

# Pope: I have deep respect for Islam

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VATICAN CITY: Pope Benedict XVI said yesterday he has "deep respect" for Islam and hoped remarks he made in Germany last week — which sparked angry reactions in much of the Muslim world — can lead to dialogue among religions.

The pope acknowledged his remarks were open to misinterpretation, but insisted he had not intended to endorse a negative view of Islam.

"I hope that in several occasions during the visit... my deep respect for great religions, in particular for Muslims — who worship the one God and with whom we are engaged in defending and promoting together social justice, moral values, peace and freedom for all men — has emerged clearly," he said during his weekly audience at the Vatican.

"I trust that after the initial reaction, my words at the University of Re-

gensburg can constitute an impulse and encouragement towards positive, even self-critical dialogue, both among religions and between modern reason and Christian faith," he told the faithful in St Peter's Square, among heightened security.

In Turkey, the man who shot and wounded the last pope wrote to Pope Benedict to warn him that he was in danger. Mehmet Ali Agca, the man who tried to murder John Paul II in 1981 and is now in prison, urged the pope not to visit the country.

"I write as one who knows about these matters very well," Agca said. "Your life is in danger. Don't come to Turkey — absolutely not!"

In Geneva, a high-profile Muslim scholar, Tariq Ramadan, said some undemocratic governments in the Islamic world are to blame for stoking anger at the comments.

However, the pope's approach to Islam is also unhelpful because it excludes the faith from being part of a European identity, Ramadan said in an opinion piece in the *Le Temps*.

He said reactions to the pope's remarks were "surprisingly intense", particularly because most participants in what have sometimes been violent protests "hadn't read the text".

"Certain governments exploit this kind of crisis to enable a frustrated public to let off steam," he wrote.

"When one has deprived people of their fundamental human rights and freedom of expression, it costs nothing to let them express their anger."

Morocco's King Mohammed, who recalled his ambassador to the Vatican in protest at the pope's remarks, told the envoy to return to Rome and get back to work, the Foreign Ministry said. — Agencies