

Headlines:

- **Monarchy Exonerated in Khashoggi Murder**
- **France on Strike**
- **US Senate Sanctions Nord Stream 2**

Details:

Monarchy Exonerated in Khashoggi Murder

The trial of 11 people accused of being in the Saudi “kill team” that murdered Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi ended with an announcement on Monday 23rd December. Eight were convicted, and five were sentenced to death. Far from the culpability much of the world sought, there is deep criticism of what was seen as a careful effort to manage the narrative of the murder, and cover up the guilt of higher-ranking officials. The focus of the trial was that Saudi al-Qahtani, a top aide to the Saudi crown prince, was totally exonerated. This was tantamount to exonerating the prince himself, who most believe ordered the killing in the first place. On top of that, the official conclusion of the trial also tried to rubber stamp the existing Saudi narrative on the murder, saying that the kill team had no premeditated plan to kill the journalist, and that it just sort of happened spontaneously.

France on Strike

French union activists cut electricity to nearly 100,000 homes or offices. Eiffel Tower staff walked off the job. Even Paris opera workers joined in nationwide protests across France, singing an aria of anger as workers rallied against the government's plan to raise the retirement age to 64. Despite 13 days of crippling train and subway strikes, French President Emmanuel Macron and his government stayed firm. The prime minister declared his “total” determination to reshape a pension system that unions celebrate as a model for the rest of the world but that he calls unfair and destined to collapse into debt. Since Macron emerged as the leader he ran on a populist basis but has failed to deliver on many of the promises he made and in fact gone against many of his pledges.

US Senate Sanctions Nord Stream 2

The US Senate passed the National Defence Authorization Act for 2020, which is the bill for the nation’s defence budget. The bill included provisions to impose sanctions on the Nord Stream 2 pipeline. The US has been seeking to impose sanctions on Nord Stream 2 to limit Russia's access to European energy markets. The new pipeline between Russia and Germany is expected to provide additional transport capacity for 55 billion cubic meters of natural gas. Although the passing of the bill was widely expected, it paves the way for a series of US penalties against companies that participate in the construction of the pipeline. However, work on the project is in an advanced stage and it remains unclear whether the sanctions can effectively halt the pipeline's finalization. But this action shows the desperate lengths the US is now being forced to go to contain other powers. The days where US influence was sufficient though, its soft power to deter others who engage allies is now a thing of the past.