

# Respect non-believers

Urges Dalai Lama

AFP, College Park

The Dalai Lama on Tuesday called for the teaching of secular values in education, saying that it was critical for the world to respect all religions -- as well as the right not to believe.

Despite devoting his life to the study of Buddhism, Tibet's spiritual leader said he was convinced that all people -- and often even animals -- shared basic moral values regardless of their religion.

"In the West, there is some connotation that secular means a little negative, or disrespect, towards religion," the Dalai Lama told a packed arena at the University of Maryland at College Park in Washington's suburbs.

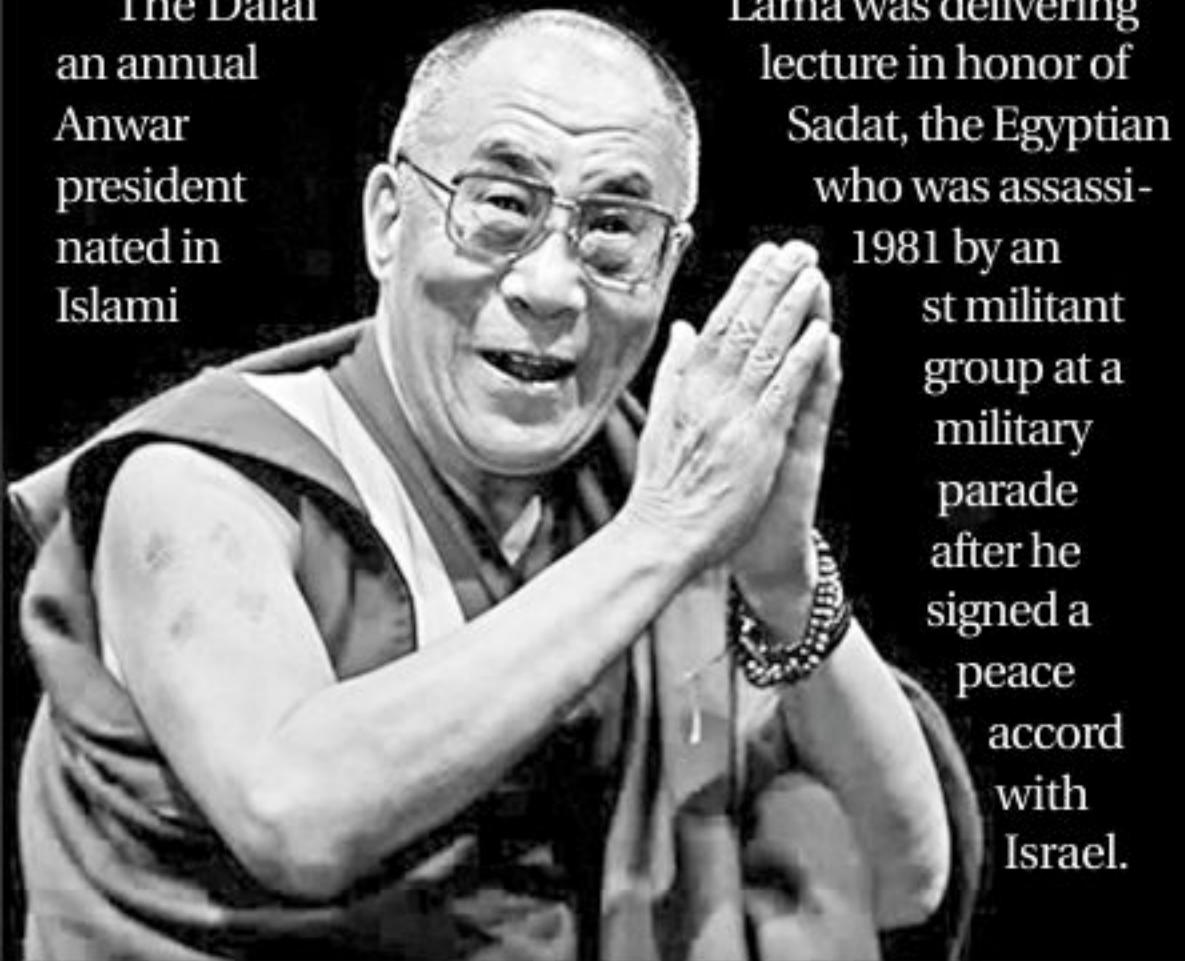
"But according to the Indian understanding, secular means respect for all religions -- and respect for non-believers," said the Dalai Lama, who has lived in exile in India since 1959.

"That is the only way it can be acceptable to a whole universal level," he said.

The Dalai Lama said he was taking part in a project to craft a curriculum on universal ethics, which could be taught initially at a local level and eventually become part of a United Nations initiative.

"The whole world should in the education field include some sort of education about moral ethics. Not based on religion -- secular," he said.

The Dalai Lama was delivering a lecture in honor of Sadat, the Egyptian who was assassinated in 1981 by an Islamist militant group at a military parade after he signed a peace accord with Israel.



## NEWS IN brief

### Russian deputy PM Surkov quits

AFP, Moscow

Influential Russian deputy prime minister Vladislav Surkov, known as a strategist who designed Russia's tightly-controlled politics, has resigned, the Kremlin said yesterday.

The Kremlin said in a statement that Surkov had left his post voluntarily.

Surkov, 48, has been considered the ideologue of Putin's domestic political strategy who oversaw political parties in parliament, electoral campaigns and the tightly controlled media.

### Cargo ship rams Italy port; 9 killed

AFP, Genoa

Nine people were feared dead yesterday after a container ship smashed into a control tower in Genoa in a night-time accident that left several missing and revived painful memories in Italy of a deadly cruise ship disaster last year.

Around 14 people were in the 50-metre (164-foot) high glass-topped tower when it was hit by the ship's stern as it ploughed into the dock. Some were thrown into the cold water, while others were trapped under rubble or in a lift which may have toppled into the sea, media reports said.

### Mexico gas tanker blast kills 24

AFP, Ecatepec

A gas tanker's container came loose and exploded on a highway north of Mexico City on Tuesday, landing between homes and setting fires that killed at least 24 people and injured dozens.

The blast rocked the suburb of Ecatepec before dawn, injuring at least 36 people and damaging some 15 cars and 40 homes, officials said. Ten children were among the dead and eight more were wounded.

Nearby buildings, cars and trucks caught fire after the tanker exploded at around 5:30am in the poor community of San Pedro Xalostoc, which is part of the municipality of Ecatepec.

### Hackers target Thai PM

AFP, Bangkok

Hackers infiltrated the website of Thai Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra's office yesterday, posting offensive comments in the latest attack on her character.

The words "I'm a slutty moron" appeared briefly alongside a picture of a smiling Yingluck, followed by "I know that I am the worst Prime Minister ever in Thailand history!!!!". It was signed by "Unlimited Hack Team".

The government quickly shut down the website and warned the perpetrators they faced tough punishment if caught.

# Russia, US find common ground on Syria

AFP, Moscow

After months of sharp differences, Russia and the United States have agreed to push both sides in Syria to find an end to the bloodshed, offering to hold an international conference in search of peace.

Syrian rebels meanwhile said they had seized four Filipino peacekeepers in the Golan Heights, the second time in two months that UN troops have been abducted in the tense ceasefire zone between Syria and Israel.

And Syria's Internet blackout entered into its second consecutive day on yesterday, which the state news agency blamed on a fault in optical fibre cables. Landline phone services between Syrian provinces have also been down since Tuesday, SANA said.

The government said they are trying to restore the services.

In talks that stretched late into Tuesday night, US Secretary of State John Kerry met first for more than two hours with President Vladimir Putin and then for a further three with Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov.

"We agreed that Russia and the



United States will encourage both the Syria government and opposition groups to find a political solution," Lavrov told reporters at a concluding news conference that ended after midnight.

Lavrov and Kerry said they hoped they could convene an international conference by the end of May to build on the Geneva accord agreed by world powers last June for a peaceful solution in Syria.

The Geneva agreement, which was never implemented, set out a path toward a transitional government without ever spelling out the fate of President Bashar al-Assad.

And in what appeared to be a major concession to Russian con-

cerns of instability in its Middle East ally, Kerry seemed to soften the US stand on Assad's future.

Washington has long insisted Assad must go. But Kerry told reporters that only the Syrian regime and the opposition can determine the make-up of a transitional government to shepherd the war-torn nation towards democratic elections.

Russia has long accused the West of worsening the Syria conflict by seeking to topple the Assad regime. The US and other Western states have in turn accused Russia of failing to use its influence with the regime to halt the bloodshed and keeping up military deliveries to Assad.

In one of the first reactions to the Russian-US accord, Lakhdar Brahimi, the UN-Arab League envoy for Syria, described the deal as a "very significant first step".

Meanwhile, Israeli Defence Minister Moshe Yaalon said his country was not getting involved in Syria's civil war, but insisted the Jewish state would not permit the transfer of arms to Damascus ally Hezbollah in neighbouring Lebanon.

## Kurdish rebels begin pullout from Turkey

AFP, Istanbul

Kurdish rebels have begun withdrawing from Turkey into their stronghold in northern Iraq, a pro-Kurdish lawmaker said yesterday, in a major step towards ending a decades-long conflict that has left tens of thousands of people dead.

The pullout is the first visible sign that months of fragile talks between the state and the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party could succeed in ending 29 years of guerrilla war.

About 2,000 rebel fighters are expected to begin leaving Turkey on foot, travelling through the mountainous border zone to reach their safe havens in the Qandil mountains in northern Iraq.

Ankara did not confirm the start of the pullout but Deputy Prime Minister Bulent Arinc said they were following the process closely.

The withdrawals are expected to take three to four months.

A permanent peace could transform Turkey's impoverished Kurdish-majority southeast, where investment has remained scarce and infrastructure insufficient due to the threat of clashes.

## Thousands rally against Malaysia election result

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Thousands of Malaysians dressed in mourning black gathered yesterday to denounce elections which they claim were stolen through fraud by the coalition that has ruled for 56 years.

The rally was called by opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim, who has vowed a "fierce" campaign for electoral reform after losing Sunday's vote and has said he would soon produce evidence of fraud by what he calls an "illegitimate" government.

Prime Minister Najib Razak's Barisan Nasional (National Front) coalition government has hotly denied the opposition's numerous allegations of cheating.

It also denounced the gathering in a

25,000-seat stadium on the outskirts of the capital Kuala Lumpur.

In a statement, the coalition said Anwar has "deliberately chosen a small stadium to ensure it will spill onto the streets. His protest is calculated to create unrest."

Previous election reform protests have ended in wild scenes, with police using tear gas and water cannon. Police had earlier threatened to arrest participants in yesterday's rally.

But with tension high over the country's closest-ever election result, police backed off and a festive atmosphere prevailed as rally-goers waved opposition party flags and blared vuvuzela horns.



Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, left, talks to China's Premier Li Keqiang during a signing ceremony at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing yesterday. Netanyahu is on a five-day trip to China.

PHOTO:AFP

# US, S Korea vow no concessions to North

AFP, Washington

The leaders of the United States and South Korea on Tuesday vowed no concessions to North Korea after months of high tension, saying the burden was on the communist state to end the crisis.

In a choreographed show of unity, US President Barack Obama and South Korean President Park Geun-Hye pledged to bolster defense cooperation and demanded that North Korea change course on its nuclear program before any new talks.

"The days when North Korea could create a crisis and elicit concessions -- those days are over," Obama told White House news conference with Park.

Obama said that he and Park agreed in talks that "we are not going to reward provocative behavior" but kept the door open to eventual talks if North Korea's young leader Kim Jong-Un decides to embrace "a peaceful path."

"If Pyongyang thought its recent threats would drive a wedge between South Korea and the United States or somehow garner the North international respect, today is further evidence that North Korea has failed again," Obama said.

Tensions have appeared to subside since earlier this year when North Korea carried out its third atomic test and vowed to prepare for nuclear war against the United States, in remarks shrill even by Pyongyang's standards.

A US defense official said that North Korea has shifted two medium-range Musudan missiles away from a launch site, signaling that -- at least for the time being -- the regime has no imminent plans to test-fire them.

## UK parliament opens with Queen's speech

Immigrants to face tougher rules

BBC ONLINE

A fresh attempt to curb immigration is the centre piece of the government's planned new laws, set out by the Queen at the State Opening of Parliament yesterday.

Short-term migrants will pay for NHS care, landlords will be forced to check immigration status and illegal migrants will not get driving licences.

Laws on cheap alcohol and monitoring web use were not among the 15 bills.

David Cameron said the package would boost recovery, but Ed Miliband said the coalition had "run out of ideas".

The Queen set out what the government plans to do over the next year amid the traditional pomp and ceremony of the state opening.

The Prince of Wales, joined by his wife the Duchess of Cornwall, attended the ceremony for the first time since 1996.

In a speech written for her by ministers, the Queen said her government's "first priority" remained cutting the deficit and strengthening Britain's economy.

But the government says it is also determined to do more to tackle illegal immigration and demonstrate that it is backing families who "want to work hard and get on".

The Queen said an immigration bill would aim to "ensure that this country attracts people who will contribute, and deter those who will not".

If passed, the bill would ensure illegal immigrants cannot get driving licences, and change the rules so private landlords have to check their tenants' immigration status.

It would also allow foreign criminals to be deported more easily, as well as people who are in the UK illegally, after the government's repeated setbacks in its efforts to deport the radical cleric Abu Qatada.

Businesses caught employing illegal foreign labour would face bigger fines.

Prime Minister David Cameron said the immigration measures were the "centre piece" of his government's plans for the year ahead, as they "go right across government".



## US MYSTERY ABDUCTION

# Women were tied, chained, say Ohio police

BBC ONLINE

Cleveland's police chief yesterday said the three women held captive in an Ohio house for about a decade were restrained with ropes and chains.

Chief Michael McGrath told US broadcaster NBC that investigators believe the victims were allowed out in the backyard occasionally.

He added Amanda Berry, Gina DeJesus and Michelle Knight were in good condition "considering the circumstances".

Chief McGrath said a charging decision would come later on Wednesday.

Former school bus driver Ariel Castro, 52, who owns the house where the women were found, has been arrested along with his two brothers, Pedro, 54, and Onil Castro, 50.

missed opportunities' Chief McGrath said: "Currently, today, we are interviewing the suspects that were arrested here the night before last. They are talking."

The police chief also disputed claims by neighbours that police did not fully investigate reports of suspicious incidents at the property on Seymour Avenue, in a working-class district.

He said he was "absolutely" sure police did not miss any opportunities to find the women over the years.



Amanda Berry



Gina DeJesus

Neighbours have told news organisations they had made multiple calls to police about the house to report women crying for help or pounding on doors.

Chief McGrath said he could not confirm reports that the captives had had multiple pregnancies.

Police have confirmed a six-year-old girl, Jocelyn, who was discovered along with the women, is Berry's daughter.

Berry, who disappeared in 2003 aged 16, escaped with the help of a neighbour who heard her screaming while her alleged captor was out of the house.

When police arrived they also found DeJesus, 23, and Knight, 32, in the house.

Ariel Castro reportedly fled the neighbourhood, and was arrested at a nearby McDonald's restaurant, according to local media. It is unclear when his brothers were detained.

## China calls US the 'hacking empire'

REUTERS, Beijing

China yesterday accused the United States of sowing discord between China and its neighbours after the Pentagon said Beijing is using espionage to fuel its military modernisation, branding Washington the "real hacking empire".

The latest salvo came a day after China's foreign ministry dismissed as groundless a Pentagon report which accused China for the first time of trying to break into US defence computer networks.

The People's Liberation Army Daily called the report a "gross interference in China's internal affairs".

The United States is "trumpeting China's military threat to promote its domestic interests groups and arms dealers", the newspaper said, adding that it expects "US arms manufacturers are gearing up to start counting their money".

The remarks in the newspaper underscore the escalating mistrust between China and the United States over hacking, now a top point of contention between Washington and Beijing.

China has said repeatedly that it does not condone hacking and is the victim of hacking attacks -- most of which it claims come from the United States.

"As we all know, the United States is the real 'hacking empire' and has an extensive espionage network," the People's Daily, a newspaper regarded as a mouthpiece of the Chinese Communist Party, said in a commentary.

A commentary by the state news agency Xinhua on Tuesday also slammed the report as a "groundless assessment" and "unwise move" that was "harmful to the aspiration of both countries to forge a cooperative partnership."

## Islamists' assault kills 55 in Nigeria

AFP, Maiduguri

Nigerian soldiers blanketed the town of Bama yesterday, where residents stayed indoors after coordinated assaults by heavily armed Islamist insurgents killed 55 people.

The military said the brazen raid was carried out by some 200 gunmen from the extremist group Boko Haram, who stormed the town in a convoy of buses and 4x4 trucks, armed with machine guns and rocket-propelled grenades.

Disguised in army uniforms, the insurgents broke into a prison, killed 14 guards and set free 105 inmates, the military in northeastern Borno state said.

They attacked a police station, killing 22 officers, while 13 Islamists, four civilians and two soldiers were also reported to have lost their lives in the assaults that paralysed the trading town.