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Al Jazeera

Thousands rally for Syrian dead

5/14/2011

More than 8,000 people are attending the funeral in Homs of one of three protesters killed by Syrian security forces in the restive city, an eyewitness told Al Jazeera.

Mourners for Fouad al-Rajoub, who was killed on Friday, gathered near Bab al-Dreib and began making their way through the city chanting for an end to the siege on Homs, Baniyas and Deraa, the major flashpoints in the uprising.

The eyewitness said that due to the size of the procession the military had removed and relocated some of the checkpoints it had established throughout the city since mass anti-regime protests erupted there last month.

"Everything is peaceful now but we will be passing government buildings and I fear the snipers will open fire on us," he said.

Another witness told the AFP news agency that security forces shot dead three people and wounded several others in Tall Kalakh, a town in the Homs region which borders Lebanon.

Syrian army personnel were deployed in Talkalakh after officials said troops and tanks were being pulled out of Baniyas and Deraa.

Security barriers were set up at the entrances of the Talkalakh and heavy gunfire was heard, according to activists' accounts. Security forces were deployed in surrounding villages as well.

Lebanese security officials said cracks of gunfire could be heard on the Lebanese side of the border.

Officials said scores of Syrians had crossed into Lebanon, fleeing violence in their country that has left at least 775 people dead since the start of the protest movement in mid-March.

'National dialogue'

Meanwhile, Adnan Mahmoud, the minister of information, announced "a comprehensive national dialogue in all Syrian governorates," Syria's state-run SANA news agency reported on Saturday.

In a press conference on Friday, Mahmoud said that the government was implementing "a comprehensive political, economic and social reform program in the interest of the people".

"There is a correlation between security and stability from one hand, and the reform from the other hand," SANA quote the minister as saying.

Mahmoud said army units had started to leave the coastal city of Baniyas and completed a pullout from Deraa, although residents there reported tanks outside mosques in the morning.

Aref Dalila, an economist who met Shaaban last week, said "the domination of the security apparatus over life in Syria" must end for different opinions to be represented.

"We are long used to these 'dialogues' in Syria, where the regime assembles its loyalists in a conference and the other opinion is either in jail or underground," he said.

According to the Syrian government "police and security forces have been sent to pursue armed groups which perpetrated acts of killing citizens, terrorised people, burned public and private properties, halted social and economic life, threatened schools and public security".