

Two Koreas at a turning point: Lee

BBC ONLINE

The Korean peninsula is at a "turning point" and there are opportunities for change, South Korean President Lee Myung-bak said in a new year speech yesterday.

He said Seoul would "respond strongly" if provoked by North Korea, with whom it remains technically at war.

But he said that the biggest goal was stability, and that aid-for-disarmament talks could resume if Pyongyang halted its nuclear activities.

On Sunday North Korea told citizens to defend leader Kim Jong-un to the death.

Kim Jong-un has succeeded his father, Kim Jong-il, who died on 17 December at the age of 69.

On Friday, the country's powerful National Defence Commission warned the outside world to expect no change from the new leadership.

In a nationally televised address, Lee Myung-bak said that peace was his priority and that a "window of opportunity" had opened for better ties with the North.

"The situation on the Korean peninsula is now entering a new turning point," he said. "But there should be a new opportunity amid changes and uncertainty."



Lee Myung-bak

South Korea would, however, "thoroughly maintain national security as long as there is a possibility of provocation by the North", he added.

Kim Jong-il had ruled North Korea since the death of his father, Kim Il-sung, in 1994.

The impoverished and isolated communist country faces ongoing food shortages. Funds are channelled to the military and North Korea has conducted two nuclear tests since 2006.

In the last two years, ties between the two Koreas have been extremely tense.

Lee's decision to link the provision of aid to North Korea to progress on nuclear disarmament has angered the North.

South Korea also blames its northern neighbour for sinking its warship in March 2010, killing 46 sailors. Eight months later, North Korea shelled a Southern border island, killing four people.

Pyongyang denies any role in the first incident and says South Korea provoked the second.

It has castigated the South for failing to send a formal delegation to pay respects to Kim Jong-il.

And in its new year message, the regime told North Koreans to defend their new, young leader.

No outside control should be imposed over media

Says Manmohan

PTI, New Delhi

Ruling out any outside regulation of the media, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh yesterday said the media in the country can itself take care of the 'ills' like paid news and urged it to reduce sensationalism in coverage.

"I am very happy that the media of our country is by and large independent and alive...Ever since we have got independence, discussions have been going on in the country about the role of the media and the manner in which it functions.

"In my opinion, there is a general consensus in our country that no outside control should be imposed over the media. But I am also of the view that the representatives of media should among themselves find a way by which objectivity and impartiality gets encouragement and sensationalism is reduced," the prime minister said.

He was speaking at a function here in



which he released a book and a postage stamp issued in the memory of late Puran Chandra Gupta, the founder of the Hindi daily Dainik Jagaran.

Gupta had also served as Chairman of Press Trust of India for two years.

Noting that it is good for the country's democracy that the reach of both electronic and print media have increased substantially due to new technology, Singh hoped Indian media will be successful in checking ills like paid news.

"I am confident that Indian media will itself take steps to wipe out the ills like paid news and will also be successful in it. You should also pay attention on how to increase the coverage of those issues, which are really important for our country," Dr. Singh said.

Lauding Gupta for encouraging independent and fearless reporting throughout his life, Singh said such journalism is quite necessary for any democracy.

Toxic alcohol kills 17 in S India

AFP, Hyderabad

At least 17 people have died from drinking toxic home-brewed alcohol in southern India, an official said yesterday, just weeks after a similar incident claimed 170 lives.

Fifteen people died in tribal villages of Andhra Pradesh state over the New Year weekend and two more died yesterday, an official from the excise ministry in the state capital Hyderabad told AFP.

"All of the victims were basically labourers. Three women are also among the dead," he said, declining to be named.

The latest deaths came less than a month after 170 people died from consuming similar poisonous alcoholic drinks in the eastern state of West Bengal.

Iran test-fires missiles in the Gulf

AFP, Tehran

Iran yesterday tested missiles near the Strait of Hormuz, underlining its threats to close the vital oil-transit channel at the entrance to the Gulf as the West prepares to impose more economic sanctions.

The launch of two missiles took place on the final day of war games in waters east of the Strait of Hormuz, a navy spokesman, Commodore Mahmoud Mousavi, was quoted as saying by official media.

Another missile was also to be tested, he said. The longest range of the missiles tested yesterday was 200 kilometres.

On Sunday, a medium-range surface-to-air missile was also test-fired during the exercises, according to Mousavi.

The show of military muscle was designed to show Iran's ability to close the Strait of Hormuz -- through which 20 per cent of the world's oil flows -- if it chooses.

Political and military officials have said they could take that drastic step if the West imposes more sanctions on top of others that have already taken their toll on Iran's oil-dependent economy.

Cops fire at protesters in Bahrain

AFP, Dubai

Bahrain's security forces fired tear gas at anti-government protesters and beat them with iron bars leaving dozens injured, human rights activists and the opposition said yesterday.

The violence erupted Sunday night in the town of Sitra after the funeral of 15-year-old Sayyed Hashem Saeed, who the opposition says was killed when he was struck on the head by a tear gas canister fired by security forces the previous day.

Another teenager, Hani al-Qanish, was also seriously wounded Sunday by a direct hit to the head by a tear gas canister, former opposition MP Matar Matar told AFP.

Opposition human rights activist Nabil Rajab said riot police used tear gas and iron bars to disperse the crowds.

NEWS IN brief

Fiji's military lifting martial law

BBC ONLINE

Martial law will be lifted in Fiji this week, Commodore Voreqe "Frank" Bainimarama said in a New Year speech yesterday.

The military ruler, who seized power in a 2006 coup, said that consultations on a new constitution would begin next month.

"To facilitate this consultation process, the public emergency regulations will cease from 7 January 2012," he said.

Three Iranians held in Pakistan

AFP, Quetta

Pakistan on Sunday detained three Iranian border guards after they allegedly crossed the border and shot at a car, killing a Pakistani national, local Pakistani officials said.

The Iranians reached Mazan Sar Mashkail, in Washuk district, three kilometres inside Pakistan where they opened fire on a vehicle they were chasing, according to officials in Pakistan's Baluchistan province.

"All three personnel of Iranian border security force were taken into custody for their penetration inside Pakistan and killing a Pakistani national on our soil", Saeed Ahmad Jamali, Deputy Commissioner of Washuk district told AFP.

Muslims, police clash in China

AP, Beijing

A crowd of Muslims fought with police who demolished a mosque in China's northwest, a police employee and a human rights group said yesterday.

The violence erupted Friday in Hexi, a town in the Ningxia region, after the mosque was declared an "illegal religious place" and about 1,000 officers arrived to demolish it, the Hong Kong-based Information Center for Human Rights and Democracy said.

It said 50 people were injured and more than 100 detained after several hundred members of China's Muslim Hui minority tried to stop the demolition.

Mubarak trial adjourns

AFP, Cairo

The judge in the murder and corruption trial of Egypt's ex-president Hosni Mubarak adjourned the hearing yesterday to the next day to hear the prosecution's arguments.

The fallen dictator was wheeled into court on a stretcher as his trial for the deaths of protesters during the uprising that ousted him in February.

The next hearings will take place over Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday.

20 feared dead in Kenyan boat crash

REUTERS, Lamu

More than 20 people were feared dead after a Kenyan ferry carrying more than 80 passengers capsized on Sunday night following a collision with a cargo boat off the island of Lamu, a popular tourist destination.

Survivors confirmed earlier suggestions that the small ferry was overloaded when the two vessels collided in the dark at about 9 p.m. (1800 GMT).

The Kenya Red Cross said of the 82 passengers, seven were confirmed dead as of Sunday night, 25 had been rescued and 23 managed to swim to shore. Fifteen people pulled from the water were admitted to hospital.

Abdalla Miraj, regional head of the Kenya Red Cross, told Reuters at least 16 people were still believed missing.

NY mosque targeted in arson spree

AFP, New York

A mosque and a nearby store run by Muslim immigrants were among four sites hit by suspected arsonists in a single New York neighborhood late Sunday, police said yesterday.

A spokesman for the New York Police Department said the Imam Al-Khoi Foundation building in the borough of Queens suffered damage to the front door from a Molotov cocktail.

The foundation, which describes itself as the biggest international Shia Muslim organization, said on its website that two firebombs were "hurled at the main entrance" but that thankfully "no major damage no injury was caused by the blast."

In a slightly earlier incident in the same part of New York, a general store known in New York as a bodega was struck with a similar device, consisting of a still-undetermined inflammable liquid in a glass Starbucks cafe bottle, a police spokesman said.

A source close to the investigation, who asked not to be identified, said that "the employees are Muslim."

A third incident, occurring just one hour after the mosque attack, saw the same Starbucks bottle and accelerant weapon thrown at a private home used by a Hindu priest for ceremonies, police said. Nothing outside the house indicates its dual use as a temple, police said.

The fourth and most serious attack of the evening ended with a major fire at a private home, although there was no proof of links between this and the other incidents.

Khan indicates political tie-up with Musharraf

PTI, Islamabad

The political scene in Pakistan appears to be hotting up, with the cricketer-turned-politician Imran Khan's Tehrik-e-Insaf party indicating that it is open to an alliance with former military ruler Pervez Musharraf.

The party's new vice-chairman Shah Mahmood Qureshi said a decision on forming an alliance with Musharraf's All Pakistan Muslim League will be taken in due course of time after considering circumstances.

His comments come in the wake of political ripples triggered by the 'memogate' scandal, which has put the country's powerful army and the executives at loggerheads, leading to speculation of possibility of early polls and new political alignments.

Musharraf, who has been living outside



Imran Khan



Pervez Musharraf

Pakistan in self-exile since early 2009, recently announced he would return to the country later this month.

Musharraf is expected to set the date for his homecoming while addressing a rally in Karachi by phone on January 8.

During an interaction with the media in Multan yesterday, Qureshi said: "People from every political party are joining the Tehrik-e-Insaf."

The party is not "just a trend" as it represents "an ideology against the status quo", he said.

Qureshi further said that if all lawmakers of the main opposition PML-N decided to resign from parliament, the Pakistan People's Party-led government would be left with no option but to call an early election.

China launches first 3D TV channel

BBC ONLINE

China has launched its first three-dimensional television channel (3D TV) on a trial basis.

The channel, operated by China Central Television and five local stations, aims to be launched formally over the upcoming Chinese New Year.

People who have 3D TV sets and high definition digital TV set-top boxes can watch the new service.

Countries like Japan, South Korea and India have already launched similar services. The free-to-air channel will initially broadcast 4.5 hours of 3D programming each day which will be repeated twice, says the official Xinhua News Agency.

"The launch of the 3D trial channel is a significant step in the development of



3D TV can bring significant revenue to the industry.

China's television," said Cai Fuchao, head of the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television.

The broadcast regulator also suggested that the new service could generate huge revenue for the industry if a proportion of China's 500 million TV sets were replaced by 3D ones.



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