



(From top, anti-clockwise) The Death Gun Salute is fired by the Honourable Artillery Company to mark the passing of Britain's Prince Philip at the Tower of London, in London, yesterday, the day after his death at the age of 99; a grieving couple embrace outside Buckingham Palace; in this file photo taken on July 11, 1947 Princess Elizabeth and Prince Philip pose on the day of their engagement; and a well-wisher waits in line to lay a floral tribute to Prince Philip in central London.

PHOTO: AFP, REUTERS

'What a life!'

With artillery guns and flowers, Britain salutes Prince Philip

REUTERS, Windsor

Gun salutes were fired across Britain yesterday to mark the death of Prince Philip as tributes flooded in for a man who was a pillar of strength for Queen Elizabeth during her record-breaking reign.

Messages of condolence have poured in from world leaders to the Duke of Edinburgh, as Philip was officially known, who was credited with helping to modernise the ancient institution and help his wife deal with repeated crises during their 73-year marriage.

Members of the public laid flowers outside royal residences, paying their respects to the 99-year-old prince who spent more than seven decades at his wife's side.

Members of the family have been visiting the grieving monarch at Windsor Castle where Philip died on Friday.

"The queen has been amazing," said a tearful Sophie, the Countess of Wessex, as she left with her husband Prince Edward, the youngest son of Elizabeth and Philip.

The armed forces marked Philip's passing at noon (1100 GMT) with a Death Gun Salute. Artillery units in London, Edinburgh, Cardiff, Belfast and Gibraltar, and some navy warships, fired their guns.

Buckingham Palace is expected to announce details of the funeral later yesterday. It is likely to be a small, private affair, stripped of the grandeur of traditional royal occasions by Covid-19 restrictions and by the prince's own dislike of people making a fuss.

Flags at government buildings across Britain were lowered to half-mast and billboard operators replaced adverts with a photo and tribute to the prince.

"We're all weeping with you, Ma'am," read the front page of the Sun tabloid, while its rival the Daily Mail ran a 144-page tribute to Philip.

Despite a request from the royal family for the public to obey pandemic social distancing rules and avoid visits to its residences, people laid cards and bouquets outside Windsor Castle and Buckingham Palace through the night.

"What a life! Thank you for serving our country," read one tribute outside Buckingham Palace.

NEWS IN BRIEF

India protests US ship patrol in its waters

India protested a US Navy warship conducting a patrol in its waters without prior consent, in a manoeuvre Washington defended as an "innocent passage" consistent with international law. The US Navy said earlier this week that the USS John Paul Jones had asserted "navigational rights and freedoms" in the vicinity of Lakshadweep Islands inside India's exclusive economic zone. The Navy also said that it did so without prior consent in a challenge to India's "excessive maritime claims" in the area, prompting New Delhi to say Friday it had conveyed concerns through diplomatic channels. The spat comes as ties between Washington and New Delhi are on the upswing, bolstered by the so-called "Quad" alliance that also includes Japan and Australia.

53 killed in 24 hours in Yemen's Marib

Fighting for the key Yemeni region of Marib has intensified, with 53 pro-government and Huthi rebel fighters dead in the past 24 hours, loyalist military officials said yesterday. The Huthis have been trying to seize oil-rich Marib, the government's last significant pocket of territory in the north, since February. "The rebels have managed to seize a bit of territory" in the latest fighting northwest of the city, a pro-government military source said, adding that they did not threaten the city of Marib itself. The same source said 22 government soldiers including five officers had been killed, along with 31 rebels. Loyalist military officials yesterday said that coalition aircraft had carried out strikes against the rebels, but the Huthis had pushed on with their offensive. The rebels have stepped up missile and drone strikes against neighbouring Saudi Arabia in recent months, rejecting a Saudi proposal for a ceasefire.

Harry, Meghan honor Prince Philip

Prince Harry and wife Meghan Markle's foundation Archewell paid tribute to Britain's Prince Philip following his death Friday as speculation builds about their plans to attend the funeral. The foundation updated the archewell.com website so that it just displayed a single message without any drop-down menus or links to other pages. "In Loving Memory of His Royal Highness, The Duke of Edinburgh, 1921-2021," read the message in white on a dark background. "Thank you for your service... You will be greatly missed," it added. Philip's death immediately fueled speculation about when Harry might return to Britain for his grandfather's funeral and whether Meghan would join him. The couple have yet to publicly say whether they will attend the funeral. If they do, it would mark their first return to Britain since their explosive interview with US talk show superstar Oprah Winfrey last month where they said acrimony had played a part in them quitting the UK for North America.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS

POST-COUP MYANMAR

Rebel attack kills at least 10 policemen

AGENCIES

An alliance of ethnic armies in Myanmar that has opposed the junta's crackdown on anti-coup protests attacked a police station in the east yesterday and at least 10 policemen were killed, domestic media said.

The police station at Naungmon in Shan state was attacked early in the morning by fighters from an alliance that includes the Arakan Army, the Ta'ang National Liberation Army and the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army, media reported.

Shan News said at least 10 policemen were killed, while the Shwe Phee Myay news outlet put the death toll at 14.

TNLA's Brigadier General Tar Bhone Kyaw said the military retaliated with air strikes on their troops, killing at least one rebel soldier.

the Arakan Army (AA) -- also a prominent rebel group based in western Rakhine state -- yesterday issued a statement reiterating their support for the anti-coup movement.

Two other outfits -- the Karen National Union (KNU) and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) -- have stepped up attacks on military and police in recent weeks. The military has retaliated with air strikes in KNU's territory, which the rebel group says has displaced more than 10,000 civilians in Karen state.

Vaccine worries deepen woes

Lockdowns, curfews return as India, South America, Europe see surging cases

AGENCIES

Fresh lockdowns and curfews were imposed on tens of millions of people from India to Argentina yesterday, as Covid-19 infections surged again and vaccine roll-outs were hampered by shortages and scares over side effects.

In India, the worst-hit state of Maharashtra was running out of vaccines as the health system buckled under the weight of the contagion, which has killed 2.9 million people worldwide.

Every weekend from yesterday until the end of April, Maharashtra's 125 million people will be confined to their homes unless travelling or shopping for food or medicine.

The crisis is being exacerbated by a shortage of vaccines.

India has so far inoculated 94 million of its 1.3 billion people, but The Times of India reported Friday that states on average had just over five days of stock left, citing health ministry data, with some regions already grappling with severe shortages.

Stay-at-home orders were also set to



come into force for the eight million inhabitants of Bogota, as the Colombian capital battled a third wave of infections, adding to curfews already covering seven million across four other major cities.

Elsewhere in South America, Argentina entered a night-time curfew Friday running from midnight to 06:00 am every day until April 30.

Both Argentina and Colombia have recorded about 2.5 million coronavirus cases, numbers surpassed only by Brazil in the region.

All of France is subject to restrictions of some form, while the German government's attempts to curb movement and commerce

have been stymied by several states refusing to go along with the proposals.

Now Berlin is changing the rules to centralise power, adjustments likely to usher in night-time curfews and some school closures in especially hard-hit areas.

As in India, Europe's stuttering vaccine roll-out faced multiple hurdles Friday as EU regulators said they were reviewing side effects of the Johnson & Johnson shot and France further limited its use of the AstraZeneca jab over blood clot fear.

France said it will now administer a different vaccine to under-55s who had been given a first shot with AstraZeneca's one.

But shortly after he spoke, the World Health Organization said there was "no adequate data" to support switching Covid-19 vaccines between doses.

As for the J&J shot, the European Medicines Agency said four "serious cases" of unusual blood clots had been reported -- one of them fatal -- with the vaccine, which uses similar technology to the AstraZeneca one.

Biden forms panel to study possible US SC expansion

REUTERS, Washington

President Joe Biden on Friday formed a bipartisan commission to study potential U.S. Supreme Court changes including expanding the number of justices beyond the current nine, a goal of some liberal Democrats hoping to end its conservative majority.

Under an executive order signed by the Democratic president, the 36-member commission will consider the "merits and legality" of potential reforms to the nation's top judicial body including adding justices or imposing term limits on their service instead of the current lifetime appointments.

The number of Supreme Court justices has remained at nine since 1869, but Congress has the power to change the number and did so several times before that. Imposing term limits would likely require a constitutional amendment, though some scholars have proposed ways to accomplish it by statute.

White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said the commission will represent the full political spectrum. It will include liberal and conservative legal scholars, former federal judges and lawyers who have appeared before the court. It will hold public meetings and have 180 days to report its findings.

Biden promised in October, late in the presidential election campaign, to establish the commission - a step that enabled him to avoid taking a firm position on the proposal floated by some liberals to expand the court, though he has opposed the idea in the past.

Republicans fiercely oppose the idea of what is sometimes called "court packing." Some Democrats and liberal activists have said all options including expansion must be considered to counter an entrenched conservative majority that could threaten abortion rights, civil rights, gun control and access to healthcare in the coming years.

Republican former President Donald Trump was able to appoint three justices during his four years in office, giving the court a 6-3 conservative majority.



This handout photo taken and released by Dawei Watch yesterday shows protesters holding flags as they march in a demonstration against the military coup in Launglone township in Myanmar's Dawei district.

PHOTO: AFP



A service member of the Ukrainian armed forces is seen at fighting positions on the line of separation from pro-Russian rebels in Donetsk region, Ukraine, yesterday. The United States will send two warships to the Black Sea next week, Turkey said on Friday as Russia, which has boosted its military forces near Ukraine, accused Nato powers of increasing naval activity in the region.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Iran starts up advanced centrifuges

AFP, Tehran

Iran yesterday announced it has started up advanced uranium enrichment centrifuges in a breach of its undertakings under a troubled 2015 nuclear deal, days after the start of talks on rescuing the accord.

The United States had said Friday that it had offered "very serious" ideas on reviving the accord but was waiting for Tehran to reciprocate, something yesterday's move signally failed to do.

President Hassan Rouhani inaugurated a cascade of 164 IR-6 centrifuges for producing enriched uranium, as well as two test cascades -- of 30 IR-5 and 30 IR-6S devices respectively -- at Iran's Natanz uranium enrichment plant, in a ceremony broadcast by state television.

The television aired no images of the injection of uranium hexafluoride gas into the cascades, but broadcast a link with engineers at the plant who said they had started the process and showed rows of centrifuges.

Rouhani also launched tests on the "mechanical stability" of its latest-generation IR-9 centrifuges.

Under the nuclear deal, Iran is currently only



allowed to use "first-generation" IR-1 centrifuges for production, and to test a limited number of IR-4 and IR-5 devices.

Iran's latest move to step up uranium enrichment follows an opening round of talks in Vienna Tuesday with representatives of the remaining parties to the deal on bringing the United States back into it.

Then-president Donald Trump withdrew from the agreement in 2018 but his successor Joe Biden has said he is ready to return, arguing the deal had been successful in dramatically scaling back Iran's nuclear activities.

The Vienna talks are focused not only on lifting crippling economic sanctions Trump reimposed, but also on bringing Iran back into compliance after it responded by suspending several of its own commitments.

All sides said the talks, in which Washington is not participating directly but has the European Union as intermediary, had got off to a good start.

Iran has demanded that the United States first lift all sanctions imposed by Trump, including a sweeping unilateral ban on its oil exports, before it falls back in line with obligations it suspended.

The "US -- which caused this crisis -- should return to full compliance first," Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif tweeted, adding that "Iran will reciprocate following rapid verification."

The US official indicated the major stumbling block in the initial talks was not the order of compliance but rather which sanctions were under discussion, as Iran is demanding an end to all US restrictions. The deal, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, covers only nuclear sanctions and not US measures taken in response to human rights or other concerns, the official said.