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The death toll from fighting between Syrian government forces and civilians rose steadily Sunday, a day after the United Nations Security Council failed to approve a plan seeking to halt the violence. At least 43 people, including five children, were killed by security forces Sunday, according to the Local Coordination Committees of Syria, a network of opposition activists. The group said 29 of those deaths were in Homs, where more than 300 civilians have died and hundreds have been wounded inin the past few days. Residential buildings and homes were bombed in what the opposition Syrian National Council called a "massacre.". Russia and China used their veto power in the Security Council to defeat a draft resolution that would have demanded al-Assad stop the killing and answer calls aimed at finding a Syrian-led solution to the 11-month crisis. Analysts say both China and Russia have their reasons to maintain good relations with Syria. Russia is one of Syria's biggest arms suppliers while China cites Syria a major importer.

* Forty-three people, including 19 Americans, face prosecution in an Egyptian criminal court on charges of illegal foreign funding as part of an ongoing crackdown on nongovernmental organizations. The defendants include Sam LaHood, International Republican Institute country director and the son of U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood. Egypt's investigation of and raids on U.S. democracy support groups working in that country could mean the end of U.S. aid to Egypt. In a February 2 letter to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Panetta, members of Congress urged the administration to withhold further aid to Egypt until the country's leadership lets the offices of those organizations reopen and returns seized property.

* Israel's prime minister will visit the United States in March, officials said Sunday. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will attend the annual conference of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee in Washington. Netanyahu also spoke at AIPAC's annual conference last year. This year's trip comes amid mounting tensions between Israel and Iran over the Islamic Republic's nuclear program. Speculation is swirling in Washington about whether Israel may preemptively bomb Iran in an effort to slow its nuclear program.

* Heavy snow left several Italian villages paralyzed and without power as winter weather and cold temperatures spread across Europe on Sunday. Many of the 32 villages in the Aniene Valley, near Rome, lost electricity on Friday when an electric pylon fell because of the snow. The valley, home to about 50,000 people, has received 100 cm of snow. Atotal of 122 people froze to death in Ukraine since the cold spell started more than a week ago.

* Tens of thousands of Russians flooded downtown Moscow on Saturday to demand an end to Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's rule, casting a strong challenge to his bid to reclaim the presidency in March. The massive protest — which drew 120,000 people, according to organizers. Demonstrationshave been triggered by evidence of fraud in favour of Putin's party in December's parliamentary election. Putin has ignored the demands for a repeat election.

BILLBOARD TOP 10

1. Chronicle
2. The Woman in Black
3. The Grey
4. Big Miracle
5. Underworld: Awakening
6. One for the Money
7. Red Tails
8. The Descendants
9. Man on a Ledge
10. Extremely Loud

NATIONAL NEWS

Canadian celebrations kick off today in marking Queen Elizabeth's 60 year reign. Parliament will hoist the Queen's official Diamond Jubilee flag featuring a crescent of maple leaves enveloping a diamond and topped by a crown. The governor general will also launch the Jubilee Medals in a ceremony at Rideau Hall. The first batch will be given to 60 "outstanding citizens" -- one medal for each year of the Queen's reign. Gov. Gen. David Johnston said he plans to award more to Canadians from every province and territory throughout the year. The bells will ring at City Hall this evening to mark Queen Elizabeth's Jubilee. God Save the Queen and O Canada will be played at 6 p.m. to celebrate the 60th anniversary. The Queen is only the second Canadian monarch to reach the 60-year milestone. Queen Victoria reigned for 63 years, from 1837 to 1901.

* Foreign Affairs Minister John Baird Baird and PM Stephen Harper head to China today on a visit that will cover a wide range of economic topics, including shipping Canadian oil to China. Wenran Jiang, founder of the University of Alberta's China Institute and government adviser, says that with the Obama administration's rejection of the Keystone XL pipeline that would have delivered Canadian oil to the U.S., it's time to open new markets for the country's resources.

* Prime Minister Stephen Harper has called for a spring byelection in former NDP leader Jack Layton's old Toronto riding. In a statement issued Sunday, Harper's office said the by-election for Layton's Toronto-Danforth riding would take place on March 12. NDP members in Toronto have selected law professor Craig Scott as their candidate. Scott specializes in human rights law. The byelection will occur two weeks before the Party selects a new leader.

* Police in B.C. have arrested an Edmonton suspect in a case where a man allegedly tried to lure a child by claiming he was Santa. David Warren Buchanan, 67, has been charged with two counts of attempted child abduction and police say he is a suspect in a third case. Buchanan will be brought back to Alberta in the next few days.

* One man has died after a snowboard incident at a southern Alberta resort. The incident happened at Castle Mountain, 220 kilometers south of Calgary Saturday. Officials have said the victim was going down the slope at a fast speed when he lost control, slid into a ditch and hit a stump.

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BEEF BREAK

Know why TV sportscasters are always sitting behind a desk? Where'd you think their name came from? The networks need them behind a desk so you can't see the casts on their ankles suffered from continually jumping on and off bandwagons. I've heard of bus depots toilet seats that haven't gone up and done as many times.
Comments: beefbreak@bellyellow.com

On This Day in History

1952 - London England - King George VI dies in his sleep; born Dec. 14, 1895; his eldest daughter Princess Elizabeth accedes to the Throne as Queen Elizabeth II. The stamp was issued to commemorate her wedding to Prince Philip a year earlier.

Today's Pop Quiz: What's a male beaver called?
Yesterday's Quiz:
Who's the Roman goddess of love?
A. Venus

Weather

Today: sunny, H -7
Tomorrow: sunny, H -2

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