



(From left, clockwise) Britain's Queen Elizabeth II looks at the coffin of her husband, Britain's Prince Philip, who died at the age of 99, during his funeral service at St George's Chapel, in Windsor, Britain, yesterday; Members of the Royal family follow the hearse, a specially modified Land Rover, during the funeral on the grounds of Windsor Castle; and Britain's Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex, and Britain's Prince William, Duke of Cambridge, look on during the funeral.



PHOTO: REUTERS

Mamata doing 'politics on dead bodies': Modi

West Bengal votes in fifth phase

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi yesterday accused West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee of doing politics with dead bodies and has been trying to politicise the death of five people at Sitalkuchi in Cooch Behar district during polling in the assembly elections on April 10.

Addressing an election rally in the industrial town of Asansol, Modi said the West Bengal Chief Minister's "insensitivity" was evident once again in connection with the Cooch Behar firing incident, while referring to a purported audio tape released by the Bharatiya Janata Party yesterday.

In the audio clip, Mamata is heard telling Trinamool Congress' Cooch Behar district President Partha Pratim Roy, who is also the party's candidate for Sitalkuchi assembly seat, asked her district party leader to take out a rally with the bodies.

"The truth is that Didi thought of her own political gain from the death of people in Cooch Behar. She has an old habit of doing politics with dead bodies," Modi said.

The Trinamool had earlier claimed that the BJP had distorted the content of the audio clip to spread disinformation amid the ongoing state Assembly election.

The blame game came as West Bengal yesterday voted in the fifth phase Assembly Elections amid tight security.

Altogether 45 constituencies across six districts including Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Nadia, East Burdwan, and North 24 Parganas went for the polls. The phase is likely to be very important because of the 45 constituencies. TMC got 23 seats and BJP shared the rest of the 22 in respect to the Lok Sabha polls in 2019.

Queen bids farewell to her 'strength' Philip

REUTERS, Windsor

Queen Elizabeth and her family paid their last respects to Prince Philip at a funeral yesterday that celebrated his naval past, his international heritage and seven decades of service in which he helped guide the queen through repeated crises.

Elizabeth, dressed in black, stood alone as her husband of 73 years was lowered into the Royal Vault in a service attended by senior royals including heir Prince Charles and his sons Princes William and Harry.

The queen was placed alone in the ceremony at St George's Chapel with her children, grandchildren and a select group of royal mourners, separated due to Covid-19 rules.

"We remember before thee this day Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, rendering thanks unto thee—for his resolute faith and loyalty, for his high sense of duty and integrity," Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby said in a prayer.

Philip, officially known as the Duke of Edinburgh, died aged 99 on April 9. The queen in 1997 described Philip as her "strength and stay" over their decades of marriage.

The archbishop praised Philip's "life of service to the nation and Commonwealth, and for the courage and inspiration of his leadership."

After the nation observed a minute's silence in brilliant sunshine, Harry and William took up their places on opposite sides of the chapel in Windsor Castle, with the final resting place of

Tudor monarch Henry VIII dividing them. Philip's naval cap and sword lay on top of the coffin, which was covered with the Duke of Edinburgh's personal standard featuring the Danish coat of arms, the Greek cross, Edinburgh Castle and the stripes of the Mountbatten family. A wreath of white roses, lilies and jasmine from the 94-year-old queen also adorned the coffin.



The four-person choir sang a sailors' hymn, "Eternal Father, Strong to Save", and shortly before he was lowered into the Royal Vault, the Russian "Kontakion of the Departed", a hymn of the Orthodox and Eastern churches, echoed around the ancient church. There were no eulogues.

Philip's coffin was borne to the chapel on a bespoke Defender TD 130 in military green as a minute gun fired eight times.

Before the procession, military bands spaced

out across the quadrangle of Windsor Castle to play the prince's chosen music, including "I Vow To Thee My Country," "Jerusalem" and "Nimrod". Philip, who married Elizabeth in 1947, helped the young queen adapt the monarchy to the changing world of the post-World War Two era as the loss of empire and the decline of deference challenged the world's most prominent royal family.

She has now been widowed just as she grapples with one of the gravest crises to hit the royal family in decades - allegations of racism and neglect by it from her grandson Harry and his American-born wife Meghan.

Meghan watched the funeral at her home in California after she was advised by her doctor not to travel while pregnant, a source familiar with the situation said. US networks showed the funeral live as did British TV stations.

The palace emphasised beforehand that while the occasion would have the due pageantry that marks the passing of a senior royal, it remained an occasion for a mourning family to mark the passing of a husband, father, grandfather and great-grandfather.

Philip was a decorated Royal Navy veteran of World War Two and his funeral, much of which was planned in meticulous detail by the prince himself, had a strong military feel, with personnel from across the armed forces playing prominent roles.

Myanmar junta leader set to join Asean summit

23,000 prisoners released in New Year's amnesty

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing will join a special Asean summit next week, his first official trip since masterminding a coup which deposed civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

The February 1 putsch triggered a massive uprising, bringing hundreds of thousands of protesters to the streets to demand a return to democracy, while civil servants have boycotted work in a bid to shutter the junta's administration.

The military has deployed lethal force to quell the anti-coup movement, killing more than 720 people and detaining some 3,100 activists, journalists and dissidents, according to a local monitoring group.

The meeting of the 10-country bloc of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) is expected to address the ongoing crisis in post-coup Myanmar, and will be on April 24 in Jakarta.

The military has consistently justified

the putsch by alleging widespread fraud in November's elections, which Suu Kyi's party won in a landslide.

More violence erupted yesterday in the central gem-producing city of Mogoke, when security forces cracked down on protesters. A rescue worker told AFP at least one had died.

Some demonstrations -- like in Yangon and central Monywa city -- also touted support of the so-called "National Unity Government", a shadow administration formed by ousted MPs working in hiding to thwart junta rule.

The country's jails are also releasing more than 23,000 prisoners nationwide, a prison official told AFP yesterday -- part of its annual amnesty for Myanmar's New Year.

There have been two other mass releases since the coup. The first was in mid-February, which rights groups feared was a move to free up space for military opponents, and the second on the eve of Armed Forces Day when the regime released around 900 detained demonstrators.



Biden walks back on key refugee pledge

REUTERS, Washington

President Joe Biden signed an order on Friday limiting US refugee admissions this year to the historically low 15,000 cap set under his predecessor Donald Trump, shelving a plan to raise it to 62,500 and drawing the ire of refugee advocates and some Democratic lawmakers.

But as criticism mounted, the White House issued a statement saying Biden would set a "final, increased refugee cap" for the remainder of this fiscal year by May 15.

Biden's order to limit admissions to 15,000 was a blow to advocacy groups that wanted the Democratic president to move swiftly to reverse the refugee policies of the Republican Trump, who had set the figure as a way to limit immigration.

The program for admitting refugees is distinct from the asylum system for migrants. Refugees must be vetted while still overseas and cleared for entry to the US, unlike migrants who arrive at a US border and then request asylum.

Biden pledged in February to increase the number of refugees admitted in the next fiscal year to 125,000.

Democratic Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez wrote on Twitter that the cap was "completely and utterly unacceptable."

"Biden promised to welcome immigrants, and people voted for him based on that promise," Ocasio-Cortez wrote.

Critics say Biden is reading carefully on the issue as migrant crisis deepens at the Mexico-US border.

Biden, Suga project unity against China's assertiveness

REUTERS, Washington

President Joe Biden on Friday sought to present a united front with Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga to counter an increasingly assertive China as the US leader held his first face-to-face White House summit since taking office.

The talks offered the Democratic president, inaugurated in January, a chance to work further on his pledge to revitalize U.S. alliances that frayed under his Republican predecessor Donald Trump.

China topped the agenda, underscoring Japan's central role in US efforts to face down Beijing. The two leaders addressed an array of geopolitical issues in a joint statement, including "the importance of peace and stability of the Taiwan Strait," a slap at Beijing's increased military pressure on the Chinese-claimed, self-ruled island.

"Today Prime Minister Suga and I affirmed our ironclad support for the US-Japanese alliance and for our shared security," Biden told a joint news conference in the White House Rose Garden, calling the discussions "productive."

"We committed to working together to take on the challenges from China and on issues like the East China Sea, the South China Sea, as well as North Korea, to ensure

a future of a free and open Indo Pacific."

Other pressing concerns at the talks included China's increased military movements near Taiwan, its tightening grip on Hong Kong and its crackdown on Muslim Uighurs in Xinjiang.

Suga said he and Biden agreed on the necessity of frank discussions with China in the context of Beijing's activities in the Indo-Pacific region.

In a strongly worded statement on Saturday, China's embassy in Washington said Beijing was "resolutely opposed" to the joint statement, and that Taiwan, Hong Kong and Xinjiang were China's internal affairs.

In another swipe at China, Biden told the news conference the United States and Japan will invest together in areas such as 5G, artificial intelligence, quantum computing, genomics and semiconductor supply chains.

The joint statement said the United States had committed \$2.5 billion and Japan \$2 billion to strengthen digital competitiveness including in 5G and beyond 5G networks.

At the White House news conference, Suga said he told Biden that he was committed to moving forward with the summer Olympic Games in Japan and that Biden offered his support.



A patient uses a new non-invasive technology that can reduce the need of intubation at the Covid-19 area of the Centenario Hospital in Sao Leopoldo, Rio Grande do Sul state, southern Brazil, on Friday. The impermeable, transparent, sealed and inflatable bubble has respiratory connections that allow pulmonary oxygenation, reducing the patient's effort without the need for sedation.

PHOTO: AFP

Castro era in Cuba to end as Raul confirms he's retiring

REUTERS, Havana

Raul Castro confirmed he was handing over the leadership of the Cuban Communist Party to a younger generation at its congress that kicked off on Friday, ending six decades of rule by himself and older brother Fidel.

In a speech opening the four-day event, Castro, 89, said the new leadership would be party loyalists with decades of experience working their way up the ranks and were "full of passion and anti-imperialist spirit."

Castro had said at the previous party congress in 2016 it would be the last one led by the "historic generation" who fought in the Sierra Maestra to topple a US-backed dictator in the 1959 leftist revolution.

He already handed over the presidency in 2018 to protegee Miguel Diaz-Canel, 60, who ran the party in two provinces before joining the national government.

The new generation of leaders, which did not forge itself through rebellion, has no easy task. The transition comes as Cuba faces the worst economic crisis since the collapse of former benefactor the Soviet Union, while there are signs of growing frustration, especially among younger Cubans.

"I believe fervently in the strength and



exemplary nature and comprehension of my compatriots, and as long as I live I will be ready with my foot in the stirrups to defend the fatherland, the revolution and socialism," Castro told hundreds of party delegates gathered at a convention center in Havana.

The congress, the party's most important meeting, held every five years to review policy and fix leadership, is a closed-door event but excerpts are being broadcast on state television.

Castro himself became acting president when Fidel fell ill in 2006 and later in 2011 party leader, launching a raft of social and economic reforms to open up one of the world's last Communist-run countries that later stalled.

Older Cubans said they would miss having a Castro at the helm, although most acknowledged it was time to pass on the baton.

"It's another stage," said Maria del Carmen Jimenez, a 72-year old retired nurse, "but without a doubt we will miss him."

Castro denounced renewed US hostility under former President Donald Trump. Incumbent President Joe Biden has vowed to roll back some of Trump's sanctions, although the White House said on Friday a shift in Cuba policy was not among his top foreign policy priorities.

Castro said Cuba was ready for a "new type of relationship with the United States without ... Cuba having to renounce the principles of the revolution and socialism."

Government critics like "artist" Luis Manuel Otero Alcantara, whom Havana accuses of being part of a US-backed soft coup attempt, say the death knell is sounding for the revolution.

"Raul is passing over the power to someone with little charisma and who does not have much popular support," he said. "This takes us one step closer to democracy."

DECLASSIFIED DOCUMENTS CIA planned to assassinate Raul Castro in 1960

AFP, Washington

The CIA made its first known attempt to assassinate a leader of the Cuban revolution in 1960, offering \$10,000 to a pilot flying Raul Castro from Prague to Havana to arrange an "accident," according to declassified documents published Friday.

Pilot Jose Raul Martinez, who had been recruited by the CIA, asked for -- and received -- assurance from the agency that it would provide university educations to his two sons if he died during the operation, according to the documents published by the Washington-based National Security Archive research institute.

After Martinez left for Prague, CIA headquarters in the US told its Havana station to cancel the mission. "Do not pursue," the cable said. "Would like to drop matter."

At that point, the pilot was already out of contact. When he returned to Cuba, Martinez told his handler that "he had no opportunity to arrange an accident such as we had discussed."

The plot came to light as Castro, the 89-year-old brother of late revolutionary leader Fidel Castro, prepares to leave Cuban politics by stepping down as head of the all-powerful Communist Party of Cuba.

"These documents remind us of a dark and sinister past in US operations against the Cuban revolution," National Security Archive analyst Peter Kornbluh told AFP. "As the Castro era officially comes to an end, US policymakers have the opportunity to leave this historical baggage behind and engage Cuba's post-Castro future."