



LAST VISIT. His Holiness the Dalai Lama preaches to Mongolians at the Sports Palace in Ulaanbaatar in Mongolia. The Dalai Lama addressed thousands of Buddhists in Mongolia despite demands from China that the visit by the exiled Tibetan spiritual leader be scrapped, at a time Mongolia seeks a critical aid package from its powerful neighbor. (AP Photo/Ganbat Namjilsangarav)

Dalai Lama preaches in Mongolia, risking China's fury

By Ganbat Namjilsangarav
The Associated Press

U LAANBAATAR, Mongolia — The Dalai Lama preached to thousands of Buddhists in Mongolia despite demands from China that the visit by the exiled Tibetan spiritual leader be scrapped, at a time Mongolia seeks a critical aid package from its powerful neighbor.

The Dalai Lama addressed followers at the Gandantegchenlin monastery and spoke about materialism at the start of his four-day visit that Mongolia said was purely religious in nature.

The Dalai Lama also chanted special sutras at a large sports facility built by Chinese companies through Chinese aid.

The trip could have repercussions for land-locked Mongolia's relationship with China, which protested previous visits by the Dalai Lama by briefly closing its border in 2002 and temporarily cancelling flights from Beijing in 2006.

China's foreign ministry had demanded the Dalai Lama's visit be cancelled. Spokesman Geng Shuang said the Dalai Lama is a "political exile who has long been engaging in splitting China activities in the name of religion with the aim of alienating Tibet from China."

Geng appealed to Mongolia to maintain "the general picture of a sound and steady development of bilateral ties (and) earnestly stick to its commitment on Tibet-related issues."

China astronauts return from monthlong space station stay

BEIJING (AP) — A pair of Chinese astronauts have returned from a monthlong stay in the country's space station, China's sixth and longest crewed mission to date.

Veteran mission commander Jing Haipeng and first-time space traveller Chen Dong landed in their Shenzhou 11 return vehicle on the frozen steppes of Inner Mongolia.

They spent 30 days aboard the Tiangong 2 station conducting experiments and testing equipment in preparation for the launch of the station's core module in 2018. A fully functioning, permanently crewed space station is on course to begin operation six years from now and slated to run for a decade.

The Tiangong 2 that launched on September 15 is orbiting 244 miles above the earth.

The Dalai Lama has been based in India since fleeing Tibet during an abortive uprising against Chinese rule in 1959.

His visit coincided with attempts by Mongolian leaders to obtain a \$4.2 billion loan from Beijing to pull the country out of a deep recession. With commodity prices slumping, Mongolia is running out of hard currency to repay foreign debts and is seeking help from a neighbor that accounts for roughly 90 percent of its exports.

Mongolian Buddhism is closely tied to Tibet's strain and many in the heavily Buddhist country revere the Dalai Lama, who made his first visit in 1979.

Mongolian religious figures say the visit could be the last for the 81-year-old spiritual leader, and some of his followers travelled hundreds of miles to see him while braving the coldest November temperatures in a decade.

Daritseren, an ethnic Mongolian from Russian Siberia, said she heard just a day before that the Dalai Lama was visiting and travelled with 40 other people for 15 hours overnight to make it just in time for the sermon.

Boldbaatar, a 75-year-old herder, said he rushed from 125 miles away.

"I'm an old man," he said. "Maybe I'm seeing His Holiness, the incarnation of Lord Buddha, for the last time."

Religious scholars said the Dalai Lama is expected to offer input on the search for the 10th reincarnation of the Jebtsundamba Khutuktu, a top-ranked lama in Buddhism.

South Korea's Park makes rare public appearance amid scandal

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Korea's president visited a rural market last month in her first public appearance out among her citizens since a huge political scandal exploded in October.

Park Geun-hye's visit to the market in the southeastern city of Daeju took place while her opponents squabbled over whether and when to impeach her after she made a conditional resignation offer.

The visit was also made just before police detained a man suspected of setting fire to the birthplace of Park's late dictator father in the nearby city of Gumi.

Park Geun-hye's office said she visited the market to review a recent fire, which destroyed hundreds of shops.

Daegu is Park's political home turf, where she was elected as a national lawmaker four times before becoming president in 2013.



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The Asian Reporter's Lunar New Year special issue will be published on **Monday, January 16, 2017.**

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