



PHOTO: AFP

Fans of pop icon Michael Jackson gather outside his house after his death in Los Angeles on Thursday to pay their last respect to the King of Pop. Celebrities and stars around the globe were overwhelmed by sorrow and shock as they sought to absorb the news of the sudden death of Jackson.

Jackson's death stuns world

Spotlight on role of drugs

AFP, Los Angeles

Amid global tributes to pop superstar Michael Jackson yesterday, friends highlighted the mounting stress and dependence on medication as a possible cause of the King of Pop's sudden death.

An autopsy was expected to be carried out on Friday by the Los Angeles county coroner but amid heartfelt tributes from Hollywood and music superstars speculation mounted about the cause of death for the 50-year-old whose "Thriller" album was the biggest selling disc in history.

Jackson family spokesman and attorney, Brian Oxman, told CNN of concerns about Jackson's use of drugs, saying members of the star's entourage were "enablers."

"This is not something that has been unexpected... because of the medications which Michael was under," Oxman said.

Jackson's former producer Tarak Ben Ammar denounced the doctors around the late pop icon as "criminals".

"He was a hypochondriac and one never really knew if he was sick because he had become surrounded by charlatan doctors who were billing him thousands and thousands of dollars worth of drugs, vitamins..." said the Tunisian producer.

One of the most influential figures in pop history, Jackson

had been preparing for a concert comeback in London next month that he had dubbed "the final curtain."

News of his death triggered an outpouring of grief as celebrities and fans paid tribute to the troubled star whose superstar success had been overshadowed by a paedophilia court case and his eccentric private life.

Jackson's brother Jermaine, the family's official spokesman, revealed physicians had battled for more than an hour to revive the star after his arrival at the UCLA Medical Center before he was pronounced dead.

"May Allah be with you, Michael, always," the brother said.

As the sun began to sink over Los Angeles, a coroner's office helicopter bearing Jackson's body took off from the UCLA Medical Center, where hundreds of media and fans had gathered.

Police motorcycle riders surrounded Jackson's gated mansion as crowds of tourists and fans congregated. Street vendors sold hastily designed commemorative T-shirts for 25 dollars.

Fans staged spontaneous gatherings across the world.

In Los Angeles, Lana Brown, a 49-year-old tourist from Dallas, broke down in tears as she digested the news. "I can't believe we might have lost the best entertainer this world has ever seen," she told AFP.



PHOTO: AFP

This January 25, 1993 file photo shows actress Elizabeth Taylor (L) and singer Michael Jackson hold one of two awards he won at the American Music Awards in Los Angeles, CA.

Stars in shock

AFP, Los Angeles

Celebrities and stars around the globe paid tribute Thursday to pop icon Michael Jackson, praising his contributions to the world of music as they reeled from the news of his sudden death.

As fans gathered to grieve outside the Los Angeles hospital where the troubled star was pronounced dead after apparently suffering a heart attack, some of the biggest names in entertainment struggled to cope with the news.

Madonna said she was left in tears over the loss of "one of the greats" of pop music.

"I can't stop crying over the sad news," the veteran pop diva told celebrity website People.com.

Actress Elizabeth Taylor, one of Jackson's closest and longstanding friends, was "too devastated" to issue a statement, her spokesperson said, according to People.

Record producer and former Jackson collaborator Quincy Jones said he too was "devastated" by the news that the "King of Pop" had died at age 50.

The star's first wife Lisa Marie Presley, the daughter of Elvis Presley, said his death had left her speechless.

"I am so very sad and confused with every emotion possible. I am heartbroken for his children, who I know were everything to him, and for his family," Presley told MTV News in a statement.

"This is such a massive loss on so many levels. Words fail me."

What made Jacko wacko?

AFP, Los Angeles

Whether he was dangling his baby over a balcony, sleeping in an oxygen chamber or befriending a chimpanzee -- at times Michael Jackson appeared to revel in his nickname of "Wacko Jacko."

The 50-year-old icon became a byword for eccentricity throughout his adult life as his staggering wealth allowed him to enter a lavish fantasy world where he could indulge his every whim, no matter how bizarre.

"He got to the point that he was so rich, so powerful and so famous, that he was allowed to kind of withdraw from any kind of reality," pop culture expert Robert Thompson told AFP.

Many of the stories surrounding Jackson turned out to be untrue; some were even created by the star himself.

A 1986 tale about him sleeping in an oxygen coffin and another story about him seeking to buy the bones of The Elephant Man were both fictions fed by Jackson to a hungry media.



PHOTO: AFP

People gather outside the former childhood home of pop icon Michael Jackson on Thursday in Gary, Indiana to mourn his sad demise. Jackson, the King of Pop, died after cardiac arrest at a hospital Thursday in Los Angeles, California.

Stress of comeback could be the killer

AFP, London

The stress of a hugely-anticipated series of comeback shows in London caused Michael Jackson's death, his close friend Uri Geller, the spoon-bending psychic, said Thursday.

Geller, who lives in Britain, said Jackson was desperate to prove to the world that he was still a superstar despite child abuse allegations which had seriously damaged his career.

The paranormalist described the scale of Jackson's planned comeback shows -- some 50 concerts at London's O2 Arena, which were due to start in July -- as "just scary".

"He wanted to prove to the world that he is number one, that he is still Michael Jackson, that he can still deliver a thriller," Geller told BBC radio.

"The anticipation, the stress levels, the anxiety for what was coming up in London was so huge... I believe that that stopped his heart."

Jackson's albums

AFP, Los Angeles

Michael Jackson, the "King of pop" who began his career as part of the Jackson 5, recorded nine solo albums between 1972 and 2001, including "Thriller," the top-selling album of all time.

Jackson also released "HIStory, past, present, future" in 1995, a double album of old and new singles.

The Jackson brothers released their first album with Motown in 1968, and Michael released his first solo album, "Got to be there," with the legendary black music label in 1972.

He switched to Epic in 1976, releasing his first album under that label in 1979, "Off the wall," which was produced by Quincy Jones.

Jackson's last album, "Invincible," was released in 2001.

"Thriller," which came out in 1982, remained at the top of the charts for two years and was at number one for 37 straight weeks. According to industry experts, it sold between 50 and 60 million copies.

Hamas gets ready for new unity talks

AFP, Damascus

Exiled Hamas leader Khaled Meshaal on Thursday welcomed what he said was a change of US policy towards his Islamist movement, which controls the Gaza Strip and said he looked forward to renewed Palestinian unity talks later this week.

"We hail the new line from Barack Obama towards Hamas. It is the first step towards direct talks without preconditions," Meshaal said from his base in the Syrian capital Damascus.

Meshaal said Hamas would "work swiftly to end the rifts in Palestinian ranks and achieve national reconciliation through talks being brokered by Egypt."

"To this end, a delegation will travel to Cairo in the next two days to tackle the obstacles," Meshaal added.

Obama wants to legalise undocumented migrants

AFP, Washington

President Barack Obama said Thursday that he wants to "recognise and legalise" undocumented immigrants in the United States.

"We need an effective way to recognise and legalise the status of undocumented people," Obama said after a White House meeting with lawmakers.

He announced that Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano would join congressional leaders to form a working group on immigration reform, which would work on concrete proposals to "secure our borders" and offer the millions of undocumented immigrants in the United States a chance to obtain legal status.

US, Russia to sign military cooperation agreement

AFP, Moscow

The United States and Russia will sign a military cooperation agreement when US President Barack Obama visits Moscow in early July, a top Russian general said Friday, quoted by news agencies.

"We determined the basic matters of military cooperation in 2009 and in the future and intend to sign these documents during US President Barack Obama's visit to Moscow at the beginning of July," said Nikolai Makarov, head of Russia's General Staff.

US to consider F-16 sale to Taiwan

AP, Taipei

The de facto US ambassador in Taiwan said yesterday the Obama administration will consider the contentious sale of F-16 fighter jets to the island after key American officials are settled into their jobs.

The comments by Stephen Young of the American Institute in Taiwan come amid strong opposition to the sale by China because of its view that the US has no business providing arms to a territory Beijing claims as its own.

Mousavi vows threats will not halt protests

AFP, Tehran

Defeated Iranian presidential candidate Mir Hossein Mousavi said on Thursday that threats and pressure would not stop him from pursuing his campaign to scrap the results of the disputed election.

"I won't refrain from securing the rights of the Iranian people... because of personal interests and the fear of threats," he said in a statement on his newspaper website, Kalemeh.

Mousavi said he had come under pressure to "give up my demand for the election to be cancelled" after he lodged a formal complaint over the re-election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and called for a new vote.

But the 67-year-old, who was premier in the aftermath of the 1979 Islamic revolution, said he would resist the pressure.

"I can not say that white is black and black is white. We should be honest. The solution is not that I say something which I don't believe in."

The ex-premier said he was ready to show how those who violated the election process "stood beside the main instigators of the recent riots and shed people's blood on the ground."

At least 17 people have been killed in the riots which rocked Tehran after the results of the June 12 election were announced, according to state media. The foreign media are banned from the streets in tight restrictions

imposed on their work since the unrest began.

Mousavi also reiterated his call for supporters to continue protests but in a way, which would not "create tension."

"The main strategy which will guarantee your objectives will be to continue with the protests within the framework of law and by observing the principles of the Islamic revolution," he said.

His office said it had applied for a permission to hold a mourning ceremony for slain protesters but was yet to receive the go-ahead. The authorities have imposed a ban on all opposition demonstrations.

Reports said on Thursday that Iran has jailed more than 140 political activists, journalists and university lecturers since the election.

Etemad newspaper listed 71 prominent reformist leaders, journalists and Mousavi campaign workers while Kalemeh said another 70 academics and members of Islamic associations at various universities were arrested after meeting Mousavi on Wednesday.

Late on Thursday, Kalemeh said only four of the people detained for meeting with Mousavi were still in custody, with the rest having been released in the morning.

"My access to people is completely restricted," said the 67-year-old Mousavi, a soft-spoken architect and painter who emerged as a key challenger to Ahmadinejad with a more moderate stance.



PHOTO: AFP

People demonstrate to protest against Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's disputed re-election yesterday in Paris, near Iranian embassy.

DST hardly improves situation

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of electricity at houses, offices, markets and other establishments has been increased for the last several days due to excessive heat while production of power remained low for the shortfall in gas pressure, causing the load shedding.

They also said there is no possibility of getting respite from the load shedding and power outages immediately but hoped that the situation would improve after sufficient rainfalls.

Shop owners in many areas in the city reportedly keep open their shops after 8:00pm as they said that many of them are not following the government's directives.

Residents from the city's different areas said they are still experiencing power cuts four to five times a day, each lasting at least an hour.

"Despite closing our shop as per the government directives, I don't find any good result of DST as the load shedding remains the same in daytime," said Abdul Hamid, a salesman of a shop in Farmgate.

Officials of Power Development Board said load shedding stood at around 312MW yesterday.

About 4,034MW of power was generated in the country yesterday against a demand of around 4,400MW. Power generation was 3,670MW on

Thursday. The PDB officials termed yesterday's power generation "quite good" as the demand decreased because of rain.

They said about 230MW of power is not being generated in Raozan Power Plant because of decreasing gas pressure. It has the capacity to generate 360MW of power.

On the other hand, power generation at Kaptai power plant fell significantly for lack of water while only one unit of Shikabaha plant is generating 40MW power, they said. They feared suspension of electricity production anytime if it does not rain sufficiently within a few days.

The heat wave that swept through the country for the last few weeks raised the demand for power but the generation remained stuck, said PDB officials.

"Apart from the heat that is leading to the increase in demand, the capacity and performances of the power plants, lines, transformers and generators usually decrease during the summer season," said a source at PDB, adding that the low gas pressure in the power plants also creates problems in power generation.

In fact, power is not being saved by the DST formula as the saved power is being consumed by those who earlier used to get less power, he said, adding that saving electricity

through DST measure is not visible largely since there is a huge gap between power generation and demand.

Power Secretary Abul Kalam Azad said there will be no change in load shedding in daytime by the DST rather it would help reduce the load shedding during peak hours.

Many shops and malls are not following the government's decision properly, he said adding, "There will be some positive effect if everyone follows it." It means the load shedding that remains for five hours will be reduced to four or four and half hours now, he said.

He also said people have some misconceptions about the DST as they are thinking that the power situation will increase drastically, but the fact is that the power save will be consumed elsewhere.

Asked about the load shedding, he said the situation would improve after sufficient rainfalls. Most of the power units are old and some even cannot produce power while they cannot carry out regular maintenance work for the units.

The secretary said the government would let the people know about its plan within 15 days. He said they are expecting to have 100-150MW more power generated in July while another 400MW power in December this year.

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