

## NAGRIK DEVO BHAVA

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is a hard task master. This shows in his style of working and that of his colleagues. He, in particular, lays a lot of stress on delivery of schemes and innovative ideas for that. With this backdrop, PM Modi's recent advice to the young IAS officers that their decisions must ensure that governance remains empathetic, responsive and inclusive, has become a lesson for the entire bureaucracy. These 183 young bureaucrats, who would soon be posted across the country, received a solid piece of advice from none other than Prime Minister. Modi asked them not to take decisions from silos and work for lasting outcomes. However, the most important direction by Prime Minister was that they must treat every file on their table as representing the aspirations of people and their decision is linked to countless lives of these people. He also gave them a new tagline, "Nagrik Devo Bhava", (Citizens are God) to follow and change the traditional way of governance.

## VENEZUELA QUAKE

India has offered to relief supplies to Venezuela after multiple earthquakes hit the country and massive humans and property losses were reported. Though the loss of human lives due to the quakes is being ascertained, Prime Minister Narendra Modi was among the first leaders to announce India's readiness to help Caracas – through materials or rescue operation - in the hour of devastation. It takes time for the authorities to assess the requirements amid such a massive disaster and hence India would wait for an official word. Acting President Delcy Rodríguez has publicly thanked PM Modi for India's message of solidarity, describing it as a reflection of the longstanding friendship between the two nations. India had upheld its commitment to rise to the occasion to help humanity in difficult times in the true spirit of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam – the world is one family.

## The Emergency and Chandrashekhar's defiance

HN Sharma

The Emergency of 1975-77 remains one of the darkest chapters in the history of independent India. Civil liberties were suspended, political opponents were imprisoned, the press was censored, and democratic institutions came under unprecedented pressure. Yet, amid the silence of fear and conformity, a few voices refused to bend. Among them stood Chandrashekhar, a leader whose commitment to democratic values transcended political convenience and personal safety.

Long before the Emergency was formally imposed on June 25, 1975, Chandrashekhar had sensed the dangers of concentrating excessive power in the hands of the executive. Though he belonged to the Congress Party at the time, he was known for speaking his mind and challenging authority whenever he believed democratic principles were at stake. He reportedly advised Prime Minister Indira Gandhi against taking any drastic and undemocratic step that could damage the Congress Party and leave a permanent scar on India's democratic legacy. His warning was prophetic. The Emergency would eventually become one of the most controversial decisions in modern Indian political history. The arrest of veteran socialist leader Jayaprakash Narayan, popularly known as JP, deeply disturbed Chandrashekhar. JP had emerged as the moral force behind a nationwide movement demanding accountability, transparency, and democratic reform. For Chandrashekhar, the imprisonment of such a towering national figure represented not merely the arrest of an individual but an assault on democratic dissent itself. When the crackdown began, Chandrashekhar openly protested. The Government attempted



to soften his detention by offering special treatment. Haryana strongman Bansi Lal reportedly suggested that a Government guest house could be converted into a place of confinement for him. Chandrashekhar rejected the offer outright. He believed that accepting privileges while thousands of political workers and opposition leaders languished in ordinary prisons would amount to compromising his principles. Instead, he chose to be lodged in a regular jail in Punjab. His decision was both symbolic and courageous. It demonstrated that resistance to authoritarianism could not be selective. If democracy was under attack, the struggle had to be shared equally by leaders and ordinary citizens alike. Before leaving for prison, Chandrashekhar informed his family of his conscious decision to oppose the Emergency. He understood the risks involved. The future was uncertain, and nobody knew how long the Emergency would last. In a poignant moment, he is remembered as telling his wife that he might not return soon.

The statement reflected not fear but a realistic assessment of the political climate and the sacrifices that lay ahead.

His wife, Dooja Devi, responded with remarkable courage and patriotism. Rather than urging caution, she freed him of any concern for domestic obligations. Her message was clear: for the sake of the nation, he should consider himself released from family responsibilities and remain steadfast in defending democratic values. It was a powerful expression of sacrifice that mirrored the resolve of countless families whose loved ones were imprisoned during that turbulent period.

I vividly recall a deeply emotional telephonic conversation with Chandrashekhar ji while he was facing the heat of the administration, at that time, I was with his family members at Pinjore Gardens, Chandigarh. As he prepared for incarceration, he spoke about the uncertainty that awaited him and the need for someone to look after his family in his absence. The gravity of the moment was over-

whelming. With tears in my eyes, I assured him that I would serve to the best of my capacity and stand by his family whenever needed. It was not merely a personal commitment; it was a tribute to a leader who had chosen principle over comfort and courage over compromise.

Throughout the Emergency, Chandrashekhar remained unwavering in his opposition to authoritarian rule. His imprisonment only strengthened his moral authority. Unlike many politicians who adjusted themselves to the prevailing winds of power, he stood firm in defence of constitutional freedoms, political pluralism, and the right to dissent. History eventually vindicated those who resisted. Public anger against the suspension of democratic rights grew steadily. When elections were finally held in 1977, the people of India delivered a decisive verdict.

The Emergency was withdrawn, and the Congress government suffered a historic defeat. Democracy, though bruised, emerged stronger. For Chandrashekhar, the struggle was never about personal ambition. It was about preserving the soul of the Republic. His conduct during the Emergency transformed him into one of the most respected democratic voices of his generation. The episode also demonstrated that genuine leadership is measured not by the offices one occupies but by the principles one refuses to surrender. The Emergency remains a cautionary tale for every generation of Indians. It reminds us that democracy survives not merely through institutions but through the courage of individuals willing to defend them. Chandrashekhar's resistance, sacrifice, and unwavering faith in democratic values ensured that when freedom was tested, he stood on the right side of history.

## RETHINKING HOW INDIA FIGHTS ADDICTION

Rajyogi Brahma Kumar Nikunjji

A recent case of a young boy, high on methamphetamine ("ice"), gouging out his own eyes in a hospital emergency room shocked people everywhere. It forces an uncomfortable question: what pushes young people toward such destructive substance use?

The numbers are sobering. AIIMS Delhi's 2019 National Drug Dependence Treatment Centre survey, the most comprehensive of its kind in India, found that 14.6% of Indians use alcohol, with 19% of those users falling into dependence. Over 5.7 crore Indians use cannabis. Opioid use runs nearly three times the global average, and heroin has now overtaken opium as the country's dominant opioid for the first time.

Yet our instinct as a society is often to shun these young people rather than help them, treating addiction as a moral failing instead of the medical and psychological crisis it actually is. Addiction rarely happens overnight. It begins as casual, recreational use, then slowly becomes a habit, then a physical dependence, where the body starts demanding the substance just to function normally. Tolerance builds, requiring larger doses for the same effect. Because most drugs are illegal, users are often pushed into crime to sustain their



supply. Too many end up dying alone and in pain, having lost everything along the way.

Psychologists note that many people who become addicted carry insecurity and low confidence rooted in family or personal struggles. Strikingly, most know exactly what the drug is doing to their mind, memory, and relationships, yet knowing isn't enough to break free.

This is addiction's cruel paradox: the very thing destroying them is the thing they lean on to cope. Underneath, there is

often deep shame. Many secretly want to quit but fear withdrawal, the emptiness it would leave behind, or losing the only social circle they have, other users.

This is where meditation deserves far more attention than it currently gets. Studies on incarcerated substance users found that those trained in meditation had lower relapse rates and better outcomes after release than those given only standard treatment.

Meditation appears to rewire key brain pathways, building self-awareness and the

mental space to pause before acting on a craving, the difference between reaching for a cigarette and reaching for calm. Introducing meditation in schools as a regular subject, rather than an occasional workshop, could give children that tool early, before dependence ever takes root.

The government's Nasha Mukh Bharat Abhiyaan has made real progress on visibility, reaching over 25 crore people, with more than 14 crore individuals and 4 lakh educational institutions formally enrolled.

That scale matters. But awareness campaigns alone do not treat dependence. They need to be paired with accessible de-addiction centers, school-level intervention, and sustained family engagement, support systems that catch a habit while it is still just a habit and not yet a dependency.

In the long run, a culture that values inner stillness over instant pleasure is our strongest defense against substance abuse. We have a choice: invest in the mental and emotional well-being of our youth now, or pay for it later in broken families and wasted potential.

To every young person reading this: choose the harder, quieter path. The peace you are searching for in a high was never really there to begin with; it was always something you had to build within yourself. Say no to drugs, and yes to meditation.

## Development in transition: What NFHS-6 tells us about India

Ankita Goyal | Sarthi Acharya

India has committed itself to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which seek to improve the quality of life through progress across economic, social, demographic, environmental, and institutional dimensions. Achieving these goals requires more than economic expansion alone; it demands that growth be translated into improvements in health, education, nutrition, gender equality, and other indicators of human well-being. The National Family Health Survey (NFHS), while not capturing the entire spectrum of development, provides an important window into the extent to which economic growth has been accompanied by social and demographic progress.

The four rounds of the NFHS, spanning the period from 2005-06 to 2023-24, allow an assessment of India's progress in select demographic and social indicators. The latest round, released this week, suggests that the country has undoubtedly

edly moved forward. However, the pace of improvement has been uneven across sectors and regions, and in several dimensions remains slower than might be expected after nearly three decades of economic growth of over 6% annually. The experience of East and Southeast Asian countries provides a useful benchmark, as many of them combined economic growth with rapid gains in human development within a relatively short period.

The data points to important achievements. Health insurance coverage expanded dramatically from about 5% to nearly 60% of the population. Female educational attainment also improved substantially, with nearly half of women now having completed ten or more years of schooling. Fertility has declined to replacement level on aggregate and below replacement in large parts of the country, marking an important demographic transition. However, there is an underbelly: The southern states, much of the Northeast, and parts of northern India report sub-



stantially better outcomes than the large states of the Indo-Gangetic plains. Moreover, the survey provides little information on the quality of health or educational services, limiting conclusions about the effectiveness of these achievements.

Progress in reducing child marriage has also been noteworthy. The proportion of women aged 20-24 who were married before the age of 18 declined from 47.4 per cent to 20.1

per cent. Yet, the prevalence remains high by international standards. Countries such as China and Thailand have reduced child marriage to negligible levels, suggesting that considerable progress remains possible. Once again, regional differences are striking. Bihar and Jharkhand continue to report rates exceeding 30%, whereas Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Mizoram have reduced the incidence to around 10% or lower.

The most serious concern emerges from nutrition-related indicators. Child stunting declined from about 48 per cent to 29.3 per cent, a substantial improvement but still one of the highest levels among major economies. T

he proportion of underweight children fell more modestly, from 42.5 per cent to 31.8 per cent. Similarly, the share of women with below-normal body mass index declined until 2019-21 but has since shown a slight reversal. These trends suggest that nutritional deprivation remains deeply entrenched despite sustained economic growth. Here too, regional disparities persist, with states such as Bihar and Jharkhand continuing to perform poorly while much of southern and northeastern India fares considerably better.

A recent article in the Indian Express (dt. June 2, 2026) finds that a number of indicators have been dropped in NFHS-6 compared to NFHS-5. This might not be a very serious issue as some of these variables do not change at short intervals.

However, India's development record has been otherwise mixed. The country has made some progress in education, health insurance coverage, decline of child marriage, and TFR in some states, etc. Improvements in nutrition and other measures of human well-being, however, have been slower than expected, and large regional inequalities remain. Compared with the experience of East- and Southeast Asian economies during their periods of rapid growth, India's progress appears gradual rather than transformational.

Evidence from NFHS-6 suggests that while economic growth might have contributed to some social advancement, it has not consistently translated into equally rapid improvements in human development.

The challenge for the coming decades is therefore not merely to sustain growth, but to ensure that its benefits are converted more effectively into better health, nutrition, education, and quality of life for all sections of the population.