

REBEKAH BROOKS ARRESTED

The Guardian is reporting that Rebekah Brooks, Rupert Murdoch's henchwoman in the UK, has been arrested in the phone hacking scandal.

The Metropolitan police said a 43-year-old woman was arrested at noon Sunday, **by appointment** at a London police station. Brooks, 43, resigned on Friday as News International's chief executive. She is a former News of the World editor.

Brooks is due to give evidence before MPs on the home affairs select committee on Tuesday. **An arrest by appointment on a Sunday by police is unusual.** In a statement the Met said:

"The MPS has this afternoon, Sunday 17 July, arrested a female in connection with allegations of corruption and phone hacking."

"At approximately 12.00 hrs a 43-year-old woman was arrested by appointment at a London police station by officers from Operation Weeting [phone hacking investigation] together with officers from Operation Elveden [bribing of police officers investigation]. She is currently in custody."

"She was arrested on suspicion of conspiring to intercept communications, contrary to Section 1(1) Criminal Law Act 1977 and on suspicion of corruption allegations contrary to Section 1 of the Prevention of Corruption Act 1906." [my emphasis]

A couple of comments on this.

Note this was "by appointment," but done on a Sunday—an unusual move. When Andy Coulson was

arrested back on July 8, also by appointment, the Guardian reported that the Met had sped up the arrest because of leaks.

The arrests had been planned to take place before 8 August, when Operation Weeting had agreed to pass all the relevant material in their possession to lawyers acting in the civil cases against News International for victims of phone hacking – thereby giving suspects the opportunity to discover what evidence the police hold against them.

The Guardian understands News International had promised police they would not make public the existence of evidence identifying Coulson and the other journalist, but that detectives began to fear the information would be leaked, after reports appeared suggesting that Coulson approved payments to police officers.

A similar worry—that investigative details were leaking out—might explain the timing here. Or, there may be a reason to have Brooks all good and arrested before her appearance at Parliament on Tuesday.

And speaking of leaks, remember what I pointed out on Friday. At a time when Murdoch seemed intent on protecting Brooks, Saudi Prince Alwaleed bin Talal—the biggest News Corp stockholder after Murdoch—called for her ouster. I guess he's looking pretty prescient about now, huh? Of course, the Saudis have their own means of figuring out what's going on in the world.

Rupert gave Brooks \$5.6 million on her way out the door. I wonder whether that will dissuade her from getting chatty with the police?

Update: Brooks; spokesperson now suggests this arrest will make it harder for her to be very forthcoming with Parliament on Tuesday.

Mrs Brooks is due to appear in front of the Commons media select committee on Tuesday to answer MPs questions on the hacking scandal.

Mrs Brooks' spokesman said her arrest would make her appearance at the committee "pretty tricky".

The spokesperson also claims that Brooks was informed (formally, I'm guessing) she would be arrested after he resignation on Friday.

A spokesman for Mrs Brooks says the Met police notified her on Friday, after her resignation had been agreed, that she would be arrested.

Update: Meanwhile, David Cameron's chumminess with the Murdoch crew is coming under scrutiny.

Mr Cameron has held more than twice the number of meetings with Murdoch executives as he has with any other media organisation. There were two "social" meetings between Mr Cameron and Ms Brooks, one of which was also attended by James Murdoch, and in return they invited the Prime Minister to a succession of parties.

Mr Cameron and Ms Brooks, who are neighbours in West Oxfordshire, met over Christmas – including a get-together on Boxing Day – just days after Vince Cable was relieved of responsibility for deciding the fate of News Corp's BSkyB bid. Downing Street has always refused to discuss what they talked about, but officials insist that the subject of the BSkyB takeover was never raised.

While James Murdoch met Mr Cameron twice over the period, on both occasions he avoided the spotlight of Downing Street. That was not a qualm shared by his father, who was invited to visit Mr

Cameron at Downing Street days after the general election.

The nice thing about these meetings coming out is that they'll allow MPs to focus on the underlying scandal here—the quid pro quo between Murdoch and government, particularly as it relates to regulatory approvals.

Problem is, I'm not sure Labour is ready to go there fully yet, given that Tony Blair had the same coziness w/Rupert as Cameron has.

Update: And here's another reason not to get your hopes up about Tuesday's Parliamentary appearance.

The MP who will lead the attack on Rebekah Brooks and Rupert and James Murdoch this week over their roles in the phone-hacking scandal has close links with the media empire, it is revealed today.

John Whittingdale, the Conservative chairman of the Culture, Media and Sport committee, admitted he was an old friend of Mr Murdoch's close aide, Les Hinton, and had been for dinner with Ms Brooks.

The Independent on Sunday has also learnt that Mr Murdoch's daughter Elisabeth, seen as the future saviour of the company, has also met Mr Whittingdale a number of times. Among her 386 "friends" on Facebook, the only MP she lists is Mr Whittingdale. He is also the only MP among 93 Facebook "friends" of Mr Hinton.

This also provides further reason to believe that Brooks was arrested to give her cover for Tuesday.

It is understood that the committee has legal advice that as Ms Brooks, and the Murdochs, have not been arrested by officers investigating hacking, they

must reveal, under oath, what they knew.

Update: ~~Ut oh. The Murdoch men seem to have developed a scheduling conflict with their Tuesday testimony.~~ Nevermind—it looks like they're still scheduled.

Update: London's police chief Paul Stephenson just resigned.