

# N Korea calls for peace with South in new year

AFP, Seoul

North Korea began 2011 with calls for improved relations with South Korea after a year of tensions marked by the first deadly attack on a civilian area since the war.

"Confrontation between North and South should be defused as early as possible," a joint New Year editorial of three leading North Korean state newspapers said yesterday.

"Dialogue and cooperation should be promoted proactively," it said.

Relations plunged after the North shelled a border island in November, killing four people, including two civilians.

World leaders leapt to condemn the

attack, with many calling on China to rein in its unpredictable ally, something Beijing so far appears unwilling to do.

The South has since staged a series of military exercises, including a live-fire drill on December 20 on the island but the North did not follow through with threats of a new and deadlier attack.

The editorial, which North Koreans are obliged to read, said: "This year we should launch a more determined campaign to improve inter-Korean relations.

"Active efforts should be made to create an atmosphere of dialogue and cooperation between North and South by placing the common interests of the nation above anything else."



New Year's revelers gather at zero hour (from right-clockwise) in New York's Times Square, Red Square in Moscow, Russia and Manila, Philippines to celebrate the moment.

PHOTO: AFP

## NEWS IN brief

### Stalin statue blown up in Ukraine

AFP, Kiev

Extremists blew up a controversial monument to Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin on New Year's night in southeastern Ukraine in an "act of terror", the local Communist Party said yesterday.

The bust in the city of Zaporizhia, unveiled this May, caused a heated controversy in Ukraine which is still split between its nationalist west and the more Russian orientated east which fondly remembers the Soviet past.

"A criminal broke into the grounds of the Communist Party regional headquarters, and laid an explosive charge which detonated after a few minutes," the Communist Party said.

"The statue of Stalin was destroyed as a result of the blast," the Communists said in a statement. It said that the explosion inflicted serious damage on the building but there were no casualties.

The explosion took place at 10:40 pm (2040 GMT) on New Year's Eve, it said.

### One dead, dozens hurt in Naples new year festivities

REUTERS, Naples

One person was killed, more than 70 injured, and fireworks set on fire dozens of piles of rubbish as the city of Naples rang in the new year.

The southern city and its hinterland are traditionally the most explosive area in Italy on New Year's Eve, and Friday night was no exception as people fired guns into the air and set off fireworks, many of the powerful illegal types.

Police said a 39-year-old man died when he was hit in the back by a stray bullet fired into the air by someone on the balcony of an apartment block on the city's outskirts.

More than 70 others were injured, including a 28-year-old man who was shot in the face -- also by a stray bullet, and was in a serious condition. The others were injured by fireworks.

## Egypt blast kills 21 at Coptic church

BBC ONLINE

Egyptian officials now believe that an attack on a church which killed at least 21 worshippers in Alexandria was the work of a suicide bomber.

Earlier the blast outside the church was said to have been caused by a car bomb. At least 43 people were wounded by the explosion, officials said.

The blast hit worshippers as they left a new year's service at the al-Qidiseen church shortly after midnight.

Christians and Muslims clashed briefly after the attack.

After the explosion, angry Coptic Christians clashed with police and local Muslims, reportedly throwing stones and

targeting a nearby mosque.

It is not known who carried out the attack.

In recent months Copts have complained of discrimination, while some Muslims accuse churches of holding converts to Islam against their will.

Meanwhile, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak accused "foreign hands" of carrying out a deadly New Year's day attack on a church early yesterday that killed 21 people and wounded 79 others.

In a televised speech Mubarak said the bombing targeting worshippers as they emerged from a New Year's eve at a Coptic church in Alexandria bore the hallmark "of foreign hands."

### Blast kills bomb squad pair in Thai south: police

AFP, Narathiwat

Two bomb disposal policemen were killed and nine other people wounded in a blast in the Thai south yesterday after warnings of New Year violence in the restive region, police said.

The bomb -- the second in Narathiwat province in four days -- went off in front of a stall, killing a 50-year-old police officer. The second victim, whose age is unknown, died in hospital after suffering a shrapnel wound.



Handout picture released by Brazilian Presidency of Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva (L) kissing Brazilian President elect Dilma Rousseff as they celebrate her victory at Alvorada Palace, on October 31, 2010. Rousseff, the first female President of Brazil, will have to impose a personal profile to the head of the country.

### Estonia becomes euro zone member

BBC ONLINE

Estonia has become the 17th member of the eurozone - the first ex-Soviet state to adopt the EU single currency.

The changeover from the kroon to the euro started at midnight (2200 GMT) in the small Baltic nation of 1.3m people.

Despite market pressure on the eurozone and the Greek and Irish bailouts this year, polls suggested most Estonians wanted the euro.

Prime Minister Andrus Ansip marked the event by withdrawing euros from a cashpoint.

### Palestinian woman gassed at demo dies

AFP, Bilin

A Palestinian woman died overnight after being teargassed by Israeli troops at a West Bank protest, an incident the Palestinian Authority is calling "a war crime."

Jawaher Abu Rahma, 36, died in hospital in the occupied West Bank city of Ramallah after collapsing on Friday during a demonstration against the Israeli separation barrier in the nearby village of Bilin, hospital staff said yesterday.

The army said on Friday that it used unspecified "means of dispersing demonstrations" against some 250 violent protesters taking part in a weekly rally against the fence near the West Bank village of Bilin.

Photos showed clouds of tear gas billowing around stone-throwing protesters.

## Ershad sees disaster

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in hands. I appeal to find out a way to overcome the disaster ahead after sitting with all parties in the grand alliance," he said at a discussion celebrating the founding anniversary of JP at Muktangaon in the capital.

Ershad said the Awami League-led 14-party grand alliance has failed in all sectors except agriculture and food in the first two years of the government's five-year tenure.

The JP chairman in his speech also tried to clear on what perspective he took over the state power on March 24, 1982.

"The responsibility of ruling the country had been bestowed on me due to a historical obligation in 1982," he said.

Ershad added a chaotic situation was prevailing in the country before the state power was "bestowed" on him. The situation was like a threat to independence, sovereignty and the democratic system, he said.

"I was a soldier and it was my duty to act as a guard to protect the country's independence and sovereignty. I did not want to do politics," Ershad claimed.

His comment came two days after the release of the full text of a High Court verdict on the seventh amendment to the constitution. The HC verdict has declared the seventh amendment that legitimised Ershad's military ruling illegal and observed that military rulers and their accomplices should be punished.

At the end of his speech, Ershad without specifying anything said, "I am a human being and I might make mistakes and I cordially regret for that."

Attending the ceremony as the chief guest, the former president of the state said the father of the nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had dreamt to make Bangladesh free from hunger, repression and pov-

erty. "I was cordial to fulfil his dreams when I was in state power," said Ershad.

He said the prices of essentials remained high during the last two years, while the government failed to break down the syndicate that plays a role behind price hike.

Ershad went on to say that the law and order was deteriorating gradually, while the number of tender manipulation incidents and extortion was increasing in last two years.

Gas and power crises were extremely high in the country in the last two years, while traffic jam stayed one of the major problems in the capital, he said.

JP Presidium Member and Civil Aviation and Tourism Minister GM Quader and JP Secretary General ABM Ruhul Amin Hawlader attended the programme as special guests. JP leader Zia Uddin Bablu, Kazi Feroz Rashid was also present.

### Yemen to amend constitution

AFP, Sanaa

Yemen's parliament agreed in principle yesterday to make constitutional amendments that could see President Ali Abdullah Saleh rule for life, and will hold a formal vote on the matter later this year.

Despite opposition protests and calls by the United States for a vote delay, some 170 members of Saleh's General People's Congress (GPC) party voted in favour of the constitutional amendments, an AFP journalist said.

Only two independent MPs who attended the meeting called for postponing the vote which sparked an opposition protest outside parliament.

In line with the constitution the amendments will be discussed in detail on March 1 and then they will be submitted to a referendum to be held simultaneously with parliamentary polls on April 27, a GPC member said.

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