

Chávez: Plot to kill rival has been foiled

Venezuela's president said the government thwarted an assassination plot against his rival by snipers hoping to disrupt the presidential election. His opponent's aide called that 'a monumental lie.'

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CARACAS - Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez said on Thursday that his government had thwarted an assassination attempt on opposition presidential candidate Manuel Rosales.

Chávez said the would-be snipers were "fascists" who wanted to shoot Rosales in order to possibly disrupt the presidential election Sunday.

"It was to say that Chávez sent them to kill him and generate chaos," Chávez said during a news conference. But he gave no details and there was no word on any arrests.

Rosales' campaign aides denied any such plan was afoot.

"It's a monumental lie," said one Rosales aide, who did not want to be identified.

"The only ones who've tried to attack Rosales were *Chavistas*," he added, referring to a recent Rosales campaign rally that ended with Chávez supporters throwing rocks and eggs at Rosales' vehicle. "But no one has ever tried to kill him."

Chávez has been prone to talking freely about assassination plots in the past, mostly aimed at him.

Venezuelan authorities arrested 130 alleged Colombian paramilitary fighters in 2004 on charges of planning to kill Chávez and overthrow the government. They had no guns and most of them were later released.

Chávez also ducked out of a parade in 2005 because of alleged plots to kill him and he has frequently said the U.S. government would like to see him dead.

The Venezuelan president has some reason to fear.

He survived a coup attempt in 2002, during which there were fears that he would be executed.

Colombian paramilitaries have spoken openly about assassinating Chávez in the past and U.S. evangelist Pat Robertson once suggested that Washington should explore that option.

Since Chávez took power in 1999, Venezuela has had its spate of violence. Over 100 people have been killed in politically motivated incidents. Two diplomatic missions have been rocked by explosions and a chief prosecutor was killed in a mysterious car bombing.

Most of these cases remain unresolved.