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HARDLINE MYANMAR MONK BLASTS 'DICTATOR' SUU KYI



DALLAS: Dignitaries including US President Barack Obama and former president George W. Bush join hands onstage during the singing of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" during an interfaith memorial service for the victims of the Dallas police shooting at the Morton H Meyerson Symphony Center on Tuesday. — AFP

OBAMA PAYS TRIBUTE TO DALLAS OFFICERS

US PRESIDENT URGES RECONCILIATION AFTER ATTACK

DALLAS: US President Barack Obama urged Americans rattled by a week of violence and protests to find "open hearts" and new empathy Tuesday in a speech that seaweed honoring police officers for their bravery and decrying racial prejudice that can affect their work. Obama spoke near five empty chairs for the police officers killed last week by a black man seeking vengeance for police killings. Behind him, underscoring his message of unity: Dallas police officers, a racially diverse church choir and local officials who ranged from black Police Chief David Brown to former President George W. Bush, a Dallas resident.

Obama sought to reassure the nation that he understands the impact of the unsettling events of the past week - including the killing of two black men by police officers as well as the Dallas attacks. Disturbing videos of the events have "left us wounded and angry and hurt," he said. "It is as if the deepest fault lines of our democracy have suddenly been exposed, perhaps even widened."

Undaunted, the president urged Americans to cast aside such doubt and replace it with faith in the nation's institutions and progress. "Dallas, I'm here to say we must reject such despair. I'm here to insist that we are not as divided as we seem. And I know that because I

know America. I know how far we've come against impossible odds," he said. The president spoke steps away from the chairs left empty for the five men killed last Thursday while protecting hundreds of people protesting the killings of black men in Louisiana and Minnesota. The Army veteran killed by police after the Dallas attack said he was motivated by revenge.

"The soul of our city was pierced," Mayor Mike Rawlings said, as he welcomed the president and a line of public officials, including Bush, who attended with his wife, Laura, Vice President Joe Biden and his wife, Jill, and Brown. The group on stage capped the ceremony by holding hands and swaying to the "Battle Hymn of the Republic" - a symbol in sight and song of the service's unity theme. "Too often we judge other groups by their worst examples, while judging ourselves by our best intentions," Bush said. "And this has strained our bonds of understanding and common purpose."

Bush and other speakers paid tribute to the fallen officers - Brent Thompson, a 43-year-old newlywed; Patrick Zamarripa, 32, a Navy veteran who served in Iraq; Michael Krol, 40, an athlete and basketball lover; Michael Smith, 55, a former Army Ranger and father of two; and Lorne Ahrens, whose wife is a police detective. No one expressed his appreciation for the men more

memorably than Brown, who has emerged as the steady and charismatic face of the Dallas police. The chief spent part of his time reciting Stevie Wonder's "I'll Be Loving You Always" to express his affection for his officers.

Powder Keg

For Obama, the moment was a chance to try to defuse what some have described as a national powder keg of emotions over race, justice, gun violence and policing. The president positioned himself as both an ally of law enforcement and a sympathizer of the Black Lives Matter movement. It's a posture neither side has completely accepted. Law enforcement officials have sharply criticized Obama and some of his policies, including a decision to stem the flow of military-grade equipment to local departments. One prominent voice, William Johnson, executive director the National Association of Police Organizations, accused Obama of waging a "war on cops."

Some protesters, meanwhile, questioned why Obama rushed home from Europe to attend the service in Dallas before meeting with the communities grieving their dead in Minnesota and Louisiana. In a gesture aimed at the answering that, as Obama flew to Dallas he telephoned the families of Alton Sterling and Philando

Castile, the men killed in confrontations in Baton Rouge and suburban St Paul. The White House said Obama worked late into the night on his speech, consulting Scripture for inspiration. After the speech, the president and Mrs. Obama spent more than an hour meeting privately with the officers' families and many of those who were wounded, the White House said. Vice President Joe Biden and his wife, Jill, and the Bushes also participated in the meetings.

After years of delivering emotional pleas for peace at similar memorials, Obama acknowledged his fatigue and the limits of his words. "I'm not naive," he said Tuesday. "I've seen how inadequate words can be in bringing about lasting change. I've seen how inadequate my own words have been." When he has doubts, Obama said, he remembers a passage from Ezekiel, in which the Lord promised to take "your heart of stone, and give you a heart of flesh."

"With an open heart we can learn to stand in each other's shoes and look at the world through each other's eyes," Obama said. "So that maybe the police officer sees his own son in that teenager with a hoodie, who's kind of goofing off but not dangerous. And the teenager, maybe the teenager will see in the police officer the same words, and values and authority of his parents." — AP



SHEFOUNIEH, Syria: A badly wounded Syrian man lies at a makeshift clinic after a strike by pro-Syrian government forces hit this town near Douma, a rebel-held town east of the capital Damascus, yesterday. — AFP

31 KILLED IN BOMBING OF REBEL SYRIA TOWNS

BEIRUT: Fierce bombardment of two opposition-held Syrian towns killed at least 31 civilians including children yesterday, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitor said. Most were killed in air raids likely carried out by either President Bashar Al-Assad's regime or its Russian ally, the Observatory said. The attacks come despite the army's extension of a nationwide truce until early Friday. The freeze in fighting has yet to produce any respite in violence.

Bombing raids killed at least 16 civilians and wounded dozens more in the rebel-controlled town of Rastan in central Homs province the Observatory said. Another three civilians were killed in government shelling on the town earlier in the day. Rastan - one of the last rebel strongholds in Homs province - has suffered a devastating siege by government forces in 2012. In northwest Syria, 12 civilians including three children were killed in raids on the opposition-held town of Ariha.

The town is controlled by the Army of Conquest, a rebel alliance of mainly Islamist groups including Al-Qaeda affiliate Al-Nusra Front that holds almost all of Idlib province. An AFP journalist saw civil defence workers using a large bulldozer to clear debris away from a crumbling building. Some rescue workers wearing face masks used small plastic buckets to clear rubble so they could pull a thin man covered in dust out of a destroyed structure. — AFP

The Correspondent

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