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Activists: Syrian Troops Kill Dozens in Daraya

by VOA News

Activists say Syrian troops have killed dozens of people in Daraya, just southwest of Damascus.

The town had already sustained heavy shelling. Activists say more than 100 people have died there this week alone.

The attack on Daraya was part of an army campaign to regain control of the outskirts of the capital.

Activists say Syrian forces with tanks and combat helicopters also launched fresh raids in other cities.

President Bashar al-Assad has blamed foreign-backed terrorists for much of the violence that has gripped his nation for the past 18 months. On Saturday, the state-run SANA news agency said armed forces killed an unspecified number of "terrorists" in Aleppo and destroyed seven vehicles equipped with machine guns.

A VOA reporter, Edward Yeranian, who has been monitoring developments in Syria says the situation is becoming more brutal and gruesome. However, he says activists are having an increasingly difficult time getting video and information out of the country because Internet service is cut off in most regions, and little or no electricity is available to recharge electronic devices.

Western powers have urged Mr. Assad to resign, but the Syrian leader continues to get support from Iran. On Saturday, an Iranian delegation visiting Syrian lawmakers in Damascus reaffirmed Tehran's support.

The Associated Press quotes Iran's ambassador to Syria ((Mohammad Rida Raouf Sheibani)) as saying that calls for reforms in Syria have been "masked by plots carried out by enemies."

In another development, General Babacar Gaye, the head of a now-defunct team of U.N. observers, left Damascus on Saturday.

The observers had been deployed to Syria as part of former U.N.-Arab League envoy Kofi Annan's six-point plan to supervise a truce that never took place. The mission officially ended last Sunday.

The U.N. will instead maintain a political liaison office in Damascus to support the mediation efforts of Mr. Annan's successor, veteran Algerian diplomat Lakhdar Brahimi.

Some information for this report was provided by AP, AFP and Reuters.