

## Police urge magazine to apologise

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### Targeted journalists have visas scrapped

Police are demanding an apology from the *Far Eastern Economic Review* while at the same time seeking Interior Minister Purachai Piumsoombun's endorsement for the immigration police's proposal that the magazine's four journalists be blacklisted.

Pol Gen Sant Sarutanon, the national police chief, said if they apologise, Mr Purachai may take that into consideration and not expel their two Bangkok-based journalists from the country.

The magazine has issued a statement standing by its story and dismissing allegations its reporters had done anything to threaten the security of Thailand.

If Mr Purachai approves the immigration police's blacklist, the magazine's Bangkok bureau chief Shawn William Crispin, a US citizen; British reporter Rodney Tasker and Hong Kong-based editor Michael Vatikiotis, who holds dual British/US citizenship, will be banned from Thailand.

A source said the magazine's publisher Philip Revzin, based in Hong Kong, could also be blacklisted.

The proposed entry ban followed the revocation of visas for Mr Crispin and Mr Tasker by the immigration police, citing national security as a reason.

The two were put on the watchlist of people considered a national security threat after the magazine refused to correct an article in its Jan 10 edition on relations between His Majesty the King and Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra.

The article, in the "Intelligence" column, referred to the King's birthday speech in December, in which His Majesty criticised the prime minister and said Thailand was in "a crisis".

The national police chief said after a meeting with Mr Purachai yesterday that the journalists had their visas revoked and could be barred from Thailand because they had published false reports about the prime minister that could ruin foreign investment and Thailand's relations with other countries.

Pol Gen Sant said the interior minister agreed with the police that the journalists were in the wrong.

The journalists had first told the Special Branch they would apologise but later had a change of heart, he said.

He suggested Mr Crispin and Mr Tasker make amends by apologising to the Thai people and the prime minister.

Without a formal apology, Pol Gen Sant believed they would definitely have to leave the country. "Saying that they are sorry could soften the matter."

The magazine said in its statement, "The *Review* strongly rejects the charge that any of its reporters or executives are a threat to Thailand's national security." It also quoted Mr Revzin, its publisher, as saying: "No one in the Thai government has pointed out any factual inaccuracies, nor asked for a correction of any inaccuracies.

"We strive for fairness and accuracy in all our coverage. We have no agenda but telling the truth," Mr Revzin said.

Immigration police chief Pol Lt-Gen Hemaraj Thareethai said Mr Crispin and Mr Tasker have been informed their visas had been cancelled. They could stay for another seven days after reporting to Immigration, he said.

The prime minister, meanwhile, denied involvement, saying the visa revocation was solely the immigration police's decision. "This has nothing to do with the government," Mr. Thaksin said.

[David Lyman](#), of the law firm Tilleke and Gibbons [Gibbins] acting for the *Review*, did not believe the expulsion order came from the police. "Police act on instructions from someone. Who gives the instructions? We do not know," he said.

Mr Thaksin said the government supported freedom of the press but that did not mean journalists could cite that freedom to justify their violations of national security.

Mr Thaksin admitted the visa revocation could backfire on his government. "But we are ready for anything that may happen," he said.

An Interior Ministry source said Mr Purachai was unhappy the immigration police had acted alone on the visa cancellation.

"The minister said the police should not do anything behind the government's back. They should have consulted the government first," the source said.

Deputy Prime Minister Chavalit Yongchaiyudh said press freedom had its limits.

"It is not right to use press freedom to destroy a nation or anything sacred," Gen Chavalit said. "We have shown them what they can expect for what they have done."

Foreign Minister Surakiart Sathirathai insisted the blacklisting of journalists was "not related to" criticisms against the government, the prime minister or cabinet members.

The government protects the rights to freedom of expression and press freedoms but there were laws on ethics and national security which were binding on everyone, he said.



*David Lyman, right, of the law firm Tilleke and Gibbons [Gibbins], speaks during a panel discussion on the move to expel two Far Eastern Economic Review journalists, at the Foreign Correspondents Club of Thailand last night. Seated next to him are Charoen Kanthawong, centre, a Democrat MP, and Senator Somkiat Onwimol.*