

FROM CARACAS WITH CRUDE

The visit of Venezuelan Acting-President Delcy Rodríguez is good news for Indian households, as she brings with her the promise of an alternative to Gulf oil that can keep Indian cars running and the wheels of industry turning. Venezuela's Acting President, heading a high-powered delegation that includes her finance, science and transportation ministers, arrives at a moment when India's energy calculus has been upended. The near-closure of the Strait of Hormuz — a corridor that once handled over 40 per cent of India's crude imports — has forced Indian refiners into a scramble for alternative supplies. Venezuela, sitting atop the world's largest proven oil reserves, has stepped decisively into that breach. The numbers are striking. India imported 427,000 barrels per day from Venezuela in May alone, making it the second-largest buyer of Venezuelan crude globally, trailing only the United States. Reliance Industries has emerged as one of Caracas's three largest customers worldwide. Bilateral trade stands at \$678.94 million — modest by global standards, but a number that carries momentum and direction.

Diversification is meaningless without reliable alternatives. Venezuela, once sidelined by US sanctions, re-entered India's supply map after sanctions were eased in February under a Washington-Caracas oil pact. The timing was fortunate: it gave Indian refiners a viable Western Hemisphere alternative precisely when the eastern routes tightened. New Delhi — with at least tacit American encouragement — has moved with unusual swiftness to secure the relationship.

What makes this partnership structurally attractive is price. Venezuelan heavy crude trades at a significant discount to Brent benchmarks, helping India moderate its import bill at a time of fiscal pressure. Three takeaways deserve particular attention. First, supply-chain resilience now demands geographic diversification, not just source diversification. India cannot afford a repeat of the Hormuz shock; Venezuela offers a supply route across the Atlantic, entirely decoupled from West Asian chokepoints. Second, the bilateral agenda — stretching across pharmaceuticals, renewable energy and transportation — suggests India intends to offer Venezuela a development partnership, not merely a transactional crude contract.

Third, Rodríguez's visit comes five months after President Nicolás Maduro's dramatic detention by U.S. forces, a fact that places India in a diplomatically delicate position — one it is navigating with characteristic pragmatism, keeping Washington engaged while preserving access to Caracas.

Diplomatically, the trajectory points towards a structured long-term energy agreement — possibly involving rupee-bolivar settlement mechanisms, equity participation by Indian PSUs in Venezuelan oilfields, and joint ventures in refining. India has walked this road with Russia, Iraq and the UAE. Venezuela is the next chapter. The risk is political volatility in Caracas. New Delhi will seek contractual architecture that hedges against it. If this visit delivers even a framework agreement, it will mark a significant step in India's quiet but relentless effort to build an energy supply network that no single geopolitical crisis can unravel.

Sanjay Rohmetra

World Food Safety Day, observed every year on June 7, is not merely a symbolic international event; it is a reminder of one of the most urgent public health concerns facing humanity today. In 2026, the observance assumes even greater significance as climate change, rapid urbanisation and increasingly complex global supply chains continue to challenge the safety and quality of the food we consume every day.

Modern food systems are more interconnected than ever before. Food produced in one region is processed in another and consumed thousands of kilometres away within days. While this global efficiency has improved food availability and trade, it has also amplified the risks associated with contamination. A single lapse in hygiene, storage or transportation at one point in the supply chain can quickly escalate into a large-scale health emergency affecting multiple countries.

The challenge has become more serious due to the growing impact of climate change. Rising temperatures, floods, prolonged droughts and shifting agricultural conditions are creating favourable environments for foodborne pathogens, toxins and pests. Heat accelerates bacterial growth during transportation and storage, while drought conditions increase the presence of harmful contaminants such as mycotoxins in staple crops. These developments clearly indicate that food safety can no longer remain a reactive exercise confined to post-harvest inspections. It must become a proactive and sci-

SAFE FOOD, SAVE LIVES



ence-driven priority integrated into every stage of food production and distribution.

The human cost of unsafe food is alarming. According to global estimates, nearly 600 million people fall ill each year after consuming contaminated food, leading to approximately 4,20,000 preventable deaths annually. Children under the age of five bear a disproportionate burden of this crisis, accounting for almost 40 per cent of foodborne disease cases worldwide. Weak immunity and vulnerability to dehydration make contaminated food particularly dangerous for young children.

Unsafe food also imposes a massive economic burden. Developing countries lose billions of

dollars annually due to healthcare costs, productivity losses and disruptions in trade caused by foodborne diseases. Food safety, therefore, is not only a health issue but also an economic and developmental concern directly linked to national productivity and social stability.

The theme for World Food Safety Day 2026 — "From Burden to Solutions: Safe Food Everywhere" — rightly shifts the global conversation from merely identifying problems to implementing practical and sustainable solutions. Governments across the world must strengthen food safety regulations by adopting internationally accepted standards such as the Codex Alimentarius guidelines developed by

the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO).

Equally important is the modernization of food infrastructure. Developing reliable cold-chain systems from farms to markets is essential for preventing spoilage and bacterial contamination. Investments in solar-powered refrigeration facilities, especially in rural and developing regions, can significantly reduce food losses and improve food quality. Digital traceability systems can further help authorities quickly identify contaminated food batches and prevent large-scale outbreaks.

Another major challenge lies in informal food markets, particularly in developing countries where a large percentage of food

transactions occur outside regulated systems. Instead of imposing punitive restrictions, authorities should focus on integrating these markets into formal safety frameworks through hygiene training, access to clean water, affordable testing kits and proper waste management facilities. Empowering small vendors and farmers with practical knowledge and low-cost technologies can transform local markets into safer and more reliable food sources.

India too must strengthen coordination among various food safety agencies and ensure better enforcement of food standards from farm to consumer. Public awareness campaigns, regular inspections and stronger laboratory networks are necessary to build consumer confidence and protect public health.

Food security cannot exist without food safety. Producing large quantities of food has little meaning if that food carries disease, contamination and economic instability. Safe food is fundamental to healthy societies, productive economies and sustainable development.

World Food Safety Day 2026 sends a clear and urgent message: ensuring safe food is a shared responsibility. Governments must modernize policies, businesses must invest in safer practices and consumers must demand transparency and accountability.

By adopting science-based standards, strengthening infrastructure and empowering local food systems, the world can significantly reduce the burden of foodborne diseases and move towards a healthier and safer future for all.

WHAT THE DEATH OF GREAT TEACHES US

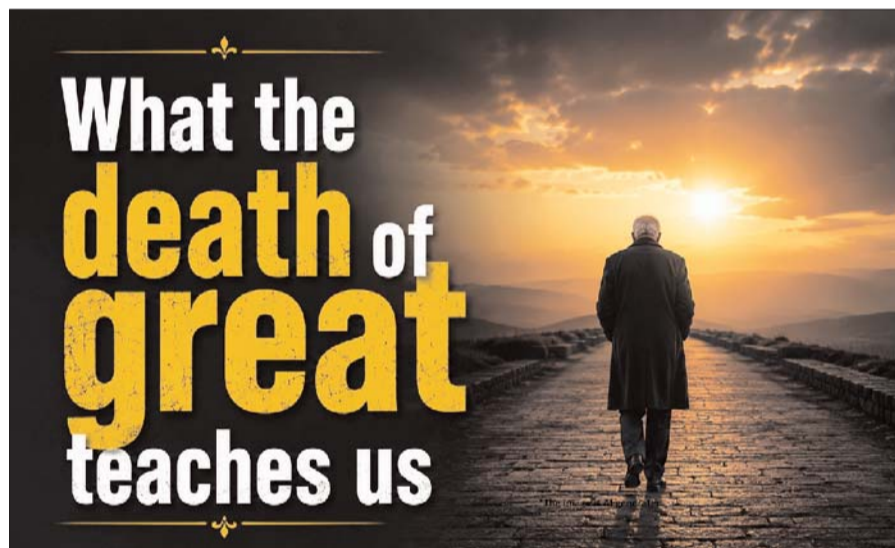
Rajyogi Brahma Kumar Nikunjji

The passing of celebrated personalities around the world draws millions into mourning — flowers laid at memorials, heartfelt tributes pouring in, and a collective sense of loss that transcends borders. These moments of grief reveal something profound: that certain individuals carve themselves so deeply into human hearts that their absence feels like a wound to the world itself.

Yet beyond the tears and tributes lies a deeper invitation — one that most of us decline. Each such departure is, in truth, a mirror held up to our own lives. If we were wise, we would pause and ask ourselves: Am I living meaningfully?

Am I leaving something worthwhile behind? These events carry within them the quiet whisper of a higher order, nudging us toward self-reflection and moral awakening. Seen rightly, the death of a great soul is not merely an ending — it is a rung on a ladder, an opportunity to rise higher in our own consciousness and conduct.

Sadly, human nature in this age is deeply lethargic. The jolt of grief stirs something noble within us briefly. We feel moved to



be better, kinder, more purposeful. But this feeling, like white froth on murky water, quickly fades. The noise of daily ambition and petty preoccupations returns, and we sink back into our familiar slumber, unchanged.

And yet, the lesson remains, patient and enduring. No matter one's worldview or philosophy, one truth stands undeniable: a life devoted to love, compassion, and selfless service to the suffering leaves the deepest and most lasting impression on

humanity.

Wealth, power, and fame erode with time — but genuine kindness and devoted service to others etch themselves permanently into the memory of the world.

This is why millions weep for those they have never personally met. They are mourning a spirit that elevated them.

This very observation raises a searching question. If a human being is nothing more than flesh, blood, and brain, then whom

exactly do we mourn when that body lies lifeless and cold? To whom do we pray for peace? Why do virtues like compassion, love, and selflessness feel so distinct — so often in conflict — with our purely physical impulses and desires? Does not a person sometimes willingly sacrifice their very body for a moral cause, suggesting that something within us stands apart from and above the material?

When one considers these questions honestly, alongside the vast body of accounts relating to near-death experiences, out-of-body states, and reincarnation, a compelling conclusion begins to emerge. The true actor behind the drama of life is not the body but the soul — a non-material, conscious entity that wears the body as a costume and uses it as an instrument to act, experience, and evolve. The body enables sensation; the soul gives meaning.

Embracing this truth transforms everything. Sorrow loses its stranglehold. Pettiness loses its appeal. Life gains urgent and beautiful purpose. Most importantly, this truth reminds us that our time here is not guaranteed. We must not postpone the good we intend to do, the love we mean to give, or the service we hope to render. Death teaches us, above all, to truly live — and to live well, beginning now.

Before building temples, build community values

Sanjay Chandra

we sometimes confuse symbols with substance.

We are, in fact, a household of three senior citizens — my father, my wife and I. My wife observed that many of those advocating such facilities in the name of senior citizens have not yet entered that phase of life themselves. Those of us who have, she remarked, do not necessarily feel the need for such elaborate handholding. The comment contained a larger truth. People often speak for others without understanding what they may actually need.

Another conversation was revealing. A young resident recounted how one of the leading contestants, whose manifesto featured the proposal, had spent considerable time explaining its importance. When the youngster attempted to present an alternative perspective, however, he found himself brushed aside. What struck him



was the unwillingness to listen.

His response stayed with me. He pointed out that his parents live with him and that he cares for them every day. What greater lesson in values, he asked, could he impart to his

own children than the example

of looking after ageing parents within the family? His comment reminded me that values are absorbed through example. Children watch what we do long before they understand what we

say.

Religious spaces have their place in community life, just as parks, libraries, playgrounds and cultural centres do. They can provide comfort, belonging and opportunities for engage-

ment. But values are rarely transmitted through buildings alone. They are learned through observation and experience. Children absorb them when they see respect for differing opinions, courtesy in disagreement, honesty in public life, concern for neighbours and care for elderly family members.

Perhaps the larger question is not what serves us today, but what kind of community we leave for those who come after us.

Every society, whether a residential complex or a nation, ultimately depends on citizens who are willing to think beyond immediate preferences and short-term gains. The challenge is not merely to choose what serves us today, but to consider what will enrich the lives of those who will inherit these spaces long after we are gone.

In that sense, every citizen must aspire to be something of

a statesman. A politician thinks of the next election; a statesman thinks of the next generation. Our choices about common spaces and values are rarely confined to the present. They shape the culture that future residents and children will inherit.

If a community wishes to leave a lasting legacy for its younger generation, it may need to focus less on what is constructed in concrete and more on what is demonstrated in everyday life. After all, values are not taught merely through places of worship. They are taught through the quiet acts of responsibility, respect, compassion and thoughtful stewardship that children witness every day.

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