

# Thai authorities fire over protesters near capital

Wednesday 28 April 2010, by [Associated Press](#) (Date first published: 28 April 2010).

Thai security forces and anti-government protesters faced off Wednesday on the outskirts of Bangkok, with troops firing in the air as they sought to keep the Red Shirts from expanding their demonstrations.

It was not immediately clear if the troops were shooting live ammunition or rubber bullets or if anyone was wounded in the confrontation along a major road connecting Bangkok with its northern suburbs.

The Red Shirts, who have paralyzed parts of the capital with protests for weeks in their campaign to bring down a government they view as illegitimate, had announced that they were widening their demonstrations and dared the military to stop them as hundreds headed on motorbikes and pickup trucks to a planned rally in a suburb of the capital.

The shooting Wednesday raised concerns that more violence was to come after government warnings that patience was running out in the seven-week standoff. The move appeared intended to provoke the government, which has repeatedly said it will not tolerate protests beyond the Red Shirts' enclave in the city. It was the first confrontation since five grenades were fired near a gathering of counter-protesters Thursday, killing one person.

At least 26 people have been killed and nearly 1,000 wounded since protesters began occupying parts of Bangkok in mid-March, barricading major roads with tires and bamboo sticks and forcing the closure of some of the city's ritziest malls and hotels.

The Red Shirts, who are demanding the dissolution of Parliament, said they were sending a team of activists to drum up support at an outdoor market north of the capital.

"We are going to send (protesters) out of the rally site," a Red Shirt leader, Nattawut Saikua, said. "If the military thinks it is necessary to use force to block us, it's all right. ... We are not afraid."

On Tuesday, protesters forced a four-hour shutdown of Bangkok's busy elevated train system during the morning rush hour, causing commuter chaos.

Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva has repeatedly said he hopes to resolve the conflict peacefully but has yet to outline a clear plan out of the crisis after calling off negotiations with the protesters, who are drawn mostly from poor, rural provinces and see the premier as a symbol of an elite impervious to their plight.

"We recognize that as every day passes by, the people of Thailand suffer, the country suffers, but we want to make sure that there is rule of law," Abhisit told CNN. "We will try to enforce the law with minimum losses and we will try to find a political resolution, but it takes time, patience and cooperation."

His government has been criticized for excessive leniency and standing aside as protesters set up

their base in the heart of Bangkok, occupying more than 1 square mile (3 square kilometers).

The area, which already reeks of garbage and urine, could become far filthier after Bangkok's deputy governor, Pornthep Techapaiboon, on Tuesday ordered a halt to trash collection there until the Red Shirts — who briefly blocked an intersection with stolen garbage trucks — promise to stop interfering with sanitation workers.

Red Shirts have set up barricades on roads leading to the capital in recent days to prevent police reinforcements from being sent to assist in a possible crackdown.

The government has warned that protesters would not be allowed to move outside their current rally zone but on Wednesday appeared to ease the ban.

"Whatever movement or gathering is peaceful will be allowed," government spokesman Panitan Wattanayagorn said. "But if they block the road, that means they are violating the rights of others. Officers can arrest them immediately."

The government also has accused the protesters of trying to undermine the monarchy and the nation's revered king. Such a charge, which protest leaders strongly deny, could weaken their support.

On Monday evening, the government distributed an elaborate diagram outlining what was described as a network of opposition politicians, academics and media involved in an anti-monarchy movement.

Deputy Prime Minister Suthep Thaugsuban said those listed would be investigated and, if found to have violated the law, arrested, the newspaper Matichon reported.

Thailand's lese majeste law mandates a jail term of up to 15 years for anyone who "defames, insults, or threatens" the royal family.

The Red Shirts' ranks are largely drawn from supporters of former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and pro-democracy activists who opposed the military coup that ousted him in 2006 on corruption allegations. The group believes that Abhisit's government — backed by the urban elite — is illegitimate, having been helped into power by the country's powerful military.

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