

Dalai Lama moves thousands at ceremony

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Exiled Tibetan leader the Dalai Lama shares his thoughts at a ceremony to comfort victims of Typhoon Morakot.
PHOTO: PATRICK LIN, AFP

More than 17,000 people from across the country packed the Kaohsiung Arena yesterday morning as the Dalai Lama held a two-hour prayer ceremony for the victims of Typhoon Morakot.

Although the ceremony officially started at 9:30am, many people began lining up on Monday night and by 9am the stadium was packed.

Admission to the event was on first-come-first-serve basis beginning at 7:30am.

Aside from locals, hundreds of people arrived from Taipei via charter bus at about 6am.

Awaiting the spiritual leader's arrival, members of the audience chanted om mani padme hum — the most commonly recited Buddhist mantra — in unison.

"I came here not to take pictures but to do something meaningful," the Dalai Lama told the audience.

"All Buddhists today — monks, men and women — must bear compassion at heart, pray and dedicate all the merits to the deceased and their families," he said.

"Many people asked if we want to do good things and pray, why don't we just do it in our own rooms? Well, when so many people are gathered here at the same time to pray, we could create a very powerful force that would generate special fruits," he said.

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Protesters stage a demonstration against the Dalai Lama during his visit in Kaohsiung y
PHOTO: PATRICK LIN, AFP

The leader led the audience in reciting Buddhist chants and commented on the teachings of the Buddha.

He also urged the public to think positively and live their lives without losing confidence, even in difficult times.

“More than 500 people lost their lives in the disaster and the survivors are very worried,” he said.

“I came here not to take pictures but to do something meaningful.”

— Dalai Lama, Tibetan spiritual leader

“But in Linbian Township [林邊, Pingtung County], a lot of fish were able to escape [from fishponds] because of the flooding,” he said, followed by laughter from the audience.

Many people in attendance said they were impressed by the Dalai Lama’s wittiness in his teachings on a subject that can sometimes be dry, as well as his quick reaction to unexpected

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events.

“It was spectacular and the Dalai Lama was so witty, I loved how he reacted to the collapse of the table, which could have been an embarrassing moment,” a member of the audience surnamed Chao (趙) said after the ceremony was over.

At the beginning of the ceremony, the Dalai Lama asked that a small table in front of his seat be removed. However, as officials were in the process of removing it, it collapsed, to a complete silence in the audience.

The Dalai Lama broke the silence with loud laughter, which triggered more laughter and applause from the crowd.

Chen Yu-ching (陳玉晶), a follower of Tibetan Buddhism, said she was excited to see the Dalai Lama in person for the first time.

“I’m so happy, because I don’t know if I’ll have another chance to see the Dalai Lama again,” she said, adding that she took the day off from work and got up at 5am to drive down from Taichung for the event.

The 1989 Nobel Peace Prize-winner gave another lecture at an auditorium at his hotel in the afternoon.

Most of the problems that trouble our world are manmade, he said, and they can only be resolved when people consider all 6 billion human beings as brothers as sisters.

Many are “too much concerned about the ‘we’ and ‘they’ and are willing to sacrifice one’s life to destroy ‘the other,’” he said.

“That’s foolish, unwise,” he said.

“Think of humanity as part of ‘we,’” he said, adding that thought alone would not resolve all problems, but that problems can be resolved through compromise and dialogue.

Admission tickets for the afternoon lecture were distributed at the hotel starting at noon, with all 500 tickets gone in half an hour.

Unable to secure tickets for the lecture, more than 1,000 people stayed in the hotel lobby and courtyard, hoping to greet the Dalai Lama after the lecture. However, the Dalai Lama returned to his room directly after the lecture.

Not everyone welcomed the Dalai Lama.

Dozens of people from the China Unification Promotion Party (CUPP) and the True Awakening Joint Cultivation Buddhist Association (覺醒聯合淨土淨土) staged protests outside the Kaohsiung Arena in the morning and the hotel in the afternoon.

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