

The Standard



Thursday, May 20, 2004

Chen shooting suspicious: HK firm

Paris Lord

There are numerous "reasonable grounds" to believe the shooting of Taiwanese President Chen Shui-bian in March may have been staged, says Hong Kong consultant International Risk.

Publishing its preliminary investigation into the shooting, the firm said yesterday there were 20 key findings that revealed "potentially grave discrepancies and unanswered questions" before, during and after the events in the Taiwanese city of Tainan on March 19.

Chen was wounded in the stomach, apparently by a gunshot, about 1.45pm on the eve of presidential elections, while Vice-President Annette Lu was grazed on her knee by what Taiwanese police said was a gunshot.

Kuomintang politicians and sceptics claimed the shootings were staged to help sway public sympathy toward Chen of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), who won the elections by 30,000 votes.

A recount of the ballot is continuing, while United States-

based forensic scientist Henry Lee has ruled out the possibility that Chen's wound was self-inflicted.

International Risk chief executive Steve Vickers told *MetroNews* last night his firm had not been hired by people with connections to the mainland.

The company was engaged on April 30 by Hong Kong solicitors PC Woo and Co on behalf of a group of overseas Chinese citizens "deeply concerned" by what happened in Taiwan, Vickers said.

"They basically asked me independently to have a look at it, to ignore ... all the hype and just focus on the facts," he said.

An 18-year veteran of the Royal Hong Kong Police who retired as senior superintendent, Vickers was chief of the criminal intelligence bureau here.

His preliminary investigation into the Tainan incident was based on material submitted by his clients and other sources, but did not include access to physical evidence, presidential staff, medical reports, witness statements or other details under government control.

Among the 20 points of interest that require further scrutiny, the report said, are the unexplained switch by Chen and Lu from a presidential car to an unprotected red jeep and a decision to use Chi Mei Hospital rather than one closer after the shootings.

The public display of an X-ray with a bullet apparently near Chen's spine, despite doctors finding there was no bullet inside his body, could have led some television viewers to suspect the injuries were more serious, the report said. Also of interest was the appearance at the hospital of DPP legislator Wang Sing-nan who at 2.54pm announced Chen and Lu had been shot - despite the timing of an X-ray that allegedly showed a bullet lodged in Chen's body, taken at approximately 3pm.

Taiwanese should be cautious about putting "too much faith in the provenance of any of the evidence that they have to date," Vickers said.

His firm recommended an independent judicial inquiry be held and that key witnesses be interviewed, including Chen and Lu using lie detectors.