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The News UpFront: (TOP STORY) as of Monday, August 27, 2012

Bumping into a big international story in London recreates the past when coverage involved determination, news instinct, fierce competition, the rush to beat the deadline and survival. Some stories are inherently perilous but no matter the risks, they are covered and reported. The threat by British authorities to storm the Ecuadorian diplomatic mission and seize Australian hacker Julian Assange, now sheltered at the embassy in central London, has all the potential of an explosive story. I happened to be at the scene, awaiting the fireworks that might or might not come.

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PREROGATIVE

Covering the Big News in London

By ROMEO P. MARQUEZ

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LONDON - I was at the scene of a big international story by accident.

On the day it unfolded on Thursday, Aug. 16, I was on my way to a second visit at Harrods, the up-market department store, not to shop, for I do not have the means to splurge on anything, but for a different reason.

Its previous owner, billionaire Mohamed Al-Fayed, had erected a memorial for his son Dodi Fayed and Diana Princess of Wales who, together, perished in a car accident in Paris on August 31, 1997, nearly a year to the day she and Prince Charles, the heir to the British throne, had divorced.

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There are two memorials; the first I already saw, photographed and filmed; and a second – titled "Innocent Victims," a bronze statue of the two – that I've missed seeing on my first journey two weeks earlier. Video is at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4zuJ9MoKKSU>

Harrods is located in the Knightsbridge neighbourhood in the posh Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. At the rear of the building is the embassy of Ecuador. The two landmarks are within 20 minutes of a leisurely walk from the Gatliff Road condo that has been my quarters since I arrived in London on July 2.

Walking by the main Sloane Street I saw a number of police cars deployed at the mouth of Hans Crescent, the narrow road that passes through high-rise Victorian mansions of red brick where Ecuador's embassy stands.

I didn't know what was happening at first. But from where I stood at the street corner shooting videos of police cars, I could already see the swelling number of protesters yelling "hands off Ecuador," "the people united, will

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never be defeated," "only one decision, no extradition." Video at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yKwttin-zeA>

Inside the embassy was Julian Assange, the 41-year-old Australian hacker who had exposed the top-secret and confidential cables involving the United States and several other countries through the WikiLeaks organization he had founded.

WikiLeaks' global revelations opened a huge can of worms, humiliated the US and embarrassed both the military and civilian officials of the Obama administration. As a result, Assange may be facing charges of espionage in the US

On Aug. 16, Ecuador granted Assange political asylum, the date exactly two months after he walked in there to take refuge. He had availed of legal remedies in the United Kingdom but was unsuccessful so he had to seek shelter at the embassy in June.

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The British want to extradite him to Sweden to answer questions about allegations that he had sexually molested two women. Assange fears that once handed to the Swedes, he would be brought to the US where he would be charged, imprisoned and worse, sentenced to death.

So the controversy took a different twist the moment Ecuador announced it had given asylum. The South American country is now on a standoff with UK, which threatened to invade the Ecuadorian embassy and arrest Assange.

As I was walking two police helicopters hovered above the area. Six police vans parked on the street practically sealed off any land exits. Video at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IF-94qq7cZE>

Judging by their number and the growing ranks of protesters, I sensed that a big story was developing right in front of where I was. I hurriedly put on my

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press credentials from Toronto and joined the journalists and photographers who have been waiting for hours since the early morning.

As a tried to break through the steel barriers to get closer to the embassy, a policeman asked me if I had a press pass. I identified myself as a journalist and showed him my press IDs hanging by my neck. "Okay, you have a good day," he mumbled, and waved me in.

That particular moment reminded me of my unforgettable experience with the bunch of ignoramuses that manned the entrance door to the Pinoy Fiesta & Trade Show at the Metro Toronto Convention Centre several weeks ago. It flashed quickly as if a raw nerve was pricked.

Not being in the list provided by the organizer Philippine Canadian Charitable Foundation, I was denied entry to the event, effectively barring my news coverage. Video at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zMzbwHcG0-w>

PCCF must have thought it was already so big that it allowed only the

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friendlies. I wasn't so much interested in the Pinoy Fiesta as I was with its guest, Canada's Immigration Minister Jason Kenney. I had a story that needed his immediate attention.

Unlike the sexual predator disguised as a photographer and a newspaperman (whose name sounds like *buking*, meaning "being found out" in English, as in "no way Jose, *buking ka na!*"

),

I pursue my stories not through the maze of bureaucratic red tape. The better to catch the subject unawares, the better for a story. It becomes spontaneous.

Compare that Toronto incident with this big breaking story in London.

It was enough for one to claim being a journalist and having the credentials to prove it, and the London police never asked any other question. They just let you in.

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There's trust. There's respect for working journalists here and I believe it is because they understand how journalists work. Besides, journalists are vetted by their peers and by experienced hands, not by membership in social clubs as in the case of the lamestream media in Toronto.

At the London coverage, the situation at the embassy was quite tense. The police and operatives from Scotland Yard were all over the neighbourhood. The Ecuadorians and other supporters, meanwhile, also assembled here preparing for what might happen.

They were all ready to defend their embassy in case British authorities make good the threat to storm it and seize Assange, which would be a violation of international law, diplomatic missions being considered extensions of their territory.

Breaking through the embassy would be an act of war, according to protesters I interviewed. It's similar to invading a piece of Ecuadorian territory, a violation of the country's sovereignty.

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The threatened attack has not happened yet. Assange remains within the brick walls of the diplomatic mission. One step out of the embassy door and he would be arrested. (Editor's note: A Reuters dispatch from Quito quoted Ecuador president on Saturday, Aug. 25, that " Britain has withdrawn a threat to enter Ecuador 's embassy in London to arrest WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange." Authorities in London have not confirmed it).

In his first public appearance since June, Assange spoke at the embassy balcony, a mere arm's length from the police who stood watch as he delivered his statement asking US President Obama to stop his witch-hunt.

Whatever would be the outcome of this standoff, joining the media ranks in London , if only briefly, was quite an experience. It brought memories of those days as foreign correspondent when coverage involved determination, news instinct, grit, tough but friendly competition and survival. # # #

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My news channels can be viewed by clicking the links:

1. The Gotcha Journalist Channel's Currents & Breaking News at:

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1. <http://currentsbreakingnews.blogspot.com/>

2. <http://torontonewsroom.blogspot.com/>

3. <http://timecircumstance.blogspot.com/>

4. <http://travelstemes.blogspot.com/>

5. <http://gotchajournalist.blogspot.com/>

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