

Thai Red Shirt security chief shot in head

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A renegade army officer accused of marshaling a paramilitary force among Thailand's Red Shirt protesters was shot in the head Thursday, apparently by a sniper, an aide said.

The aide who answered Maj. Gen. Khattiya Sawasdiphol's mobile phone described the injury as "severe." The Associated Press called Khattiya's phone after several gunshots and explosions were heard in central Bangkok late Thursday from the vicinity of the area being occupied by the protesters.

"Seh Daeng was shot in the head," said the aide, referring to Khattiya by his nickname. The aide hung up without identifying himself.

It was not possible to verify the aide's claim that Khattiya was shot by a sniper. Calls to police and army spokesmen seeking comment were not answered.

Several Thai media outlets also reported that Khattiya was shot and taken to a hospital. Khattiya is a renegade army major general whom the government has labeled a "terrorist" and a mastermind behind violence from anti-government protesters.

The report of Khattiya's shooting came after sounds of gunfire and at least four explosions, and expectation that security forces could launch a crackdown.

It was not clear who was shooting, but the sounds came after the government said it will impose a military lockdown on the area to evict the thousands of protesters.

Khattiya, who helped construct the barricades paralyzing downtown Bangkok, was accused of creating a paramilitary force among the anti-government protesters and had vowed to battle against the army if it should launch a crackdown.

He was suspended from the army and his actions made him a fugitive from justice. Yet he has wandered freely through the protest zone, signing autographs just yards (meters) from security forces keeping watch over the protesters.

A reporter for TNN television said electricity went out late Thursday in the Red Shirt protest zone in Rajprasong, a posh area of shopping malls, hotels and upscale apartments that they have occupied since April 3 in the intractable political crisis gripping the country.

The Red Shirts, many from the rural poor, are demanding an immediate dissolution of Parliament. They believe Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva's coalition government came to power illegitimately through manipulation of the courts and the backing of the powerful military.

P.S.

From Asian Correspondant.

<http://uk.asiancorrespondent.com/breakingnews/ide-thai-red-shirt-security-chief-s.htm>