



Sitar maestro Vilayat Khan laid to rest

AFP, New Delhi

Indian sitar maestro Vilayat Khan has died in a Mumbai hospital after a long battle with lung cancer and was buried yesterday, his family said.

Khan, 76, died in Jaslok Hospital Saturday and his body was flown to his home in Kolkata city for burial, family members told the Press Trust of India news agency.

Born in Bangladesh, Khan's lineage could be traced back to Tansen, the 16th century musician in the court of Mughul King Akbar.

UN's rights commission opens meet

AFP, Geneva

The UN's top human rights body opened its annual meeting yesterday with debate on the impact of terror attacks and sweeping security powers on civil liberties set to overshadow the six-week session.

Mike Smith, the Australian envoy presiding the UN Human Rights Commission this year, opened the meeting with a reminder of recent bomb attacks in Iraq, Spain and Israel.

"The sad truth is that there can scarcely be a country in this hall which has not been touched by terrorism in the last couple of years," he said.

Israeli-Palestinian summit put off

Israeli helicopters fire rockets at Gaza targets

AFP, Jerusalem

A long-awaited summit between the Palestinian and Israeli prime ministers was postponed indefinitely after 10 civilians were killed Sunday in a twin suicide attack in the southern port of Ashdod.

Around 20 people were also wounded when two teenage bombers blew themselves up in the attacks jointly claimed by the Palestinian militant groups Hamas and the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, police said.

"We have 10 dead as well as the two bombers," police spokesman Gil Kleiman told AFP at the scene.

In an apparent retaliation for the attacks Israeli military helicopters fired a dozen rockets at targets in Gaza City overnight, wounding one person, Palestinian officials

said Monday.

The helicopters attacked targets in central and east Gaza City, which led to power cuts, the security officials said.

Among the targets were two steel works in Gaza City's al-Nasser neighborhood but it was not immediately clear why they were hit.

The Israeli police spokesman said most of the victims in Ashdod died in a blast at a citrus fruit packaging factory inside the port while the remainder were killed in a second explosion at an office just outside the perimeter of the port.

An Israeli government spokesman said almost immediately that a summit between Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Palestinian premier Ahmed Qorei, which was expected to take place in just two days, could not be held in such an

environment.

"I can confirm that this meeting will not take place in these conditions," Pazner told AFP. "A meeting cannot be held in the midst of terror attacks.

Qorei's office said in a statement that "we are sorry for this cancellation of tomorrow's (Monday's) meeting", adding that "we hope talks will be resumed as soon as possible."

Hamas and Al-Aqsa said that the two bombers both came from the Jabilya refugee camp in the northern Gaza Strip.

It is believed to be the first time that Palestinian militants from Gaza have carried out a suicide bombing since the start of the Intifada in September 2000. Gaza has been sealed off from the rest of Israel by a massive security fence.

Russians hand Putin 2nd term

AFP, Moscow

Russians handed Vladimir Putin a crushing reelection victory yesterday after a vote that lacked drama but confirmed a desire for post-Soviet stability that the former KSG spy embodies here.

Putin immediately vowed to defend democratic principles and a free media in his second term while leading a foreign policy based on compromise rather than "imperialist ambitions."

"I promise that the democratic accomplishments of our people will be unconditionally defended and guaranteed," Putin said in televised remarks early Monday from his campaign headquarters near the Kremlin.

"We will not stop with our accomplishments and will strengthen a multi-party system. We will strengthen civic society and do everything to ensure freedom of the mass media," Putin said.

He led with 71.2 percent of the vote with 97 percent of the ballots counted -- a massive jump on the 52.5 percent he won in 2000 after succeeding the tumultuous era of his ailing mentor Boris Yeltsin.

Madrid bombs probe focusing on al-Qaeda

REUTERS, Washington

Investigators probing the train bombings that killed 200 in Spain last week believe a multinational cell of al-Qaeda loyalists carried out the attack, the Washington Post reported on Monday, citing European and Arab intelligence officials.

The officials, who requested anonymity, told the newspaper the preliminary investigation and the interrogation of three Moroccans and two Indians arrested in connection with the attack, as well as other evidence, indicated they were carried out by Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda network.

While Spanish officials have yet to rule out the possibility the Basque separatist group ETA played a role in Thursday's blasts, the Post said some intelligence officials described the pursuit of ETA as a dead end.

Officials told the paper they believed the group that carried out the bombing was composed of Islamic radicals and may have included Saudi nationals and other North Africans besides the arrested Moroccans.

Iran punishing itself by delaying inspection: IAEA

AFP, Vienna

Iran is punishing itself by delaying international inspections since this will prolong the UN nuclear watchdog's investigation of Tehran's atomic programme, the watchdog's head Mohamed ElBaradei said Sunday.

He said the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) discovery in January of designs for sophisticated P2 centrifuges in Iran for making highly enriched uranium (HEU) that could be used to make the bomb was "a setback, a great setback" since Iran had claimed in October to have fully disclosed its nuclear activities.

This led to a tough resolution against Iran at an IAEA board of governors meeting on Saturday in Vienna.

And that drew Iran's ire and led Tehran to suspend inspections that had been scheduled for last week.

DPRK boycotts economic talks with S Korea

AFP, Seoul

North Korea pulled out of inter-Korean economic talks scheduled to start yesterday in South Korea after demanding a change of venue over political unrest here, officials said.

South Korea's Unification Ministry said North Korean officials did not turn up at the truce village of Panmunjom for their entry into South Korea.

"Talks will not take place because North Korean delegates did not turn up, and there has been no official explanation on their action," a ministry official told AFP.

South Korea has yet to accept North Korea's earlier proposal to change the venue for working-level economic talks, which were to start Monday in the South Korean city of Paju, 20km north of Seoul.

North Korea's chief delegate Choe Yong-Gon demanded in a statement issued Sunday through state-run Radio Pyongyang that the venue be changed to the North Korean city of Kaesong.

Choe said the change was inevitable because of South Korea's political crisis caused by the impeachment of South Korean President Roh Moo-Hyun last week.



PHOTO: AFP

Socialist leader Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero puts his thumb up outside the headquarters of Socialist party (PSOE) after his victory in the Spanish general election on Sunday in Madrid.

Spaniards vote out govt over Madrid blasts

REUTERS, Madrid

Spain's opposition Socialists prepared for power on Monday after a sensational election upset sparked by anger over the government's handling of a suspected al-Qaeda attack on commuter trains that killed 200 people.

Voters ousted the center-right Popular Party (PP), which until Thursday's coordinated attacks had looked certain to win a third consecutive term in power in Sunday's poll.

Spain's next prime minister will be 43-year-old Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero, who has criticized outgoing premier Jose Maria Aznar's unswerving support for US foreign policy and has threatened to pull out 1,300 Spanish troops from Iraq.

"Spain punishes the PP and places its confidence in Zapatero," said El Mundo newspaper on

Monday's front page, slamming the government for attempting to play down evidence of al-Qaeda's involvement in the bombing of four commuter trains.

With President Bush facing reelection later this year, the unprecedented swing in the Spanish ballot may be closely watched internationally. It was the first time in Spain's modern democratic history a party had lost power after holding an absolute majority.

"The result wasn't due to the economy, or to the government's management in general...it was just due to the attack," Antonio Tena, a 26-year-old civil engineer, said on Sunday evening, lamenting the PP's loss.

With almost all votes counted, the Socialists had won 42.6 percent of the vote to the PP's 37.6 percent as voters turned out in large numbers to reaffirm their faith in

democracy amid the upheaval over the bombings which also injured 1,500 people.

With 164 seats in the lower house of parliament, 12 short of those needed for an absolute majority, the Socialists will need to negotiate alliances with smaller regional parties or left-wing allies in order to govern.

But the PP will remain by far the largest single party in the upper house or Senate, potentially making it difficult for a Socialist government to pass legislation.

The Socialists' surprise win sparked wild rejoicing among their supporters after eight years out of power.

"It's like a dream...Now things are going to change, and change for the better in every sense," said Carlos del Puerto, a 24-year-old mechanic.



PHOTO: AFP

An Indian man and his passenger ride past a wall painting showing president of India's main opposition Congress Party Sonia Gandhi in Madras yesterday. As the political campaigns ahead of the forthcoming elections gathers momentum, many of the city's walls are being used by political parties to deliver their message to potential voters.