

## 'Iran and Hezbollah aiding Syria crackdown'

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According to Army Radio, Syrian activists have said some security officials dispersing protests were heard speaking in Farsi; foreign ministry official quoted calling Syria an 'Iranian acquisition'.

Israel's Foreign Ministry on Sunday accused Iran and Hezbollah of assisting Syrian forces in the violent crackdown on anti-government protesters, Army Radio reported.

Syrian activists have said that some of the security officials charged with dispersing protests were speaking in Farsi, Army Radio said. According to the report, this is testimony to the close ties between the Syrian and Iranian governments.

"Syria is an Iranian acquisition, and it is clear that Iran is concerned that this investment will go down the drain," the ministry reportedly said. "Therefore, Iran has shown more involvement [in Syria] than in other Arab countries."

Protests in Syria intensified last week after police detained more than a dozen schoolchildren for writing graffiti against the government in the south Syrian city of Daraa, the hub of anti-government protests.

Syrian activists on Sunday called for a nationwide general strike in the wake of the bloody suppression.

Their call through social networking websites came after seven protesters were killed late Saturday during mass demonstrations in Lattkiya, 350 kilometers northwest of Damascus, activists said.

Anti-government demonstrations have spread throughout the country, escalating significantly on 'Friday of Dignity' last week, in which at least 23 were killed.

Syria has come under harsh criticism from international powers for its attacks on protesters, with UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon calling on Syria to show "maximum restraint" in its response to demonstrations.

The United States has denounced the government's response to protests as well, and the White House issued a statement Friday saying "we strongly condemn the Syrian government's attempts to repress and intimidate demonstrators".

Some leaders have chosen to support embattled Syrian President Bashar Assad, and Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez has claimed the reports of government crackdowns are hyperbolic and a pretext for the United States to intervene and fulfill colonial aspirations.

The Venezuelan leader reportedly called Assad a "humanist" and a "brother".