

Dalai Lama Ends His Teachings in Northeast India

Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama looks on during a public meeting in Tawang, near the frontier with Chinese-controlled Tibet, Arunachal Pradesh state, India, on Wednesday, Nov. 11, 2009. China has protested the Tibetan spiritual leader's week long visit to the northeastern Arunachal Pradesh state that began on Sunday after months of rising friction between India and China.

The Dalai Lama exhorted thousands of his followers to maintain Buddhist culture as he closed a series of public teachings Wednesday in a northeastern Indian region near his homeland of Tibet in a visit that has drawn protests from China.

The exiled spiritual leader's trip to the remote Himalayan region of Arunachal Pradesh, the subject of a long-running border dispute between India and China, has increased already high tensions between the regional rivals.

The Dalai Lama said at the start of his trip on Sunday that his mission was not political but a purely religious visit to local Buddhists.

"It's important for us to preserve our traditions and our culture. You must work hard to preserve these," the Dalai Lama told thousands crowded into a dusty playground in the town of Tawang on Wednesday.

Dancers, many of them in elaborately painted masks, performed at the last day's ceremonies.

The Dalai Lama, who has lived in exile in India since he fled Chinese-controlled Tibet in 1959, made no mention of China in his last public address in Tawang, saying only that the most "profound and detailed" expression of Buddhism was to be found in Tibet.

India brushed off China's demand to bar the Dalai Lama from visiting the region that has been under dispute since the two nations fought a border war in 1962.

Beijing opposes most activities of the Dalai Lama, whom it accuses of agitating for independence for Tibet. The Nobel Peace Prize laureate insists he only seeks autonomy for Tibet to practice its unique Buddhist culture.

India has tried to downplay the tensions with China, barring the foreign media from covering the trip and working to keep the Dalai Lama away from local reporters.

Thousands have attended the Dalai Lama's teachings since they began Monday. Many of them were poor villagers who had walked for miles (kilometers) through narrow and winding mountain paths to catch a glimpse of their spiritual leader.

Followers from the local Monpa tribe, dressed in maroon and black wool coats and stiff black hats made of yak hair, were the largest presence, but followers from across the country, neighboring Bhutan and also included a handful of Western visitors.

"I'm sad that he is leaving, but we have received his blessings and that is a great thing for us Buddhists," said Tsering, a local resident who uses only one name. "Seeing him and listening to him preach has made me very, very happy."

The Dalai Lama departs Thursday morning and will stop in a few other Buddhist monasteries before wrapping up his trip with a visit to the state capital, Itanagar, on Saturday.

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India, Wednesday, Nov. 11, 2009. China has protested the Tibetan spiritual leader's week long visit to the northeastern Arunachal Pradesh state that began Sunday after months of rising friction between India and China.

Buddhist monks watch a cultural show by devotees during a public meeting addressed by Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama in Tawang, near the frontier with Chinese-controlled Tibet, Arunachal Pradesh state, India, Wednesday, Nov. 11, 2009. China has protested the Tibetan spiritual leader's week long visit to the northeastern Arunachal Pradesh state that began Sunday after months of rising friction between India and China.

A paramilitary force soldier stands guard as Buddhist monks watch a cultural show by devotees during a public meeting addressed by Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama in Tawang, near the frontier with Chinese-controlled Tibet, Arunachal Pradesh state, India, Wednesday, Nov. 11, 2009. China has protested the Tibetan spiritual leader's week long visit to the northeastern Arunachal Pradesh state that began Sunday after months of rising friction between India and China.

Buddhist monks carry sacred items as devotees look on, on the last day of prayer meetings and teaching sessions headed by spiritual leader the Dalai Lama, in Tawang, near the frontier with Chinese-controlled Tibet, Arunachal Pradesh state, India, Wednesday, Nov. 11, 2009. China has protested the Tibetan spiritual leader's week long visit to the northeastern Arunachal Pradesh state that began Sunday after months of rising friction between India and China.

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Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama, left, listens to a translator during a public meeting in Tawang, near the frontier with Chinese-controlled Tibet, Arunachal Pradesh state, India, Wednesday, Nov. 11, 2009. China has protested the Tibetan spiritual leader's week long visit to the northeastern Arunachal Pradesh state that began Sunday after months of rising friction between India and China.

A tribal dancer of Arunachal Pradesh looks on at a public meeting addressed by Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama in Tawang, near the frontier with Chinese-controlled Tibet, Arunachal Pradesh state, India, Wednesday, Nov. 11, 2009. China has protested the Tibetan spiritual leader's week long visit to the northeastern Arunachal Pradesh state that began Sunday after months of rising friction between India and China.

(<http://macedoniaonline.eu/content/view/9282/53/> (Wednesday, 11.11.2009))