

# NEWS IN brief

## IS attack in Iraq kills at least 7

AFP, Najaf  
An attack claimed by the Islamic State group on a police checkpoint in southern Iraq left at least seven people dead yesterday, officials said. Gunmen wearing suicide vests and driving an explosives-laden vehicle opened fire on the checkpoint near the town of Qadisiyah, which lies around 180 kilometres south of Baghdad. Five policemen were among the dead.

## India mine collapse toll rises to 17

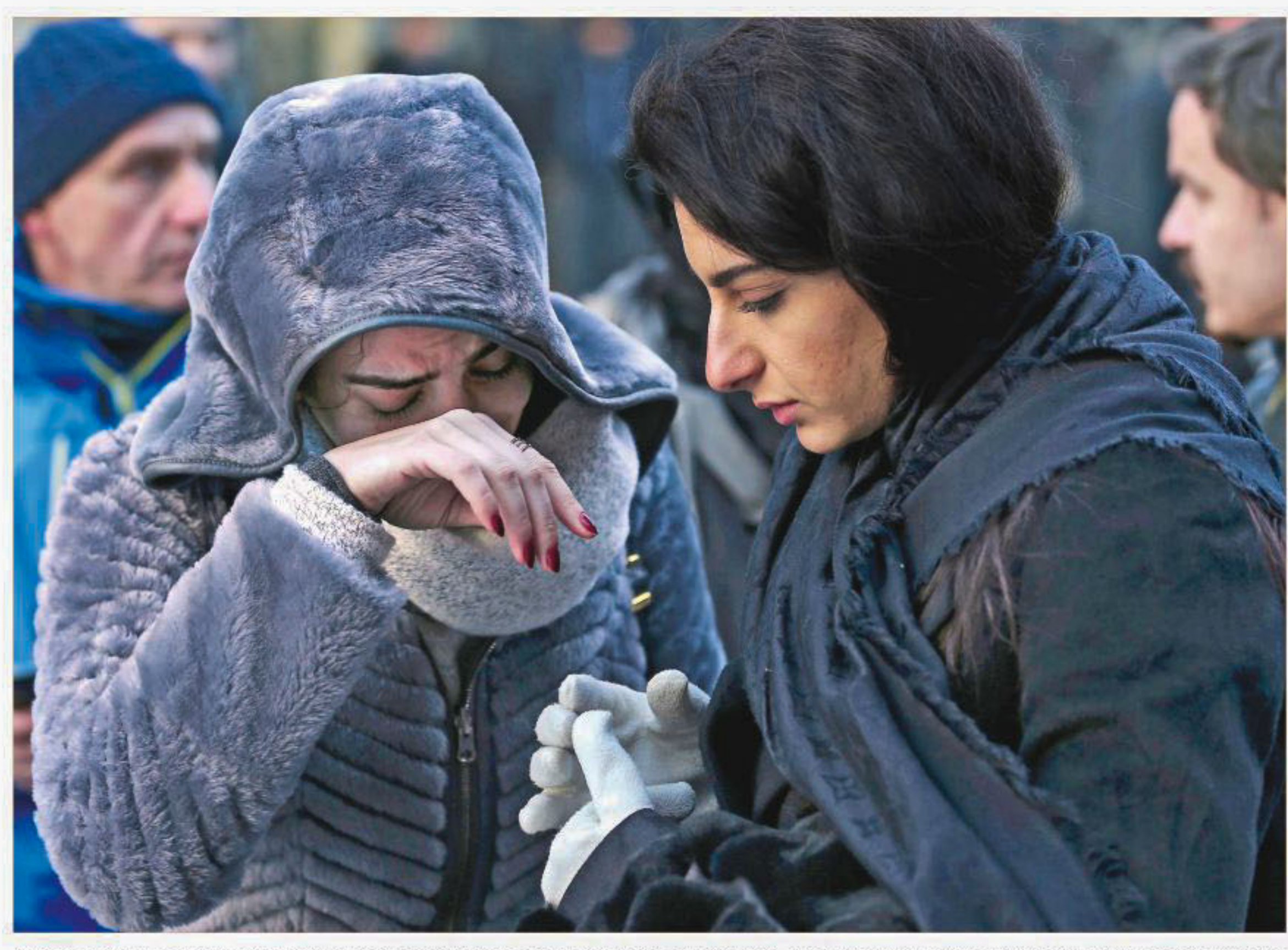
AFP, New Delhi  
The death toll from a mine collapse in eastern India's Jharkhand state rose to 17 yesterday as rescue workers continued to search for the bodies of six missing miners. A massive mound of earth caved in late Thursday at Lalmatia open cast mine. There was no immediate explanation for the collapse, but the government has launched an investigation into the incident.

## Burundi minister shot dead in latest violence

AFP, Nairobi  
Burundi's environment minister was shot dead in the capital Bujumbura early yesterday, police said, the first killing of its kind since the country was plunged into political turmoil two years ago. Emmanuel Niyonkuru, 54, the country's water, environment and planning minister, was killed shortly after midnight, according to a tweet sent by police spokesman Pierre Nkurikiye.

## Saudi executes 153

AFP, Riyadh  
Saudi Arabia carried out 153 executions in 2016, according to an AFP, slightly down from the year before. The ultra-conservative kingdom is one of the world's most prolific executioners.



(From left, clockwise) Women who survived an attack by a gunman, react outside the Reina nightclub by the Bosphorus; a security official stands alert after the attack; and the Reina nightclub where the massacre took place. Turkish police were yesterday hunting for the gunman who killed 39 people, including many foreigners, in a rampage at an upmarket nightclub in Istanbul where revellers were celebrating the New Year.

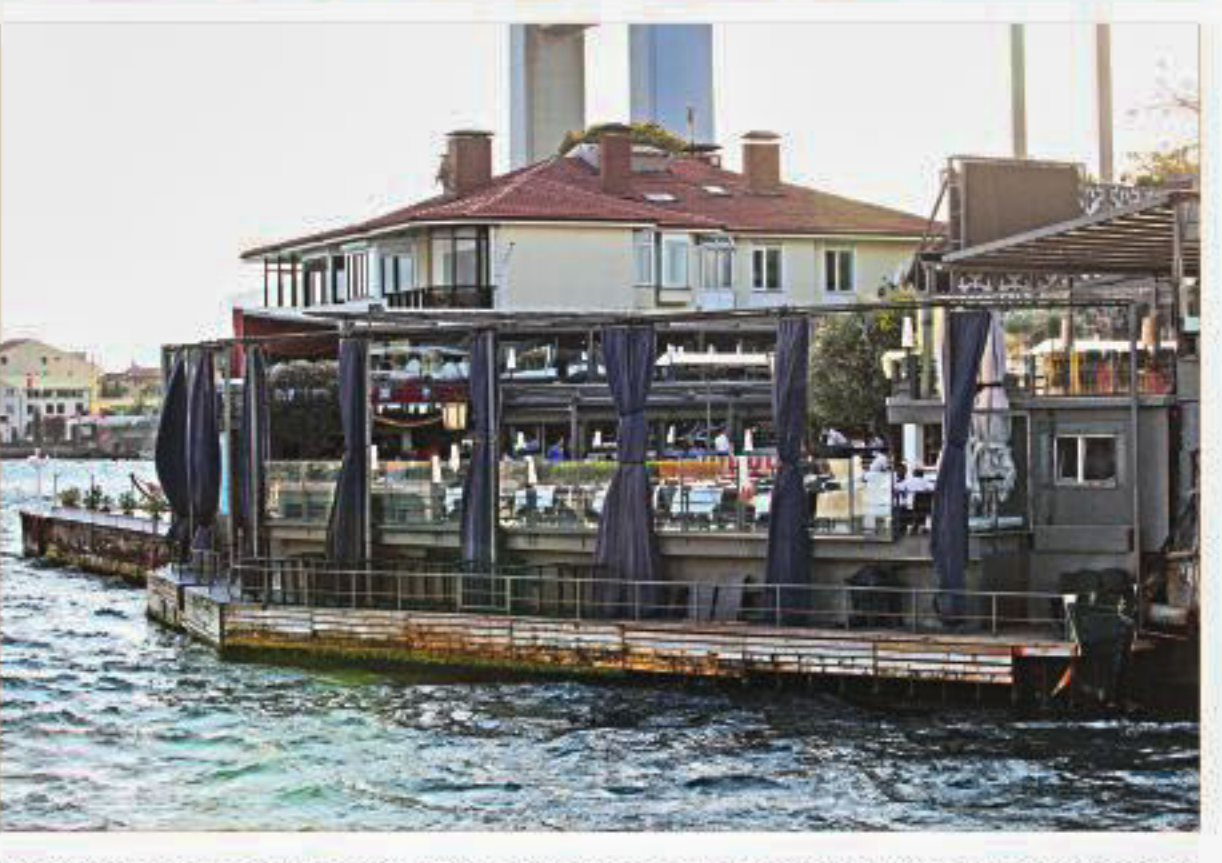


PHOTO: REUTERS

## Iraq retook over 60% of east Mosul: army

AFP, Basrah  
Iraqi forces have retaken more than 60 percent of eastern Mosul from the Islamic State group since the battle for the city began in mid-October, a top commander said yesterday.

He was speaking in an area southeast of Mosul, the city where IS proclaimed a cross-border "caliphate" in June 2014 after overrunning it and swathes of other Iraqi territory.

The eastern side of Mosul, which is split by the Tigris River, is the larger of the two, but more civilians live in the west, he said.

Hundreds of thousands of civilians remain inside Iraq's second city, a large urban area that gives IS myriad opportunities for ambushes, forcing Iraqi and allied forces to take precautions and slowing their advance.

Iraqi forces have yet to enter west Mosul, which is still completely held by IS.

# Syria clashes test shaky truce

AFP, Beirut

Fighting in parts of Syria yesterday threatened a shaky ceasefire brokered by Russia and Turkey, whose efforts to kickstart talks towards ending the conflict won backing from world powers.

The nationwide truce between the regime and non-jihadist rebels aims to smooth the way for peace talks in Kazakhstan later this month orchestrated by Damascus's allies Moscow and Tehran and rebel backer Ankara.

The UN Security Council on Saturday unanimously approved a resolution supporting the Russian and Turkish initiative aimed at ending the nearly six-year-old war that has killed more than 310,000 and displaced millions.

Air raids and clashes have continued to shake parts of the country since the ceasefire started at midnight Thursday, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based monitor of the war.

Four civilians and nine rebels have been killed since the truce took effect, according to the group, which relies on a network of sources in Syria for its information.

The air strikes and fighting "are unlikely to lead to the ceasefire collapsing, but they are violations of the deal,"

Observatory head Rami Abdel Rahman said.

In northern Syria, regime air strikes yesterday targeted the rebel-held town of Atareb, the monitor said.

On Saturday night, rebels shelled Fuaa and Kafraya, two besieged Shia-majority villages in northwestern Syria.

Outside Damascus, the Observatory reported exchanges of fire between the regime and rebels in Eastern Ghouta, where President Bashar al-Assad's forces

"rapid, safe and unhindered" delivery of humanitarian aid in Syria.

In Eastern Ghouta's Hammuriyeh area, Syrian activists late Saturday marked the New Year by decorating a tree with lights and pictures of the war's victims over the past year, an AFP photographer said.

The Observatory says a total of 60,000 people lost their lives in violence across Syria in 2016, more than 13,000 of them civilians.

Syria's conflict began in 2011 with the brutal repression of anti-government protests and has since spiralled into a multi-front war involving various sides and international players.

Russia and Turkey say the Astana talks in late January will supplement, not replace, UN-backed peace efforts, including negotiations set to resume on February 8 in Geneva.

Moscow and Ankara have been working increasingly closely on Syria, including on a deal to allow the evacuation of civilians and rebels from the besieged northern city of Aleppo last month.

The fighting in Syria has occasionally spilled over into neighbouring Turkey, with several attacks blamed on IS or Kurdish militants.

## RUSSIA GETS UN BACKING FOR CEASEFIRE, KAZAKHSTAN TALKS

have waged a months-long offensive to retake an opposition bastion.

The truce excludes the Islamic State group and former al-Qaeda affiliate Fateh al-Sham Front.

Saturday's UN resolution "welcomes and supports the efforts by Russia and Turkey to end violence in Syria and jumpstart a political process" and hails the planned talks in the Kazakh capital Astana as "an important step".

The measure also calls for the

## NEW YEAR MASSACRE IN TURKEY

# 'We walked on top of people'

AFP, Istanbul

One of the revellers at the Istanbul nightclub which came under attack during New Year celebrations described the chaos and panic as people tried to escape a gunman intent on killing as many as possible.

Thirty-nine people were killed when at least one attacker -- reportedly dressed as Santa -- stormed an elite nightclub on the Bosphorus where party-goers were celebrating New Year.

Professional footballer Sefa Boydas told AFP how several people fainted after they heard gunshots while people walked on top of one another to escape the elite Reina club on the European side of the city.

Boydas said he had only been in the club with two friends for about 10 minutes before he heard gunshots and his friend



collapsed in shock.

"Just as we were settling down, by the door there was a lot of dust and smoke. Gunshots rang out. When those sounds were heard, many girls fainted."

He told AFP that people appeared to be crushed as they ran away from the attacker.

"They say 35 to 40 died but it's probably more because when I was walking, people were walking on top of people," said Boydas, who plays full time for Istanbul club Beyleybeyi SK.

He described the screams which he said drowned out anything said by the attackers.

Turkish police were yesterday hunting for the gunman.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said the carnage sought to sow chaos and undermine peace, but vowed that Turkey would never bow to the threat.

# N Korea in 'final stages' to test ICBM: Kim Jong-Un

AFP, Seoul

North Korea is in the "final stages" of developing an intercontinental ballistic missile, leader Kim Jong-Un said yesterday, adding the country had significantly bolstered its nuclear deterrent in 2016.

"We are in the final stages of test-launching the intercontinental ballistic missile," Kim said in a 30-minute televised New Year's speech, pointing to a string of nuclear and missile tests last year.

Pyongyang had "soared as a nuclear power", he said, adding it was now a "military power of the East that cannot be touched by even the strongest enemy".

The country carried out two nuclear tests and numerous missile launches last year along in pursuit of its oft-stated goal -- developing a weapons system capable of hitting the US mainland with a nuclear warhead.

"We have seen marvellous feats for bolstering our military power, including the fact that our preparations for test-launching an intercontinental ballistic missile are in the final stages," Kim added.

Analysts are divided over how close Pyongyang is to realising its full nuclear ambitions, especially as it has never successfully test-fired an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM).

But all agree it has made enormous strides in that direction since Kim took over as leader from his father Kim Jong-Il, who died in December 2011.

A senior US defence official said last month that the North has developed the capability to pair a nuclear warhead with a missile and launch it, but has not mastered bringing the weapon back from space and onto a target.

There are growing concerns of fresh provocations by Pyongyang following last month's impeachment of South Korean President Park Geun-Hye, which has left the country with a caretaker leader -- Prime Minister Hwang Kyo-Ahn.

Kim called for an end to the South's annual joint military exercises with the United States -- a perennial thorn in North-South ties.



Police and rescue workers search a boat for victims at Muara Angke port in Jakarta, Indonesia, yesterday. A massive fire erupted in the boat carrying hundreds of local tourists to an island north of the Indonesian capital Jakarta, leaving at least 23 dead and 17 injured, officials said. Another 17 people remain missing. PHOTO: REUTERS



## Guterres aims to make 2017 'a year for peace'

AFP, United Nations

The new United Nations chief Antonio Guterres yesterday said he would like to make 2017 a year to "put peace first," in a message heralding the new year and marking his first day as the world body's chief.

The Portuguese former prime minister, 67, took over as UN Secretary-general from South Korea's Ban Ki-moon, inheriting complex crises in Syria, South Sudan, Yemen, Burundi, North Korea and elsewhere.

"How can we help the millions of people caught up in conflict, suffering massively in wars with no end in sight?" Guterres said. "Citizens are pounded with deadly force. Women, children and men are killed and injured, forced from their homes, dispossessed and destitute."

"No one wins these wars; everyone loses." Ushering in 2017, Guterres asked the world to make "one shared New Year's resolution: Let us resolve to put peace first."

"Let us make 2017 a year in which we all -- citizens, governments, leaders -- strive to overcome our differences."

The unanimous election of Guterres -- who fought for migrants' rights as the UN High Commissioner for Refugees for a decade -- has energized UN diplomats who see him as a skilled politician who may be able to overcome the divisions crippling the international organization.

# Yadavs in war in Uttar Pradesh

Father, son feud over party control as state heads to key election

AGENCIES

The chief minister of India's most populous state of Uttar Pradesh yesterday tried to seize control of its ruling party from his father in another twist to a family feud that has made headlines for weeks.

The bid by 43-year-old Akhilesh Yadav to take over the Samajwadi Party comes at the end of a turbulent 48 hours.

On Friday he was expelled from the party but taken back into the fold the following day by his father and mentor Mulayam Singh Yadav.

Mulayam, a 77-year-old wrestler-turned-politician, previously served three terms as the state's chief minister.

Akhilesh, along with one of his uncles Ram Gopal Yadav, has been locked in a dispute with Mulayam and another uncle Shivpal Yadav.

polls expected around February. At a special party meeting in the state capital Lucknow, Ram Gopal announced Akhilesh's appointment as the party's new national president.

But Mulayam in a statement to the media declared the meeting "unconstitutional" and warned everyone against attending it.

Mulayam Singh yesterday expelled party's national vice-president Kiranmoy Nanda and senior leader Naresh Agrawal for attending the national convention called by the

Akhilesh camp. They were sacked hours after Mulayam expelled his cousin Ramgopal Yadav for six years.

Meanwhile, Akhilesh removed Shivpal as the party's Uttar Pradesh unit chief and appointed MLC Naresh Uttam in his place, soon after being anointed its "president".



Mulayam

Akhilesh

# ALLEGED RUSSIAN MEDDLING IN US POLLS Trump again doubts US intelligence reports

AFP, Washington

President-elect Donald Trump again cast doubt Saturday on a US intelligence finding that Russia meddled in the US election through computer hacking, a conclusion that led to US sanctions against Moscow.

"Well, I just want them to be sure, because it's a pretty serious charge, and I want them to be sure," Trump told reporters at his estate in Mar-a-Lago, Florida.

He noted that US intelligence had erred when it said Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction -- the pretext for the US-led invasion in 2003 -- calling this "a disaster, and they were wrong".

He said it was "unfair" of the United States to accuse Russia of hacking if there was any doubt.

"And I know a lot about hacking. And hacking is a very hard thing to prove. So it could be somebody else. And I also know things that other people don't know, and so they cannot be sure of the situation," Trump said.

Asked what he knew that others did not, Trump said, "You'll find out on Tuesday or Wednesday."

Trump was also asked how important cybersecurity would be to his administration after he takes power on January 20.

Trump said: "It's very important. If you have something really important, write it out and have it delivered by courier, the old fashioned way because I'll tell you what, no computer is safe. I don't care what they say, no computer is safe."

Meanwhile, The Washington Post reported a code connected to Russian hacking efforts has been discovered in a utility system in Vermont.

The Russians did not actively use the code to disrupt operations, according to officials who spoke to The Post. But they told the daily that the discovery underscores the vulnerabilities of the nation's electrical grid, and raises fears that Russian government hackers are actively trying to penetrate the grid to carry out potential attacks.