

Sources: Syrian Tanks Pull Away From Cities

BEIRUT (AP) — Syrian security forces are still killing anti-government protesters despite the presence of foreign monitors in the country, the head of the Arab League said Monday. But he insisted the observer mission has yielded important concessions from the Damascus regime, such as the withdrawal of heavy weapons from cities.

Syria's opposition cautioned the observers not to be taken in by President Bashar Assad's government, which has unleashed a withering military assault to crush a 9-month-old uprising. Opposition groups have been deeply critical of the mission, saying it is simply giving Assad cover for his crackdown.

"The Arab League has fallen victim to the regime's typical traps, in which observers have no choice but to witness regime-staged events, and move about the country only with the full knowledge of the regime," said a statement by the Local Coordinating Committees, an umbrella group of activists.

"This has rendered the observers unable to work or move independently or in a neutral manner," the group said.

The U.N. estimates more than 5,000 people have been killed since the revolt erupted in mid-March. Activists say that in the week since the observers started their work in Syria on Dec. 27, hundreds have been slain. The LCC put the death toll at more than 390 people since Dec. 21.

One-Third Of States May Miss Truck Deadline

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (AP) — Stuck in a financial pothole, Missouri's highway department has been selling equipment and eliminating employees to scrounge up enough money to repair its roads. Unless it also changes state law, it could lose tens of millions of federal highway dollars as a penalty for not adopting new safety requirements for commercial truck drivers.

Though Missouri's financial predicament may be extreme, it is far from unique. Approximately one-third of states have indicated they may not meet a Jan. 30 deadline for their drivers' license offices to require interstate truck drivers to provide proof from a medical professional that they are healthy enough to drive, according to the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration.

States that fail to comply with the federal mandate could lose 5 percent of their highway funds — about \$30 million in Missouri's case. If they remain out of compliance for a second year, that penalty doubles. But noncompliant states could receive a grace period; as long as they submit a plan to obey the mandate, federal officials have indicated they may not start deducting money until 2014.

The federal agency declined to provide a list of the states in jeopardy of missing the deadline. But Missouri's plight was confirmed by state officials and documents obtained by The Associated Press through an open-records request. Officials in several other states, including Colorado, Kansas and Oklahoma, also confirmed to the AP that they will not be able to fully implement the federal requirement by the deadline.

"It's hard enough to keep our roads in good condition, and this is going to make it more difficult," said Missouri state Rep. Eric Burlison, a Republican who unsuccessfully sought to bring Missouri in line with the federal requirements.

Attack On NYC Islamic Center Investigated

NEW YORK (AP) — While members of an Islamic cultural center gathered for a Sunday evening dinner, a Molotov cocktail hurled by an unknown assailant and made from a Starbucks bottle burst and shattered against the center's main entrance. Another was thrown at the sign for the center's school.

It was one of a string of suspected arson attacks that police were investigating on Monday as possible bias crimes and trying to determine whether the incidents were linked. No arrests have been made.

Structural damage to the Imam Al-Khoei Foundation was minimal, but some members of the center were emotionally shaken, the assistant imam said. About 80 worshippers were there when the firebomb was set off at 8:44 p.m., the third in the series of suspected arson attacks in Queens on Sunday night.

"We were very surprised," assistant Imam Maan Al-Sahllani said. "This has never happened here before."

The decades-old foundation is among the foremost Muslim institutions in New York, with branches around the world, he said. Named for one of the most influential Shiite scholars, it promotes work in development, human rights and minority rights as a general consultant to the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations.

Kids OK After Car Skidded Into Icy Utah River

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — Three children trapped in an upturned car after it skidded into a river were released Monday from a hospital, two days after they were saved by several passers-by.

The children had been treated for hypothermia, said Primary Children's Medical Center spokeswoman Bonnie Midget. The family wasn't answering phone calls.

At least nine people helped right the car in the river.

"It's an amazing story, so good," Laurel Anderson Gilbert, the driver's sister, told The Associated Press on Monday. "We're so grateful. It was a miracle."

The father, Roger Andersen, lost control of the car Saturday on a slippery, narrow stretch of road in Logan Canyon. Andersen, his two children and his niece were going to a ski resort at the head of Logan Canyon.

Aretha Franklin Engaged To Longtime Friend

NEW YORK (AP) — Aretha Franklin is engaged to longtime friend William "Willie" Wilkerson.

The Grammy-winning singer told The Associated Press in a statement Monday that she and Wilkerson are considering a summer wedding, perhaps in Miami Beach, Fla. The Queen of Soul wants to follow the ceremony with a reception on a private yacht.

The 69-year-old jokes: "No, I'm not pregnant."

Franklin and Wilkerson became engaged over the holidays. She is considering Vera Wang, Valentino and Donna Karan to design her dress.

Democrats Take Aim At Romney

WASHINGTON (AP) — Looking ahead to next fall, Democrats in Iowa and beyond sought to weaken Republican Mitt Romney in advance of Tuesday's lead-off presidential caucuses as polls show the former Massachusetts governor amassing support.

Democrats dispatched party leaders and surrogates in Iowa on Monday to assail the Republican field while paying close attention to Romney, who has led in national polls and could use Iowa and other early states as a springboard to secure the Republican nomination. Democrats have tried to portray Romney as lacking any core convictions while raising questions about his business background, which the former governor has offered as a chief reason to send him to the White House.

President Barack Obama is expected to compete heavily for Iowa's voters in next fall's general election after winning the state's caucuses in 2008 and carrying Iowa against Republican John McCain. Obama planned to address Democratic caucus attendees by web video Tuesday night.

COMING UP ROSES



Allen J. Schaben/Los Angeles Times/MCT
Marchers alongside Wells Fargo's "Just Imagine ..." float rolls down Colorado Boulevard in the 123rd Rose Parade in Pasadena, Calif., on Monday. Hundreds of anti-Wall Street protesters also turned out at the parade, considered by many as the premier event of the New Year's holiday.

Mount Rainier Shooting

Police: Body Found At Park Is That Of Gunman

BY MIKE BAKER
Associated Press

MOUNT RAINIER NATIONAL PARK, Wash. — An armed Iraq War veteran suspected of killing a Mount Rainier National Park ranger managed to evade snowshoe-wearing SWAT teams and dogs on his trail for nearly a day. He couldn't, however, escape the cold.

A plane searching the remote wilderness for Benjamin Colton Barnes, 24, on Monday discovered his body lying partially submerged in an icy, snowy mountain creek with snow banks standing several feet high on either side.

"He was wearing T-shirt, a pair of jeans and one tennis shoe. That was it," Pierce County Sheriff's spokesman Ed Troyer said.

Barnes did not have any external wounds and appears to have died due to the elements, he said. A medical examiner was at the scene to determine the cause of death. Troyer said two weapons were recovered, but he declined to say where they were located.

According to police and court documents, Barnes had a troubled transition to civilian life, with accusations in a child custody dispute that he suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder following his Iraq deployments and was suicidal.

The mother of his toddler daughter sought a temporary restraining order against him, according to court documents.

She alleged that he got easily irritated, angry and depressed and kept an arsenal of weapons in his home. She

wrote that she feared for the child's safety. Undated photos provided by police showed a shirtless, tattooed Barnes brandishing two large weapons.

The woman told authorities Barnes was suicidal and possibly suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder after deploying to Iraq in 2007-2008, and had once sent her a text message saying "I want to die."

In November 2011, a guardian recommended parenting and communication classes for both parents as well as a visitation schedule for Barnes until he completed evaluations for domestic violence and mental health and complied with treatment recommendations.

Barnes is believed to have fled to the remote park on Sunday to hide after an earlier shooting at a New Year's house party near Seattle that wounded four, two critically. Authorities suspect he then fatally shot ranger Margaret Anderson.

Immediately after the park shooting, police cleared out Mount Rainier of visitors and mounted a manhunt.

Fear that tourists could be caught in the crossfire in a shootout with Barnes prompted officials to hold more than a 100 people at the visitors' center before evacuating them in the middle of the night.

Late Sunday, police said Barnes was a suspect in another shooting incident.

On New Year's, there was an argument at a house party in Skyway, south of Seattle, and gunfire erupted, police said. Barnes was connected to the shooting, said Sgt. Cindi West, King County Sheriff's spokeswoman.

Police believe Barnes headed to the remote park wilderness to "hide out" following the Skyway shooting.

Critics Rip Crime Laws Aimed At People With HIV

NEW YORK (AP) — A man in Texas is serving a 35-year prison sentence for spitting at a police officer — because he has the virus that causes AIDS and his saliva was deemed a deadly weapon. In Michigan, an HIV-positive man who allegedly bit a neighbor during an argument faced a bioterrorism charge.

Charges for the same acts would have been far less severe if the defendants had been virus-free. Now, a coalition of advocacy groups — backed by an outspoken champion in Congress — is ratcheting up a campaign to press for review and possible repeal of criminal statutes specifically targeting HIV-positive people.

"These laws are archaic," said Rep. Barbara Lee, D-Calif. "They're criminalizing a population of people who should not be criminalized."

Lee introduced a bill in September that would provide states with incentives and support to reform criminal laws aimed at people with HIV. Lee assumes the bill has little chance of passage while Republicans control the House, but hopes it will help raise awareness about the state laws.

Arrest Is Made In L.A. Arson Spree

BY MICHAEL R. BLOOD
Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Authorities arrested a man Monday in connection with dozens of suspected arson attacks that destroyed parked cars, scorched buildings and rattled much of the nation's second-largest city over the New Year's weekend.

The suspect resembled a "person of interest" captured on surveillance video. The man, believed to be 20 to 30 years old, had a receding hairline and a shoulder-length ponytail and was seen emerging from an underground parking garage on Hollywood Boulevard where a car fire was reported.

He was stopped by police early Monday in a van being sought by arson investigators.

Police declined to identify the suspect or reveal any motive for the fires, but he was to be booked later on arson charges arising from more than 50 blazes that have flared since Friday in Hollywood, neighboring West Hollywood and the San Fernando Valley.

Firefighters have not responded to any other suspicious fires since the man was detained, Capt. Jaime Moore said.

The blazes caused an estimated \$2 million in damage and forced many apartment dwellers from their homes. But there were no serious injuries — one firefighter was hurt in a fall from a ladder, and another person suffered smoke inhalation.

One of Saturday's fires occurred at the Hollywood and Highland entertainment complex, a popular tourist destination bordered by the Walk of Fame in a neighborhood that includes Grauman's Chinese Theatre.

Damaged buildings included a former home of Doors singer Jim Morrison in Laurel Canyon.

Most of the fires began in cars. Authorities have not said how they were started. Investigators declined to provide any other immediate details, saying they did not want to jeopardize the case. A news conference was scheduled for Monday evening.

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