

Red Schools Are Back in Session

BANGKOK – Close to 1,500 provincial red shirt leaders assembled this Saturday morning to kick off the 2011 political school year for the UDD. The School for Provincial Committee Coordinators met as a one-day teachers' college designed to educate district-level leaders on the movement's politics and strategies in the lead-up to this year's parliamentary elections.

Restraint and nonviolence were the main themes of the morning as both UDD-leader Thida Thawornseth and spokesperson Natthawut Saikua asked their audience for patience. "We're not going to teach you how to use guns," Mr. Natthawut told the crowd. "Instead we're going to give you the weapon of thinking and if this knowledge is spread throughout the country, then victory is at hand."

After the Songkran holiday, Saturday's students will become this season's Red Shirt teachers, holding classes in villages and cities throughout the country.



Natthawut Saikua lectures from the stage.

Grumblings of disunity and disorganization have plagued the movement since last May's bloody government crackdown sent much of the Red Shirt leadership to prison and left 91 supporters dead. Now, just six weeks after the group's leaders were let out on bail, the scene on the sixth-floor of the Ladprao Big C felt far from haphazard. Before the crowds arrived, registration tables were erected and attendance lists laid out – the names and telephone numbers of every enrolled

student were waiting to be checked and confirmed. Inside the classroom, attendees thumbed through their [twenty-five page textbooks](#), eyeing full-page illustrations of the organization's network and bullet-pointed lists of its stated goals.

Later, after lunch, Mr. Natthawut told reporters that the day's aim was to organize their supporters "so they could unify the country." But national unification will be a tall order, particularly for an organization whose rally today saw the preemptive mobilization of 22 police companies. However, if the themes of Saturday's lessons can speak for the movement, then Bangkok's police have little to worry about.

[UPDATE: April 16, 2011 – A PDF of the [textbook](#) has been linked to in this article. Though The Isaan Record has digitally erased its margin notes, the rest of the book appears in full.]