



Volunteers collect rubbish washed ashore along the coastline of freedom island in Paranaque City, suburban Manila, Philippines, yesterday during a clean-up drive as part of the international coastal clean-up day.

PHOTO: AFP

DEATH OF QUEEN ELIZABETH II

C’wealth faces uncertain future

REUTERS, London

When she was a child growing up in Nigeria, Timie Ogunmola’s father used to show her black-and-white pictures of his trip to London in 1953 to attend Queen Elizabeth’s coronation as an official in what was then his country’s colonial administration.

Now a resident of Edinburgh in her 60s, Ogunmola was among thousands of mourners who filed past the queen’s coffin this week as it lay at rest in the city’s cathedral, eager to pay her respects to a monarch who has been a fixture in her life.

“We are from the Commonwealth countries, she is the queen of the Commonwealth for us,” said an emotional Ogunmola, shortly after exiting the cathedral. “We grew up seeing her.”

The Commonwealth, a club of 56 countries that evolved out of the British Empire after World War Two and which presents itself as a partnership of equals, mattered hugely to the late queen, who as its head made numerous visits to member states and cultivated friendly ties with their leaders.

Her dedication and longevity meant that many Commonwealth citizens, like Ogunmola, grew up seeing her and felt genuine warmth towards her, a reservoir of goodwill that gave meaning to the organisation. Her presence at Commonwealth events attracted heads of state and government, giving it diplomatic clout.

Now that she is gone, the baton passes to her son King Charles, as she had hoped and as was agreed by Commonwealth leaders in 2018, but stepping into her shoes will not be



straightforward for the new monarch, who is far less popular.

Some Caribbean ministers have questioned why he should succeed her as head of the Commonwealth, noting the British monarch is not automatically its figurehead and suggesting that this was redolent of the days of Empire, when British colonies were expected to transfer allegiance from one monarch to the next.

The question of colonial legacies, hotly debated in the Caribbean and among some sections of British society, is an underlying tension in the Commonwealth, some observers say.

“Yes, the queen is a powerful symbol,” said Nicole Aljoe, a professor of English and African Studies at Northeastern University in Boston in the United States.

“She’s also a powerful symbol not only of the good stuff, but also of the very negative outcomes that have occurred because of Empire,” said Aljoe, who was born in Jamaica.

Some voices within the Commonwealth have called for a reckoning with that history, and Charles surprised many at its most recent summit of heads of state and government, in Rwanda in June, by raising the issue of slavery.

“I want to acknowledge that the roots of our contemporary association run deep into the most painful period of our history,” he said, expressing personal sorrow at the pain caused by the slave trade.

Charles said the time had come for the Commonwealth to have a conversation about slavery, but neither he nor anyone else has explained how that would work, what it would seek to achieve and whether it would tackle

the question of reparations.

Calls for Britain to pay reparations for its role in the slave trade have grown louder in recent years, especially in the Caribbean, and some say the Commonwealth could be a useful forum in which to thrash out the highly divisive issue.

“Just because people are scared about where a debate will end up does not mean that we shouldn’t engage in it,” said Valerie Amos, a British ex-minister and diplomat, now head of an Oxford college, who was born in Guyana, a Commonwealth member.

So far, however, there is no sign that the organisation is gearing up for a structured and substantive dialogue about these issues.

In an interview with Reuters, Commonwealth Secretary-General Patricia Scotland emphasised the club’s appeal beyond the circle of former British colonies, pointing out that new entrants Togo and Gabon had been French colonies.

“There are more countries applying even now, so I think she (the queen) has left our Commonwealth in robust good health,” said Scotland.

The organisation tends to put forward its work on issues such as trade, climate change and human rights, but critics say it struggles to make much of an impact in those areas as other international bodies have more specific powers and mandates.

Some observers warn that, without the queen to provide focus and unity, the Commonwealth risks fading into irrelevance unless it shows it can improve its citizens’ lives.

Amos said she saw it as a positive thing to have a club where leaders and citizens from disparate countries, large or small, rich or poor, could meet and talk on an equal footing.

“But the Commonwealth will have to evolve around that agenda and have some clarity about exactly what contribution it can make to people going forward,” she said.

Landslide in Nepal kills 14, seven injured

Rescue ops on for 10 missing people

REUTERS, Kathmandu

A landslide triggered by heavy rains killed at least 14 people and injured seven in western Nepal, officials said yesterday, as rescue workers searched the disaster site to try to find a further 10 missing people.

Rescuers had pulled the dead and injured from the silt-covered wreckage of five houses buried under mud in Achham district, about 450 km (281 miles) west of the capital city of Kathmandu, said Dan Bahadur Karki, a police spokesperson.

Local media footage showed rescuers clearing slush with their hands in a desperate search for the missing people who were believed trapped. Officials said the injured had been rushed to a nearby hospital.

Flash floods and landslides occur frequently in the mountainous terrain of Nepal, especially during annual monsoon rains between June and September.

At least 48 people have been killed and 12 are missing across the country in flash floods and landslides so far this year, according to official data.

S Africa vows co-op with US but firm on keeping Russia ties

AFP, Washington

South Africa’s leader has agreed to cooperate closely with US President Joe Biden on health, security and climate but warned against punishing African nations for maintaining ties with Russia.

The Biden administration has put a new focus on Africa after being taken aback by the reluctance of some nations to condemn Russia over its invasion of Ukraine, which has triggered sweeping Western sanctions.

President Cyril Ramaphosa enjoyed unusually warm treatment from Biden, who walked him back to his motorcade at the White House, weeks after Secretary of State Antony Blinken traveled to South Africa and promised that the United States will listen more to Africans.

“We really need to make sure we fully understand one another,” Biden said as he welcomed Ramaphosa in the Oval Office. “Our partnership is essential.”

Ramaphosa said he sought to work together on security, including in South Africa’s troubled neighbor Mozambique, as well as on climate change, a key priority for the Biden administration.

But Ramaphosa warned Biden over a piece of legislation that has passed through the US House of Representatives which would require a strategy to counter Moscow’s role in Africa.

Ramaphosa said he explained that Africans should not be “punished” for their historic non-aligned position among major powers.

“I think it will harm Africa and marginalize the continent,” Ramaphosa told reporters after his meetings.

“We should not be told by anyone who we can associate with.”

Five Syrian soldiers killed in Israeli strike

AFP, Damascus

An Israeli airstrike near Damascus airport killed five Syria soldiers yesterday, Syrian state media said. “The aggression led to the death of five soldiers and some material damage,” Syria’s official news agency Sana quoted a military source as saying. The strike carried out at approximately 00:45 am (2145 GMT Friday) came “from the northeastern direction of Lake Tiberias, targeting Damascus airport and some points south of Damascus,” it added. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights war monitor confirmed that the strikes killed five Syrian soldiers, and said two Iran-backed fighters were also killed. An Israeli strike in the countryside around the capital Damascus and south of coastal Tartus province killed three soldiers last month.

Turkey targets joining SCO

REUTERS, Istanbul

President Tayyip Erdogan said he was targeting membership of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) for Nato-member Turkey, broadcaster NTV and other media said yesterday. He was speaking to reporters after attending the SCO summit in Uzbekistan before heading to the United States. “Our relations with these countries will be moved to a much different position with this step,” Erdogan said. “When asked if he meant membership of the SCO, he said, ‘Of course, that’s the target’.” Turkey is currently a dialogue partner of the SCO, whose members are China, Russia, India, Pakistan, Iran, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.



Anger as Iran woman dies after morality police arrest

AFP, Paris

A young Iranian woman who fell into a coma after being arrested in Tehran by the notorious morality police died on Friday, state media and her family said, with activists urging those responsible for her “suspicious” death be brought to justice.

Mahsa Amini, 22, was on a visit with her family to the Iranian capital when she was detained on Tuesday by the police unit responsible for enforcing the Islamic republic’s strict dress code for women, which include the compulsory wearing of the headscarf in public.

“Unfortunately, she died and her body was transferred to the medical examiner’s office,” Iranian state television reported.

Persian-language media, including the Iran Wire website and the Shargh newspaper have quoted her family as saying that the previously healthy Amini had been rushed to hospital in a coma a few hours after her arrest and had now died.

It is not yet clear what happened between her arriving at the police station and her departure for hospital. The 1500tavsir channel, which monitors violations in Iran, said she had suffered a blow to the head.

Images posted on social media showed crowds gathering outside the hospital

where she was being treated and police trying to disperse the dozens who had gathered. People were also shown angrily shouting anti-regime slogans later in the evening in Tehran.

“The circumstances leading to the suspicious death in custody of 22-year-old young woman Mahsa Amini, which include allegations of torture and other ill-treatment in custody, must be criminally investigated,” Amnesty International said.

“The so-called ‘morality police’ in Tehran arbitrarily arrested her three days before her death while enforcing the country’s abusive, degrading and discriminatory forced veiling laws,” it added.

“All agents and officials responsible must face justice.”

US President Joe Biden’s national security advisor, Jake Sullivan, denounced her death.

“We are deeply concerned by the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini, who was reportedly beaten in custody by Iran’s morality police,” he tweeted Friday.

“Her death is unforgivable. We will continue to hold Iranian officials accountable for such human right abuses.”

State television broadcast images on Friday purportedly showing her falling to the ground inside a large hall full of women while arguing with one of the female instructors about her dress.



Ukrainian national Yuliia (L), reacts as she is greeted by her husband Eugene (R) upon her return to Ukraine, at a train station in Kyiv, Ukraine, yesterday. Yuliia fled her country on March 11, 2022 to seek refuge in France.

PHOTO: AFP