

Italy Court Upholds Knox Conviction

FLORENCE, Italy (AP) — An appeals court in Florence on Thursday upheld the guilty verdict against U.S. student Amanda Knox and her ex-boyfriend for the 2007 murder of her British roommate. Knox was sentenced to 28 1/2 years in prison, raising the specter of a long legal battle over her extradition if the conviction is confirmed.

Lawyers for Knox and her co-defendant, Raphael Sollecito, vowed to appeal to Italy's highest court, a process that will take at least another year and drag out a legal saga that has divided court watchers in three nations.

In a statement from Seattle, where she had awaited the verdict at her mother's home, Knox said she was "frightened and saddened" by the decision. She said it was "unjust" and the result of an overzealous prosecution and narrow-minded investigation that worked to "pervert the court of justice."

"This has gotten out of hand," she said. "Having been found innocent before, I expected better from the Italian justice system."

After nearly 12 hours of deliberations, the court reinstated the guilty verdicts first handed down against Knox and Sollecito in 2009 for the death of Meredith Kercher. Those verdicts had been overturned in 2011 and the pair freed from prison, but Italy's supreme court vacated that decision and sent the case back for a third trial in Florence.

US Expresses Concern Over Syria's Delay

BEIRUT (AP) — The United States accused the Syrian government Thursday of using stalling tactics to delay efforts to remove and destroy chemical agents, an indication that the international community's patience is wearing thin over the slow pace of the operation.

The comments, delivered by the U.S. representative to the international chemical weapons watchdog, marked some of the strongest public criticism of Syria's commitment to relinquish its chemical stockpile.

Syria agreed to surrender its arsenal after a deadly chemical attack in August on a rebel-held suburb of Damascus raised the threat of punitive U.S. missile strikes. President Barack Obama has touted the agreement as a victory and a major policy achievement for his administration on Syria's intractable civil war.

The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons is leading the mission to eliminate Syria's 1,300-metric ton stockpile by a June 30 deadline.

Under the OPCW's tight timeline, the most toxic chemicals in Syria's arsenal were to have been removed from the country by Dec. 31, but that deadline was missed due to poor security amid Syria's raging civil war as well as other factors. So far, just two small consignments of chemicals have been shipped out.

9 Members Of Family Killed In Ky. fire

GREENVILLE, Ky. (AP) — Eight children and their mother were killed in an early morning house fire in western Kentucky on Thursday, with only the injured father and an 11-year-old girl escaping, Kentucky State Police said.

Trooper Stu Recke said eight of the people were found in a master bedroom while the ninth person was found between 10 and 15 feet away. Recke said the fire started accidentally with combustible material against an electric heater in a bedroom.

Recke identified those killed as 35-year-old LaRae "Nikki" Watson, 15-year-old Madison Watson, 14-year-old Kaitlyn Watson, 13-year-old Morgan Watson, 9-year-old Emily Watson, 8-year-old Samuel Watson, 6-year-old Raegan Watson and 4-year-old twin brothers Mark and Nathaniel Watson.

Prosecutors Seek Death Penalty For Boston Marathon Suspect

BY DENISE LAVOIE
AP Legal Affairs Writer

BOSTON — Federal prosecutors Thursday announced they will seek the death penalty against 20-year-old Dzhokhar Tsarnaev in the Boston Marathon bombing, accusing him of betraying his adopted country by ruthlessly carrying out a terrorist attack calculated to cause maximum carnage.

U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder's decision to press for Tsarnaev's execution was widely expected. The twin blasts last April killed three people and wounded more than 260, and over half the 30 federal charges against Tsarnaev — including using a weapon of mass destruction to kill — carry a possible death sentence.

"The nature of the conduct at issue and the resultant harm compel this decision," Holder said in a statement of just two terse and dispassionate sentences that instantly raised the stakes in one of the most wrenching criminal cases Boston has ever seen.

Tsarnaev has pleaded not guilty. No



Tsarnaev

trial date has been set. In a notice of intent filed in court, federal prosecutors in Boston listed factors they contend justify a sentence of death against Tsarnaev, who moved to the U.S. from Russia about a decade ago.

"Dzhokhar Tsarnaev received asylum from the United States; obtained citizenship and enjoyed the freedoms of a United States citizen; and then betrayed his allegiance to the United States by killing and maiming people in the United States," read the notice filed by U.S. Attorney Carmen Ortiz.

Prosecutors also cited Tsarnaev's "lack of remorse" and allegations that he killed an MIT police officer as well as an 8-year-old boy, a "particularly vulnerable" victim because of his age. They also said Tsarnaev committed the killings after "substantial planning and premeditation."

In addition, they cited his alleged

decision to target the Boston Marathon, "an iconic event that draws large crowds of men, women and children to its final stretch, making it especially susceptible to the act and effects of terrorism."

Tsarnaev's lawyers had no immediate comment.

In an interview with ABC, Tsarnaev's mother, Zubeidat, who lives in Russia, said: "How can I feel about this? I feel nothing. I can tell you one thing, that I love my son. I will always feel proud of him. And I keep loving him."

Prosecutors allege Tsarnaev, then 19, and his 26-year-old brother, ethnic Chechens from Russia, built and planted two pressure-cooker bombs near the finish line of the race to retaliate against the U.S. for its military actions in Muslim countries.

The older brother, Tamerlan Tsarnaev, died in a shootout with police during a getaway attempt days after the bombing. Dzhokhar Tsarnaev was wounded but escaped and was later captured hiding in a boat parked in a yard in a Boston suburb.

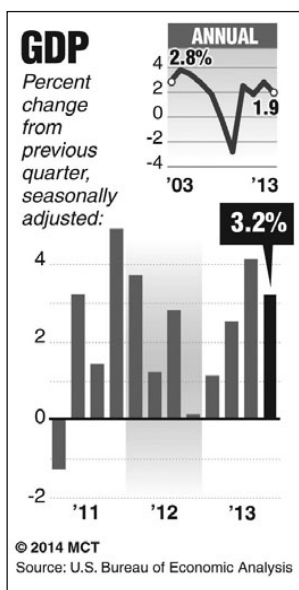
Growth Brightens Economic Outlook For 2014

WASHINGTON (AP) — Consumers will spend more. Government will cut less. Businesses will invest more. And more companies will hire.

Add it all up, and you can see why expectations are rising that the 2014 U.S. economy will be the best since the recession ended 4 1/2 years ago. It's why the Federal Reserve is pressing ahead with a plan to scale back its economic stimulus.

The optimists got a boost from a government report Thursday that consumers fueled solid growth for the economy in the final quarter of 2013. The report lifted hopes that the economy will manage this year to withstand turmoil in emerging economies, a pullback in the Fed's stimulus and mounting risks to the U.S. stock market.

Americans struggling with long-term unemployment and stagnant pay might not get relief anytime soon. And areas like manufactur-



ing, construction and home sales remain far from full health. Still, the outlook for the economy as a whole brightened after the government said growth reached a 3.2 percent annual rate last quarter on the strength of the strongest consumer spending in three years.

"The economy showed real signs of momentum at the end of 2013," said Diane Swonk, chief economist at Mesrow Financial. "We are better positioned for decent growth for 2014 than we were a year ago."

Consumer spending surged in the October-December quarter at an annual rate of 3.3 percent — the best pace since 2010 and a big jump from 2 percent spending growth rate the previous quarter. Consumer spending is particularly important because it accounts for about 70 percent of the economy.

For 2013 as a whole, the economy grew a tepid 1.9 percent, weaker than the 2.8 percent increase in 2012, the Commerce Department said Thursday. Growth was held back by higher taxes and federal spending cuts that kicked in early in 2013.

A budget deal Congress approved earlier this month halted tens of billions in additional spending cuts that

were due to kick in this year. With that drag diminished, many economists think growth could top 3 percent in 2014. That would be the best showing since the recession ended in mid-2009.

The strength in consumer spending last quarter was driven by purchases of both durable goods — things like cars, computers and communications equipment — and nondurable goods like clothing. Spending on services also rose strongly.

In addition, businesses invested in more equipment. There was also strength from a shrinking trade deficit.

Spending on home construction declined, though. Government spending fell at a 4.9 percent rate last quarter, led by a plunge in federal spending. This was a result, in part, of the government's 16-day partial shutdown during October. The shutdown shrank fourth-quarter growth by about 0.3 percentage point, the government said.

Hockey

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games being played on any given Saturday, and that's bringing families in from across the region. That's going to have an impact."

While larger tournaments with older teams generally receive more attention than an event like the one this weekend, which will feature children around 10 years old, that doesn't necessarily correlate with economic impact, Scheve said. Events with younger participants often attract more visitors because more family members want to attend, she said.

"You'll have grandparents that want to come and watch, or aunts and uncles that want to see their little nieces and nephews. That can have a greater impact sometimes than a high school sport might have," she said. "I think it's important to recognize that when we have these tournaments, they do bring a serious value to the community."

Businesses that should benefit from the visitors include restaurants, hotels, gas stations and various types of stores, Scheve said.

"These people are going to touch a number of different areas of the community, including places we might not always think of and different aspects of the business community," she said.

While the hockey tournament will have an impact on the city of Yankton, the event also has added importance for the local athletes.

Wenisch said. It is the final of three tournaments for the squirt season, and the only one played on home ice, she said.

"The kids are fired up, and they should have more family members in attendance than they do with away tournaments," Wenisch said. "They want to put on a show for the local crowd."

Games will be played from 8:30 a.m.-8:45 p.m. Saturday and 8 a.m.-4:45 p.m. Sunday at the Kiwanis 4-H Ice Center. For a full schedule, visit www.yanktonice.org and click on "Tournaments" under the "Hockey" tab.

A fundraiser to help pay for the arena's kitchen upgrades will also be held throughout the tournament. Raffle tickets will be sold for theme baskets made by each Yankton hockey team and 4-H club, with drawings for the winners on Sunday.

Wenisch encourages anyone interested in hockey to attend the tournament, even those who are new to the sport.

"It's a very entertaining weekend we have planned," she said. "If you've never come in and taken in a hockey game, there's a lot more excitement than what you'd anticipate. It's going to be high energy with a high competition level. These kids are ready to go, and everybody's all set to send everything off on a really nice note this weekend."

You can follow Derek Bartos on Twitter at twitter.com/d_bartos/. Discuss this story at www.yankton.net/.

Park

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Pierson Ranch increased by 6.6 percent to 4,485.

Total camping units at the Lewis and Clark Recreation Area declined from 51,355 in 2012 to 50,695 in 2013.

Attendance at two of the three other state parks in the immediate region also grew. The Tabor unit went up 33.9 percent to 75 camping units. Sand Creek increased by 15.5 percent to 97. However, Springfield was down .3 percent to 1,078.

"In general, we continue to have great use in our parks," said Regional Park Supervisor Jeff Van Meeteren, who oversees the parks in the southeast quarter of the state. "It just doesn't slow down. We're fortunate to have such good user support. In a sense, that pays for the operational costs of our parks, repairing facilities and the investment in new things."

While budgets are being trimmed for state parks in other parts of the nation, he said South Dakota continues

to develop its recreational system.

"Because of the good user support we have, we continue to move forward," Van Meeteren stated. "People have strong feelings about recreation in the Midwest. We work hard for our money, and we like to play hard."

Bertsch said that he is looking forward to another good year at the Lewis and Clark Recreational Area.

Several improvement projects were completed late in 2013, he stated.

The first nine holes of the Gavins Point disc golf course were redesigned, and another nine were added. Each hole was given two basket locations, so that it can be periodically changed and provide a different experience for users.

"I don't think there are any other courses that do that around here," Bertsch said.

That project was completed in September.

An effort to re-surface roads and extend some campsites that were a little shorter than others was finished in October.

"With the road project,

we leveled and sealed all the cracks in the bike trail before we seal-coated it," Bertsch said. "That's been a big improvement. We had some pretty big cracks. It will be a much smoother ride for people."

A \$100,000 project to upgrade electrical infrastructure at Chief White Crane wrapped up in November.

"All the campsites now have 50-amp electrical pedestals instead of 30-amp," Bertsch stated. "We also put new wiring in the first three camping loops. The fourth one was added in 2002 and didn't need the work."

This April, a \$40,000 dredging project at the Gavins boat ramp will commence, he said.

"We'll be dredging from the boat ramp out through the channel to the end of Gavins Point," Bertsch said. "It silts in, and it's probably been 20 years since it was dredged. The material will be pumped out to the old river channel to create a better boat lane."

Most of the projects scheduled for 2014 are maintenance in nature, according to Bertsch.

The restaurant at the marina will get a new roof, and that project will likely proceed in late summer or the fall.

Finally, remodeling at some comfort stations will also be done, Bertsch said.

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