

## Japan Faces Deadline To Free IS Captives

TOKYO (AP) — The deadline for paying ransom for two Japanese hostages held by the Islamic State group was fast approaching early Friday with no signs of a breakthrough.

Lacking clout and diplomatic reach in the Middle East, Japan has been scrambling for a way to secure the release of the two men, one a journalist, the other an adventurer fascinated by war. Two Japanese who said they have contacts with a leader in the Islamic State group offered Thursday to try to negotiate, but it was unclear if the Japanese government was receptive to the idea.

The militants threatened in a video message to kill the hostages within 72 hours unless they receive \$200 million. Based on the video's release time, that deadline would expire sometime Friday.

Government spokesman Yoshihide Suga said Thursday that Japan was trying all possible channels to reach those holding the hostages — 47-year-old freelance journalist Kenji Goto, and 42-year-old Haruna Yukawa, the founder of a private security company.

Goto's mother was expected to make an appearance in Tokyo early Friday, in the first public comment by a family member.

## UN Speakers Talk About Anti-Semitism

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — The first U.N. General Assembly meeting Thursday on anti-Semitism sparked calls for global action to combat the rising hatred of Jews and a surprising denunciation from the world's 57 Islamic nations of all words and acts that lead "to hatred, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia."

U.S. Ambassador Samantha Power said the statement delivered by Saudi Arabia's U.N. Ambassador Abdallah Al-Moualimi on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation was "extremely significant," especially since the United Nations has often been a venue to try to de-legitimize Israel.

The assembly met at the request of 37 mainly Western countries including the United States who urged the world body to address the "alarming outbreak of anti-Semitism worldwide." It was an informal meeting, attended by about half the 193 member states, so no resolution could be adopted.

But 40 mainly Western countries issued a joint statement afterward urging all nations to "declare their categorical rejection of anti-Semitism," strengthen laws to combat discrimination, and prosecute those responsible for anti-Semitic crimes.

"The determination to eradicate the conditions that gave rise to the Holocaust was a guiding principle among the founders of this organization over six decades ago," their statement said. "Let us rededicate ourselves to that principle and endeavor to eliminate anti-Semitism in all forms."

## Euro Makes European Vacations Cheaper

NEW YORK (AP) — Americans hoping to save on European goods thanks to a falling euro shouldn't rush to uncork that bottle of French Bordeaux. There's very little to celebrate.

Not since September 2003 has the euro traded this low against the dollar. Still, German sports cars, Belgian beers and the latest fashions out of Italy aren't going on sale anytime soon. The reason? There's simply too much demand in the U.S. for any mark downs.

"The U.S. economy is the one that's doing well in the world right now," notes IHS senior principal economist George Magliano. "We've got a lot of growth in upper-income families and households."

Since Americans are willing — and able — to spend heavily on imported goods, there's no need for companies to cut prices. Any savings thanks to the euro's decline will instead be pocketed by manufacturers and distributors.

It's been a dramatic fall for the euro. Back in April, the European currency was trading at 1.38 dollars to the euro. That means that one dollar bought you about 72 euro cents.

## Politician Arrested On Bribery Charges

NEW YORK (AP) — Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, who bent state government to his will for more than 20 years as one of New York's most powerful and canny politicians, was arrested Thursday on charges of taking nearly \$4 million in payoffs and kickbacks.

The 70-year-old Democrat was taken into custody by the FBI on federal conspiracy and bribery charges that carry up to 100 years in prison and could cost him his political seat. He was released on \$200,000 bail.

U.S. Attorney Preet Bharara said Silver, a lawyer by training, lined up jobs at two firms and then accepted large sums of money over more than a decade in exchange for using his "titanic" power to do political favors. The money was disguised as "referral fees," Bharara said.

Silver, who seemed unfazed in court, did not enter a plea.

"I'm confident that after a full hearing and due process I'll be vindicated on the charges," said Silver, who even paused on his way out of court to sign a sketch artist's rendering of the scene.

## Outbreak Causes Vaccination Movement

LOS ANGELES (AP) — A major measles outbreak traced to Disneyland has brought criticism down on the small but vocal movement among parents to opt out of vaccinations for their children.

In a rash of cases that public health officials are rushing to contain, at least 70 people in six states and Mexico have fallen ill since mid-December, most of them from California. The vast majority of those who got sick had not gotten the measles-mumps-rubella, or MMR, vaccine.

While still a scourge in many corners of the world, measles has been all but eradicated in the U.S. since 2000 because of vaccinations. But the virus has made a comeback in recent years, in part because of people obtaining personal belief exemptions from rules that say children must get their shots to enroll in school.

Others have delayed getting their children vaccinated because they still believe now-discredited research linking the measles vaccine to autism.

"Some people are just incredibly selfish" by skipping shots, said Dr. James Cherry, a pediatric disease expert at the University of California, Los Angeles.

## Eerie Glow Of Seas May Mean It's Toxic

Eerie fluorescent blue patches of water glimmering off Hong Kong's seashore are magnificent, disturbing and potentially toxic, marine biologists say.

The glow is an indicator of a harmful algal bloom created by something called Noctiluca scintillans, nicknamed Sea Sparkle.

It looks like algae and can act like algae. But it's not quite. It is a single-celled organism that technically can function as both animal and plant.

These type blooms are triggered by farm pollution that can be devastating to marine life and local fisheries, according to University of Georgia oceanographer Samantha Joye, who was shown Associated Press photos of the glowing water.

"Those pictures are magnificent. It's just extremely unfortunate that the mysterious and majestic blue hue is created by a Noctiluca," Joye wrote in an email Thursday.

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# GOP Pushes Abortion Bill Through The House On March For Life Day

BY ALAN FRAM  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — With thousands of abortion protesters swarming the city in their annual March for Life, Republicans muscled broadened abortion restrictions through the House on Thursday after a GOP rebellion forced leaders into an awkward retreat on an earlier version.

By a near party-line 242-179 vote, the House voted to permanently forbid federal funds for most abortion coverage. The bill would also block tax credits for many people and employers who buy abortion coverage under President Barack Obama's health care overhaul.

A White House veto threat and an uncertain fate in the Senate mean the legislation has no realistic chance of becoming law. But on a day when crowds of anti-abortion demonstrators stretched for blocks outside Capitol windows — and hours after the embarrassing GOP stumble on another abortion measure — Thursday's vote let party leaders signal that the Congress they now command is at least trying to end abortion.

The GOP's passage of one bill and the abrupt derailment of another forbidding most late-term abortions underscored the party's perilous balancing act of backing abortion restrictions crucial to conservatives while not alienating women and younger voters wary of such restrictions.

Obama, out West to promote his State of the Union economic agenda, embraced the same 1973 Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion that the protesters were vilifying.

He said the decision in the Roe v. Wade case "reaffirms a fundamental American value: that government should not intrude in our most private and personal family matters." He said the



Anti-abortion activists attend the March For Life in front of the U.S. Supreme Court in Washington, D.C., on Thursday. Tens of thousands of Americans who oppose abortion are in Washington for the annual March for Life, marking the 42nd anniversary of the Supreme Court's Roe v. Wade decision.

House-passed bill would "intrude on women's reproductive freedom and access to health care and unnecessarily restrict the private insurance choices that consumers have today."

Republican House Speaker John Boehner of Ohio praised the marchers in a written statement that also seemed to acknowledge discord among Republicans.

"This march is part of a longer one, and our destination is clear: to secure and protect the rights of every unborn child. When there is disagreement, we should pause and listen closely. When there is movement, we should rejoice, and the House's vote to ban taxpayer funding of abortion is cause for doing so," he said.

Even so, the GOP sidetracking of the late-term abortion measure sparked grumbling from politically potent allies.

In a sharp statement that singled out Rep. Renee Ellmers, R-N.C., and others, National Right to Life President Carol Tobias criticized GOP dissenters on the late-

term bill and warned, "Some of these lawmakers may ultimately conclude that they were ill advised to sacrifice the trust of their pro-life constituents so egregiously."

Ellmers, who has had a strong anti-abortion voting record, was among those who had objected to portions of the late-term abortion bill. Her spokeswoman, Blair Ellis, declined to comment.

Dozens of protesters visited her Capitol Hill office Thursday to protest her role in scuttling that measure.

On the House floor, a debate that has raged virtually every year for decades was emotional, as usual.

"Abortion is not health care. It's a brutal procedure that ends lives of unborn children," said Rep. Joseph Pitts, R-Pa.

"I urge my colleagues to stand with the hundreds of thousands of people out on the Mall right now by voting for this bill," said House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif.

Democrats said such talk showed that Republicans

were willing to subjugate women's rights to political pandering to the crowds outside.

"Women's rights should not be theater, it shouldn't be drama," said Rep. Steve Cohen, D-Tenn.

The debate took a turn for the personal when Rep. Jackie Speier, D-Calif., referred to "hypocrites on the other side of the aisle who have counseled their own girl friends to have abortions. It's legal."

Rep. Scott DesJarlais, R-Tenn., a doctor who opposes abortion rights, once urged a patient he was dating to seek an abortion. His aides did not return phone and email requests for comment.

Outside, thousands of demonstrators trudged up Capitol Hill to the Supreme Court in protest of the justices' legalization of abortion exactly 42 years ago. Some wore religious garb while others carried signs with messages ranging from "I am a voice for the voiceless" to "Thank God my mom's pro-life."

# Saudi King Abdullah Has Died, Prince Salman Successor

BY AYA BATRAWY AND ABDUL-LAH AL-SHIHRI  
Associated Press

RIYADH, Saudi Arabia (AP) — Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah, the powerful U.S. ally who joined Washington's fight against al-Qaida and sought to modernize the ultraconservative Muslim kingdom with incremental but significant reforms, including nudging open greater opportunities for women, has died, according to Saudi state TV. He was 90.

Abdullah's death was announced on Saudi state TV by a presenter who said the king died at 1 a.m. on Friday. His successor was announced as 79-year-old half-brother, Prince Salman, a Royal Court statement carried on the Saudi Press Agency said.

Salman was Abdullah's crown prince and had recently taken on some of the ailing king's responsibilities. The 69-year-old Prince Muqrin, a former head of intelligence in Saudi Arabia and half-brother to both Salman and Abdullah, was announced as the kingdom's crown prince.

More than his guarded predecessors, Abdullah — who ascended to the throne in 2005 — assertively threw his oil-rich nation's weight behind trying to shape the Middle East. His priority was to counter the influence of rival, mainly Shiite Iran wherever it tried to make advances. He and fellow Sunni Arab monarchs also staunchly opposed the Middle East's wave of pro-democracy uprisings, seeing them as a threat to stability and their own rule.

Regionally, perhaps Abdullah's biggest priority was to confront Iran, the Shiite powerhouse across the Gulf. He backed Sunni Muslim factions against Tehran's allies in several countries, where colliding ambitions stoked proxy conflicts around the region that enflamed Sunni-Shiite hatreds — most horrifically in Syria's civil war, where the two countries backed opposing sides. Those conflicts in turn hiked Sunni militancy that re-

turned to threaten Saudi Arabia.

Abdullah was selected as crown prince in 1982 on the day his half-brother Fahd ascended to the throne. He became de facto ruler in 1995 when a stroke incapacitated Fahd. Abdullah was believed to have long rankled at the closeness of the alliance with the United States, and as regent he pressed Washington to withdraw the troops it had deployed in the kingdom since the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. The U.S. finally did so in 2003.

He was constantly frustrated by Washington's failure to broker a settlement to the Israel-Palestinian conflict. In 2000, Abdullah convinced the Arab League to approve an unprecedented offer that all Arab states would agree to peace with Israel if it withdrew from lands it captured in 1967. Alarmed by the prospect of a rift, President George W. Bush soon after advocated for the first time the creation of a Palestinian state alongside Israel.

He also pushed the Obama administration to take a tougher stand against Iran and to more strongly back the mainly Sunni rebels fighting to overthrow Syrian President Bashar Assad.

Abdullah was born in Riyadh in 1924, one of the dozens of sons of Saudi Arabia's founder, King Abdul-Aziz Al Saud. Like all Abdul-Aziz's sons, Abdullah had only rudimentary education. His strict upbringing was exemplified by three days he spent in prison as a young man as punishment by his father for failing to give his seat to a visitor, a violation of Bedouin hospitality.

His aim at home was to modernize the kingdom to face the future. One of the world's largest oil exporters, Saudi Arabia is fabulously wealthy, but there are deep disparities in wealth and a burgeoning youth population in need of jobs, housing and education. More than half the current population of 20 million is under the age of 25. He was a strong supporter of education, building

universities at home and increasing scholarships abroad for Saudi students.

Abdullah for the first time gave women seats on the Shura Council, an unelected body that advises the king and government. He promised women would be able to vote and run in 2015 elections for municipal councils, the only elections held in the country. He appointed the first female deputy minister in 2009. Two Saudi female athletes competed in the Olympics for the first time in 2012, and a small handful of women were granted licenses to work as lawyers during his rule.

One of his most ambitious projects was a Western-style university that bears his name, the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology, which opened in 2009. Men and women share classrooms and study together inside the campus, a major departure in a country where even small talk between the sexes in public can bring a warning from the morality police.

But he treaded carefully in the face of the ultraconservative Wahhabi clerics who hold near total sway over society and, in return, give the Al Saud family's rule religious legitimacy.

"He has presided over a country that has inched forward, either on its own or with his leadership," said Karen Elliot House, author of "On Saudi Arabia: Its People, Past, Religion, Fault Lines."

"I don't think he's had as much impact as one would hope on trying to create a more moderate version of Islam," she said. "To me, it has not taken inside the country as much as one would hope."

After the Sept. 11, 2001 terror attacks took place in the United States, Abdullah had to steer his country's alliance with Washington through the resulting criticism. The kingdom was home to 15 of the 19 hijackers, and many pointed out that the baseline ideology for al-Qaida and other groups stemmed from Saudi Arabia's Wahhabi interpretation of Islam.

## Yemen's President Quits Under Pressure

SANAA, Yemen (AP) — Yemen's U.S.-backed president quit Thursday under pressure from rebels holding him captive in his home, severely complicating American efforts to combat al-Qaida's powerful local franchise and raising fears that the Arab world's poorest country will fracture into mini-states.

Presidential officials said Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi submitted his resignation to parliament rather than make further concessions to Shiite rebels, known as Houthis, who control the capital and are widely believed to be backed by Iran.

The prime minister and his cabinet also stepped down, making a thinly veiled reference to the Houthis' push at gunpoint for a greater share of power. Houthis deployed their fighters around parliament, which is due to discuss the situation on Sunday.

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