



US President Barack Obama exits after his final presidential press conference at the White House in Washington, DC, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

'We're going to be okay'

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Against this backdrop, the traditionally mild-mannered ritual of a final presidential press conference was given added political weight.

Obama was in turn resolute and reassuring. "I have offered my best advice," he said, describing his conversations with the president-elect.

"I can tell you that -- this is something I have told him -- that this is a job of such magnitude that you can't do it by yourself. You are enormously reliant on a team."

He also warned Trump to think through foreign policy decisions that may be domestically popular, like his vow to move the US embassy in Israel to Jerusalem.

"It's a volatile environment. What we have seen in the past is when some unilateral moves are made that speak to some of the core issues and sensitivities of either side, that can be explosive."

Asked about Trump's stated intention to seek a thaw with the Kremlin,

Obama stopped short of criticising his successor -- but noted that his own overtures to Russia were frustrated by an "adversarial spirit" when Vladimir Putin regained the presidency.

He also defended his decision -- slammed by Trump's Republicans -- to commute the sentence of transgender army private Chelsea Manning, jailed for 35 years for handing classified US documents to WikiLeaks.

"Let's be clear. Chelsea Manning has served a tough prison sentence," Obama said. "I know I feel very comfortable that justice has been served and that a message has still been sent."

Asked about how his daughters Sasha and Malia were taking Trump's election, he said he and First Lady Michelle Obama had "tried to teach them hope and that the only thing that is the end of the world is the end of the world."

"This is not just a matter of 'no-drama-Obama'," he said, joking about his reputation for a cerebral, even

detached approach. "This is what I really believe."

"It is true that behind closed doors I curse more than I do publicly, and sometimes I get mad and frustrated like everybody else does, but at my core, I think we're going to be okay."

Given the rocky transition to Trump's presidency -- which has seen the 44th and 45th president trading barbs -- even the venue for Obama's press conference in the White House briefing room, took on political significance.

Trump's team has floated the idea of evicting the White House press corps from the West Wing, ending daily on-camera briefings and handpicking who gets access, although some of those suggestions have since been rowed back.

Obama hinted at the changes that may be afoot as he paid tribute to the reporters who covered his two terms in office.

"You're not supposed to be sycophants, you're supposed to be skeptical," he said. "And having you in this building has made this work place better. It keeps us honest, makes us work harder."

He has not always been so effusive. While defending the press, he has been a searing critic of shallow and flitting reporting.

When he appeared on the national political stage a decade ago, Obama's oratory pulsed with vitality and hope.

Today, the gray haired leader appeared like a man who was setting down a heavy burden and accepting of his place in history.

He exits with approval ratings that stand at 60 percent -- according to a CNN/ORC poll -- the highest level since June 2009.

On Tuesday, Trump dismissed the polls as "rigged" after a Washington Post-ABC News survey found his 40 percent approval rating was the lowest of any incoming president-elect since Jimmy Carter in 1977.

Can the Tigers overcome?

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one-down batsman Mominul Haque joined the long list after complaining of chest pain while batting in the nets yesterday.

The injury to three key players has greatly disturbed the batting balance; the solidity at the top that Imrul provided, the calmness of Mominul after that and the assurance of Mushfiqur in the middle. So we can rest assured their replacements in the team cannot match their crucial roles against a hostile blowing attack from the Black Caps that came back strongly in Bangladesh's second innings of the opening Test to win the game in stunning fashion despite conceding a first-innings lead.

The greenish Hagley Oval wicket promises to be a typical bouncy one and the cold weather coupled with a cloudy atmosphere can make things more difficult for a team batting first. Bangladesh however has showed the tenacity to survive a similar situation in a very windy Wellington in their first innings of the opening Test.

But with Soumya Sarker coming in place of Imrul to open the innings, the Tigers have got more options to be spectacular in the absence of all that grit and graft. Soumya has not been scoring for a long time. But his two innings in the T20s provided plenty of evidence that he was getting among the runs.

And if Soumya can find his rhythm it might provide the Tigers a perfect

launch pad to do something like they did in the first innings of the opening Test. Today's Test will also mark the first game in which vice-captain Tamim Iqbal will be in charge for the duration of the game, and he will look to instill his aggressive mentality with the bat to bring about a more positive outlook in the team.

Besides, with so many attacking players in the line-up including Sabbir Rahman, who scored half centuries in both innings of the first Test, attack will perhaps be the best option if they to make a match out of it. The game will also serve as one last chance for a misfiring Mahmudullah Riyad, who might come in to bat at number three in the absence of Mominul, to do justice to his billing as the most technically sound player in the team.

Young wicketkeeper Nurul Hasan will also make his debut today. He has already shown how good he is behind the wicket in the limited-overs series. But the biggest challenge for him will be to show his ability with the bat in a five-day game.

The 'green' pace attack will get a second chance to have a go at the opponents after an impressive performance in the opening Test where right-arm pacer Kamrul Islam Rabbi bowled beautifully.

But if the Tigers are to enforce a positive result in what is their last game of a demanding tour after seven defeats, the batting must have to be consistent be it spectacular or not.

Migrants race to reach US before Trump takes over

AFP, Sasabe

Migrants trying to sneak into the United States from the parched Mexican desert have to contend with border guards' drones overhead, poisonous snakes underfoot and human trafficking gangs at their backs.

But these challenges are nothing compared to their bigger fear: that someday soon, US President-elect Donald Trump will build a wall to keep them out altogether.

So before Trump takes office today, they are racing against time, riding a freight train up to the border to look for a way across.

In the town of Caborca near the frontier, a group of Hondurans warm themselves by a fire of trash in the early morning cold.

One of them, Wilson, a 48-year-old builder, missed the birth of his daughter to make the journey. Getting to the United States before Trump takes control was more important.

"When I saw that man on the television saying how he hated migrants and was going to build a wall, I thought: 'It's now or never,'" said Wilson, who would not give his last name.

"So we all spent Christmas and New Year traveling to try to get here in time. We want to beat him to it."

It's time to be cautious

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chairman of the regulator said the stockmarket will perform better in the coming days.

Their comments indicate that the government is giving importance to the market.

Faruq Ahmad Siddiqi, former chairman of Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission, said the index and the turnover have been gradually increasing over the last two-three months. It's a good sign for the market, which was suffering for more than five years since the price debacle.

"It seems that the investors' confidence is growing. It is quite normal, and still there is no sign of abnormality," he told The Daily Star.

The overall market PE (price-earnings) ratio, which is around 18, showed that the market can perform better from this stage.

The PE ratio is an important indicator to better understand what happens in the market after a large gain or decline. It is also one of the best gauges to know how expensive or cheap the overall stockmarket is at a certain moment.

But Siddiqi was worried about the sharp rise in the market over the last two or three weeks without correction or profit taking.

He also pointed out that the tendency of many investors to bet on weak fundamental shares for quick profit would also be an area of concern.

Dhaka Stock Exchange, however, assured yesterday that the market is

Dhaka calls

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Member states of Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) appreciated Bangladesh's generosity and efforts in hosting hundreds of thousands of Rohingyas for decades and called for their early repatriation, according to a foreign ministry press release.

Shahriar expressed concern over recurrence of instability in Rakhine resulting in Rohingyas being displaced and uprooted from their ancestral homes and compelled to take shelter in Bangladesh.

He stressed the need for ensuring basic rights of the Rakhine Muslims for a durable solution to the problem, with a particular emphasis on restoring their citizenship.

The state minister also demanded urgent measures from Myanmar for repatriation of all documented and undocumented Myanmar nationals, temporarily sheltered in Bangladesh and beyond, to their homeland in Rakhine.

He urged the OIC to continue working for a durable solution to the problem.

OIC's Special Envoy to Myanmar Hamid Albar presented a report on the Rohingyas' plight and highlighted their subjection to atrocities, gross violation of human rights and collective punishment under state-sponsored violence.

He underscored the need for engaging the international community, including the Human Rights Council, with Myanmar and called upon Myanmar to stop the violence.

Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi thanked Bangladesh for facilitating her visit to Cox's Bazar to meet Rohingya refugees and the new arrivals from Rakhine and informed the meeting that she would be visiting Sittwe, the capital of Rakhine, shortly.

OIC countries expressed concern about the Rohingyas' plight and called for putting end to discrimination and violence against Rohingyas.

The resolution and the communique adopted at the end of the meeting emphasised on immediate halt to atrocities, unhindered humanitarian access, end of discrimination, ensuring basic rights including restoration of citizenship through review of the existing law and return of refugees and displaced Rohingyas to Rakhine.

OIC members urged its secretary general to engage more with Myanmar, the United Nations and

other international and regional organisations to address the humanitarian situation and to find a durable solution.

Meanwhile, State Minister Shahriar held bilateral meetings with Malaysian Foreign Minister Anifah Aman, State Minister for Foreign Affairs of Qatar Sultan bin Saad Al Muraikhi and Turkish Deputy Foreign Minister Ahmet Yildiz. He also had a meeting with OIC Secretary General Yousef bin Ahmad Al-Othaimeen.

'END PERSECUTION OF ROHINGYAS'

Malaysia yesterday pushed the OIC to pile pressure on Myanmar to end the persecution and killing of ethnic Muslim Rohingyas, reports Kyodo News.

Addressing the OIC meeting Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak warned that if the conflict is not resolved, Southeast Asia will not only see an influx of refugees, but also create a new front for terror groups, such as Islamic State, to exploit and infiltrate.

"I believe I speak for all neighbouring countries when I say that we want to avoid a repeat of the 2015 'boat people' crisis," he said, referring to thousands of Rohingyas who fled their homeland in Rakhine in boats for Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand in 2015.

Najib said Malaysia will contribute \$2.25 million to building infrastructure such as schools and hospitals in Rakhine.

Malaysia is home to about 56,000 Rohingya refugees.

The Rohingyas make up around one million of Myanmar's 50 million population. The government does not regard them as one of the country's 135 official ethnic groups and thus they are denied citizenship.

OIC Secretary General Al-Othaimeen said since the latest military crackdown last October, the grouping received reports of "extrajudicial killings, burning of houses and arbitrary arrests by security forces", reports that were accompanied by disturbing snapshots of death and destruction.

Al-Othaimeen quoted a report from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs claiming that between October 9, 2016, and January 5, 2017, over 65,000 Rohingyas fled to Bangladesh.

The defence of Muslim minorities being targeted in this manner is a Charter obligation upon all the OIC member states, he said.

End ban on women driving

UN expert tells Saudi Arabia

AFP, Riyadh

Saudi Arabia's government should end the kingdom's ban on women driving and reform the male guardianship system, a United Nations independent expert said yesterday.

Philip Alston spoke at the end of a 12-day visit during which he met cabinet ministers, people living in poverty, activists, Islamic experts and others.

"My concern is that the government is in fact deferring to a relatively small portion of conservative voices," Alston told a news conference.

This is obstructing the economic and social progress which the oil-rich kingdom aims to achieve under its

Vision 2030 wide-ranging reform programme, said Alston, the UN special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights.

"So I feel very strongly that the kingdom should move to enable women to drive cars," said Alston, an independent expert who reports to the UN's Human Rights Council.

He said features of the guardianship system which hinder women's ability to work and travel "need to be reformed."

Under that system a male family member, normally the father, husband or brother, must grant permission for a woman's study, travel and other activities.

Officials have argued that society is

not ready for women driving but Alston says the government must take an activist role.

"The role of the government is to work out how it can change the policy and how it can change attitudes," he said, calling for an educational campaign.

Alston, an Australian legal expert, said driving and guardianship are very much related to poverty. Women in low-paying retail jobs, for example, cannot afford to hire drivers.

'AMBIVALENT' ON RIGHTS'
He said he visited Jazan, in the kingdom's southwest, because it is the poorest part of the country, although there are "major problems" in the east as well.

Sea turtles in danger

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that trawl net, fixed in a place... turtle, small dolphins, porpoise cannot escape for life. These gears remain 4-6 hours and turtle or dolphin die far before the harvesting time," said the report.

It also said most of the dead turtles are Olive Ridley and Green Turtles.

Trawlers also do come very close to the shore, shallower than 40 metres, hitting and killing many turtles.

The alliance, which is working under a project titled "Sea Turtle Conservation Programme", observed that the total number of dead turtles found on the beaches came down to 86 last year. It was the lowest in the last 13 years, thanks to some initiatives by the government and several organisations to raise public awareness against

killing the reptiles.

However, the scenario has not changed in the sea where turtles keep getting killed.

The turtle conservation programme was supervised by the Bangladesh Forest Department and funded by the World Bank.

"The roaming areas of the turtles are becoming risky as most of the fishing trawlers are not following the proper rules of fishing and moving in the coastal areas. The fishing nets don't have turtle excluder device [TED] that helps turtles flee," Zahirul Islam, director, Marinelife Alliance, told The Daily Star.

The amended Marine Fisheries Rules, 1983 made it mandatory for fishing trawlers to have TEDs but no one is following that, he said.

He said under the programme, which has ended, they built at least 22 centres on the beaches to monitor free movement of turtles and ensure their protection.

Quoting different studies, Nitendra Kumar Singha, a scientific officer at the Marine Fisheries Survey and Management Unit, said it has been found that turtles play a significant role in protecting several sea fishes and other aquatic lives.

Contacted, Moin Uddin Ahmed, district fisheries officer at Cox's Bazar, said he would comment after looking into the matter.

He, however, said the Chittagong District Fishery Department always keeps an eye on the movement of the trawlers. The department fines anyone who violates the rules, he added.



turnover, he said, replying to a query.

The index is increasing, as the market movers such as banking, fuel and power stocks caught the investors' attention. "The share prices are lucrative for investment," said Rakibur, also managing director of Midway Securities, a stockbroker.

He also called for expediting the process of offloading of shares by government, which has stakes in many state-owned and multinational companies.

"Our focus should be on how we can contribute to the economy through the capital market," added Majedur.

The market, however, closed almost flat yesterday, with the DSEX, the benchmark index of the DSE, increasing by only 0.56 points to finish at 5,534. The turnover stood at Tk 1,408 crore, down from 1,989 crore the previous day.

Losers, however, beat gainers as 205 declined and 93 advanced, while 30 finished unchanged.