



Syria endured its bloodiest day yet of the Arab Spring as mass protests against the regime of President Bashar al-Assad roiled dozens of town and cities across the country and security forces reportedly gunned down dozens of people.

Despite a string of government concessions earlier in the week, including the lifting of the hated 48-year-old emergency law, tens of thousands of demonstrators demanding greater political freedom and an end to Ba'ath party rule took to the streets after Friday prayers.

Security forces that deployed overnight close to Damascus and other key cities ignored appeals to eschew violence and opened fire with live rounds and used teargas against several pro-democracy protests, activists and witnesses reported.

Although firm information was difficult to obtain, at least 25 people were reported killed – including two in Douma, at least one in Homs, at least six in the southern town of Izraa, and others in Moudamiya, outside Damascus, the activists said.

With more casualties being reported by the hour, it was Syria's bloodiest day since the unrest began, and there were fears the final toll might be significantly higher.

More than 220 people are believed to have died since the unrest began six weeks ago. Twenty-one protesters were killed this week in the central city of Homs. Activists and observers in Damascus, who described Friday's events as a watershed moment, said their impression was that protests had been bigger than on the past seven Fridays – and more bloody.

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