

Ex-KGB spy's death takes a radioactive turn

Officials tracking his London trail say radiation poisoning killed Putin critic.

By Alan Cowell
NEW YORK TIMES NEWS SERVICE
LONDON — Radiation poisoning killed Alexander Litvinenko, the former Russian KGB officer and foe of the Kremlin, authorities said yesterday, further complicating a case that has taken on all the mystery and menace of a political thriller. From his deathbed, Litvinenko's family said, he accused President Vladimir V. Putin of being behind his poisoning. Outside the hospital where he died late Thursday, some

voiced alarm after police found traces of radiation in three places the former spy had been: a sushi bar, a hotel, and his North London home. Scientists were astounded at use of the rare, hard-to-produce substance, dangerous when breathed, injected or ingested. All the while, diplomats scurried to prevent the case from becoming an international incident. The cause of death was so unusual, so baffling and so chilling that a senior British official called it "unprecedented." The government

called a high-level meeting restricted to the most senior ministers — code-named Cobra — and the Russian ambassador was summoned to the Foreign Office. Rebutting the accusations of foul play, Russian officials hinted at a conspiracy to discredit Putin. The former agent's relatives, citing what they called a statement dictated by the dying Litvinenko, accused Putin of a "barbaric and ruthless" murder — a charge the See **SPY** on A15



Alexander Litvinenko in 2002, left, and last week. The Kremlin has denied involvement in his death.

The British government called a meeting of its most senior ministers. Russia's envoy was summoned.

SATURDAY EXTRA

Flyers defeat ex-coach

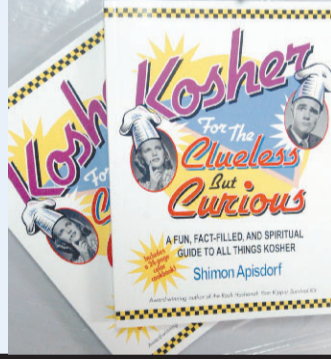
SPORTS: Ken Hitchcock forgets the name of his new team — Columbus — and his former Philadelphia players hand him a 3-2 loss. **E1.**



RON CORTES / Inquirer Staff Photographer
Ken Hitchcock talks with the Blue Jackets as he sets strategy during a time-out late in yesterday's loss to the Flyers.

What's kosher — and why

FAITH LIFE: A Bucks seminar series explores the diet and its importance. **B1.**



Was Clay Aiken so out of hand?

ReVIEWS: Kelly Ripa was miffed at her guest cohost's disrespect, then Rosie O'Donnell took a shot. **D1.**

Holiday Trips

COMING SUNDAY: Where to go, how to manage, and what to buy. **Travel.**



INSIDE TODAY'S INQUIRER

INTERNATIONAL Iraq's raging violence

Six Sunnis are seized and burned alive as revenge strikes escalate and dozens more bodies turn up. **A2.**

LOCAL NEWS Gun ornament spurs call for a boycott

A Philadelphia antiviolence group has Urban Outfitters in its sights. **B1.**

WEATHER
10 NBC
High 60,
Low 40
Sunny and nice. Even warmer tomorrow. Full report and exclusive NBC10 EarthWatch forecast, **B7.**

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They came (very early), they saw, they bought



ELIZABETH ROBERTSON / Inquirer Suburban Staff
It's 6:13 a.m., and Target security personnel try to let the folks who waited in line — some overnight — into the Deptford store first.

Shoppers out in force

Waves of bargain-hunters lined up at the region's stores to find the goodies that were on their holiday-gift lists.

By Edward Colimore, Lini Kadaba and Madhusmita Bora
INQUIRER STAFF WRITERS

Many of the first shoppers began camping out at Philadelphia-area stores by mid-afternoon on Thanksgiving Day — soon after gobbling down a turkey lunch.

With tents, blankets, folding chairs and umbrellas, they braved a cold, windblown rain during the evening, then fought their way through the crowds when the doors opened on Black Friday. The trend was similar in malls and shopping centers nationwide.

"It was a much bigger retail day than what we thought," said Britt Beemer, chairman of

America's Research Group, a South Carolina consumer research and marketing firm. "It's a very good kickoff to the holiday season."

Nationally, retail sales are expected to be up 3.5 percent to 4 percent, after deducting for inflation, said Kurt Barnard, president of New Jersey-based Barnard's Retail Consulting Group. "It's much too early to give accurate data," he said.

In the Philadelphia region, another expert estimated Black Friday sales to be up 4 percent to 5 percent from last year.

"Many stores effectively extended the shopping day by See **RETAIL** on A10

Inside

■ A vandal glued the doors of 16 stores shut. **A10.**

■ It may now be Macy's, but the Wanamakers holiday show goes on. **C1.**



DAVID M WARREN / Inquirer Suburban Staff
Maureen Johns, 21, of Philadelphia, with her Victoria's Secret purchases.

DRUGNET » SPECIAL INQUIRER SERIAL IN PURSUIT OF CYBERSPACE DRUG DEALERS

THE STORY SO FAR
DEA agents working their biggest online pharmacy case find a smoking gun: a brazen PowerPoint presentation made by Temple grad student Akhil Bansal, outlining his entire pill network. Today's installment begins as Akhil flies back to India, where his father has suffered a heart attack. It is March 2005.

By John Shiffman
INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

Betrayal

CHAPTER 7

Akhil loses his family's trust, his father loses his health, and the business loses security. Agents prepare to move.

AGRA, INDIA

For the flight from New York to Kiev to New Delhi on Ukraine Airlines, Akhil Bansal numbed himself with his favorite prescription: 30 milliliters of Black Label, 6 ounces of Coke, and 5 grams of generic Valium.

Usually, Akhil flew home via London on Virgin Atlantic, but when his father suffered a heart attack, he rushed back on the first available flight.

The Temple graduate student landed in New Delhi 30 hours later in a medicated, jet-

lagged haze. He pushed past a throng of taxi drivers to find the chauffeur his mother had sent to ferry him the final three hours to Agra.

When Akhil arrived home, he expected a warm welcome. Instead, he was greeted with hard stares from his mother, Kamlesh; sister Julie; and her husband.

Julie thrust her finger at him. "This is because of you!" she said. "You've become so arrogant with the money."

They were blaming Akhil for the heart attack! All those arguments over the phone, See **BETRAYAL** on A12