

## 'Review' to say sorry in letter to Speaker

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### 'PM hired US firm to repair damage'

The *Far Eastern Economic Review* is expected to apologise for any perceived offence to the monarchy resulting from its article in January that touched on Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's relations with the palace.

The Review would apologise in a letter to be delivered to House Speaker Uthai Pimchaichon today, police spokesman Pongsathat Pongcharoen said. Handing it to the Speaker was a gesture intended as a public apology for offending the monarchy.

[David Lyman](#), the magazine's lawyer in Bangkok, is expected to deliver the letter. It is not expected to admit to any inaccuracies in the Jan 10 article.

Mr Lyman declined to comment, and *Review* editor Michael Vatikiotis could not be reached.

In protest at the article the government revoked visas held by *Review* Bangkok correspondents Rodney Tasker and Shawn Crispen. They are appealing against the decision.

Mr Vatikiotis says he wants talks between the magazine and the government to clear up misunderstandings. The government has not indicated whether such a meeting will take place.

Officials have said that if an apology were forthcoming, the matter would be dropped.

But the opposition Democrats yesterday accused the government of secretly negotiating with the *Review* to patch up the prime minister's name.

The Democrats alleged the government had hired a Washington-based lobbying firm, Verner Lipfert Bernhart McPherson, to arrange a meeting with the *Review*, whose article alleged tension between Prime Minister Thaksin and the palace.

Abhisit Vejjajiva, the Democrat deputy leader, said the government claimed it was leaving the matter to police, when this was obviously not the case.

The government said it wanted to protect the name of the "highest institution", but was really interested in salvaging its own image, at taxpayer expense.

The Democrats had obtained a letter from the firm to Prommin Surayadech, the PM's secretary-general, in which it said the prime minister had considered taking legal action against the *Review*.

Mr Abhisit said the wording indicated the premier was upset and was taking legal action in a personal capacity. Had he wished to safeguard the image of the institution, the letter should have at least referred to "lese majeste" but this was nowhere to be found.

Akrapol Sornsuchart, the Democrat spokesman, said lobbyists were usually hired to iron out policy details, not to work on the prime minister's reputation.

He said insiders unhappy with the role of the lobbyist had leaked the letter.

Suranan Vejjajiva, spokesman for Thai Rak Thai, said the opposition was trying to discredit the government ahead of today's by-elections. The firm had been hired to thrash out a deal with the United States on jasmine rice patenting, not to work on Mr Thaksin's image.