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When journalists themselves are sometimes breaking news

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At times journalists themselves are breaking news. So it is with those working for United Press International (UPI), the American news agency with its headquarters in Washington, not far from the White House.

Lately owned by a group of Saudi Arabian businessmen, it has been taken over by News World Communications headed by the Reverend Sun Myung Moon, leader of the Unification Church. He is also the owner of The Washington Times newspaper.

As reported in Brill's Content magazine which keeps track of goings-on in the American media, News World is a "deep-pocketed media conglomerate" and had been funding the "profitless Washington Times for more than 18 years".

Surprising, nonetheless, was the resignation of Arnaud de Borchgrave, head of the UPI editorial team and former foreign correspondent of Newsweek magazine for 30 years. He had been brought in by the former Saudi owners. His replacement is Douglas Joo, CEO of News World, who is not a trained journalist, but just a church member.

On the founder himself Brill's Content reports thus: "In 1935, according to Unificationist theology, Jesus Christ asked Sun Myung Moon to save the world... he founded the Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity in 1954. Moon's acolytes regard him as the Second Messiah, but among non-believers, he is best known for officiating over mass wedding ceremonies. In 1982, he married 2,075 couples in New York's Madison Square Garden."

There was a reference to a speech made by Moon in January 1999. Quote: "In 1982, in accordance with the will of God, I founded The Washington Times... Ever since then, this newspaper has led American public opinion as a conservative news medium showing the path that America must follow."

The question was then posed by the magazine: do these words apply to UPI?

Mentioned among its few subscribers is The Straits Times newspaper in Singapore and the Daily Challenge, a small African-American paper in New York.

Meanwhile, the bigger American news agency, Associated Press (AP), has more than 1,500 subscribers in the US alone.

Preceding all this were changes in the ownership structure of Asiaweek magazine published in Hong Kong. It was founded in 1975 by T.J.S. George, an Indian editor and Michael O'Neill from New Zealand. Both established the Asian character of the magazine. A few years later, Reader's Digest of Pleasantville, New York, attained a controlling stake.

In 1985, Time Incorporated, later renamed Time Warner, purchased the controlling stake. George later returned to Bangalore and O'Neill died in the Philippines.

There were changes also in the Hong Kong-based Far Eastern Economic Review magazine. Once run by Britishers, editorial control later passed on to American journalists.

An indication of other things was a criticism by the Jakarta Post newspaper over the magazine's report in its Aug 2 issue on President Megawati Sukarnoputri when it "even went so far as to brand Megawati on its cover page as a puppet President... it is difficult to comprehend how such a hurried view could be arrived at by the magazine, especially since its editor in chief, Mr Michael Vatikiosis (sic), has worked in Indonesia

for so many years".

Vatikiotis later wrote a book about Indonesia under President Suharto.

Mentioned in the same issue in its "Intelligence" column was an item about a possible meeting between Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad with President George W. Bush at the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation forum in Shanghai in October, ending, however with a reminder from one Steve Hadley, Deputy Director of the National Security Council: "You first have to what has to be done."

Surely arrogant was Hadley's statement as if Malaysia is under US tutelage and that we must all kowtow to him also as a way of propitiating the chief. He reminds us of a description of something "fretting, preening, clucking and cooing to himself and scuttling importantly around like a cockroach in its Sunday Best".

To which we can add: We ain't beggars who can't be choosers, bud.

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