

Rupert Murdoch quits boards of British newspapers

LONDON, UK: Rupert Murdoch has resigned as director of a number of companies behind British newspapers *The Sun*, *The Times* and *The Sunday Times*, a News International spokeswoman said.

"Last week Murdoch stepped down from a number of boards, many of them small subsidiary boards, both in the UK and US," a spokeswoman for News Corp's British publishing arm News International said Saturday.

The News Corp chief executive is stepping down from his role on the boards of News Corp Investments, News International Group Limited and Times Newspaper Holdings.

He has also left more than a dozen boards in the US, Australia and India. News International sought to play down the development, saying it was "no more than a corporate house-cleaning exercise prior to the company split".

The decision comes after Murdoch announced last month that News Corp will press ahead with a split of the entertainment division from its struggling publishing business, saying he is committed to both units.

He said he would be chairman of both companies, including an entertainment unit led by Fox studios and television assets, and a publishing unit that includes *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Times of London*.

An email sent to newspaper staff on Saturday said the latest move "is part of the preparation of the business for the upcoming restructure into two companies", British media reported.

In the memo News International boss Tom Mockridge said Murdoch "remains fully committed... as chairman of what will become the largest newspaper and digital group in the world."

"We look forward to seeing him in London over the Olympic Games," he added. The announcement fuelled speculation in the British press however that News Corp could be preparing to sell its British newspapers which have been at the centre of Britain's phone hacking scandal.

Opposition Labour MP Tom Watson, a long standing Murdoch critic, told *The Independent* newspaper: "It's hard not to draw the conclusion that Murdoch is deserting his loyal staff who are left to clean up the ruins after the wrongdoing that has been exposed."

"No matter how far he runs, he can never evade responsibility for creating a corporate culture that allowed widespread criminality to take place." Watson was a member of the select committee which earlier this year branded Murdoch as "not a fit person" to run a major international business.

Murdoch has been under increasing pressure from British shareholders and politicians over claims of phone hacking and corruption at some of his British newspapers in what has been a turbulent year for the 81-year-old Australian national.

His board resignations comes 12 months after the closure of the flagship *News of The World* tabloid weekly following allegations that journalists accessed the voicemail of a murdered schoolgirl and hacked the phones of dozens of public figures.

The move will seen by many as a way of detaching News Corp from the scandal that has led to the departure of several senior executives in Britain.

The Financial Times said Murdoch was "symbolically distancing himself from the Fleet Street empire he began when he bought the *News of the World* and *The Sun* in 1969".

The media mogul's son James Murdoch, who was chairman of News International at the time of the revelations, quit the British newspaper group last November over the scandal.

The hacking allegations sparked public outcry and triggered a huge public inquiry into media ethics in Britain as well as a string of high-profile arrests.

More than 50 people have been arrested under investigations into hacking and corruption, including Rebekah Brooks, a former top aide to Murdoch and friend of British Prime Minister David Cameron and his former media chief Andy Coulson.

Source: *AFP* via I-Net Bridge

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