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Thousands flee Syrian regime's brutal tactics

By Khalid Ali in Damascus

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Army tanks shelled the ancient centre of a city at the heart of the uprising yesterday as thousands of people fled over the border into Jordan.

Troops and snipers in Deraa pressed on with their attempt to subdue unrest after another weekend of violence across Syria. More than 60 people are believed to have been killed in demonstrations after prayers on Friday. Hundreds of people have also been seized in further swoops by the security services.

"It is difficult to keep track of all the arrests," Radwan Ziadeh, a Washington-based activist, said. The Syrian regime's brutal tactics appear to be working in some areas. A recent visitor to Duma, a city to the east of Damascus, said the place had turned into a "ghost city".

"There is nobody on the streets," she said. "There aren't even any animals."

In Deraa a witness told the Associated Press that men had been forbidden from leaving their homes. The city has been without water, food or electricity since Monday, when the regime sent in tanks to crush the anti-government uprising.

Another witness said: "Our houses are close to each other, so even though we can't go outside, we stand by the windows and chant. Our neighbours can hear us and they respond."

On Saturday troops killed four people when they stormed the Omari mosque in Deraa, which had become a focal point of dissent. Dozens more people from Deraa were killed in unrest on Friday, while there were a number of deaths elsewhere across the country, including in Latakia, Homs and Rastan.