

Under The Radar

While the media landscape is preoccupied by COVID-19, politics and business grinds on. 'Under the Radar' provides a concise overview and thoughtful analysis of critical stories currently being overlooked.



'No-way' the Saudi lads

What happened?

The fiancée of murdered Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi has requested a meeting with the Premier League to urge them to reject the proposed Saudi-backed purchase of Newcastle FC.

Hatice Cengiz is urging Premier League Chief Executive Richard Masters to block the £300m purchase of the fabled club by a coalition backed by money from the state-run Saudi Public Investment Fund. Cengiz had also written an open letter to Newcastle supporters urging them to reject the Saudi bid.

Khashoggi was murdered and dismembered in gruesome fashion by associates of Saudi Crown Prince Mohamed Bin Salman in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul in 2018. His body has never been recovered.

'I know that many of you are tempted by his offer to get out of the dire situation that has crippled your club for so many years,' Cengiz wrote. 'But the Crown Prince is accused of ordering Jamal's murder. All credible investigations have shown his responsibility. He has not been put on trial in his own country as he controls it with an iron fist.'

What does it mean?

The Premier League has generally avoided difficult discussions over the money behind some of its clubs ever since the 2003 purchase of Chelsea FC by Roman Abramovich, a Putin-friendly Russian oligarch who made his money during the 1990s collapse of state industries in the Soviet Union.

But as Abramovich begat oligarch Alisher Usmanov at Arsenal and Sheikh Mansour of the Emirates at Manchester City, ownership of a Premier League club has now become a sign of status around the world, with all of the commensurate inflating of the assets. Sports Direct's Mike Ashley - the current owner of Newcastle FC - paid £135m for the club in 2007 and has done precious little to increase its allure or prowess on the pitch in the intervening years.

The issue now before the court of public opinion is whether the Premier League is capable of turning a blind eye to reprehensible conduct, as well as obscene wealth. The Saudis are not accused of bad business practice, or ill-gotten wealth; they are credibly accused of the murder of a journalist whose only crime was speaking truth to power against the Saudi regime.

And while residents of the 'Toon can be forgiven for wanting an improvement over the utterly dismal Ashley, a tyrant with blood on his hands isn't an upgrade. The approval of the sale would mean that murder has no consequences, and that Britain is for sale to anyone with a big enough cheque book.

One job too far

What happened?

Former U.S. special forces soldier Michael Taylor and his son, Peter, were arrested by authorities in Massachusetts over their role in spirited former Nissan chief executive Carlos Ghosn out of Japan while the auto executive was awaiting trial on charges of embezzlement. The two U.S. men are accused of physically smuggling Ghosn out of Japan and into Lebanon last year. U.S. federal prosecutors were acting on a request from the Japanese authorities to extradite the two men.

What does it mean?

This story is the latest episode of the riveting Ghosn drama, a tale that is surely destined for the silver screen. In this installment, Michael Taylor - a former operative in the elite Green Berets, turned private security contractor - is alleged to have masterminded the daring escape act that stunned the world.

While most contractors try to avoid breaking laws, Taylor appears to have made a career out of it. From planting marijuana in the car of a client's estranged wife to rubbing shoulders with the Boston mob, he has proved again and again the lengths he is willing to go for those who pay for his services.

Ghosn certainly got his money's worth, with Taylor and his crew pulling off the impossible. Despite strict bail conditions preventing the businessman from

travelling abroad, Taylor organized and later executed a plan to move Ghosn out of Japan in a scheme that involved Ghosn boarding the nearly 200 mile per hour bullet train from Tokyo to Osaka, bundled into a case used for musical equipment, before being loaded onto a private jet to Istanbul, then another flight to his native Beirut.

"He has proved again and again the lengths he is willing to go for those who pay for his services"

The debacle has left Japanese authorities humiliated, in a country where dishonor was once met with a form of ritual suicide. But their hands are tied when it comes to Ghosn. There is no extradition treaty between Lebanon and Japan and Interpol's 'Red Notice' against him does not require Lebanese authorities to arrest him. Similarly, Ghosn also entered the country with a valid passport, so they are not obliged to arrest, no doubt a deliberate move on Taylor's part. Furthermore, the man is practically a God in Lebanon, adored by the people even featuring on one of their postage stamps. He can rest easy.

The same can't be said for Taylor and his son. Humiliated, Japanese authorities need someone to pay for Ghosn's string of crimes and the Taylors fit the bill. Japan and the US share an extradition treaty, and while extraditions are usually unsuccessful, expect the Japanese to use whatever tools at their disposal to ensure the Taylors are behind Japanese bars.

The next station is... Old Oak Common

What happened?

Old Oak Common is now set to become one of Britain's biggest railway stations, after receiving approval as part of the controversial £100 billion HS2 project. The West London station is expected to open in 2029, with six trains running to and from Birmingham every hour. By 2031, services will also open at London Euston, before extending to Manchester and Leeds in 2040.

What does it mean?

For over a decade consecutive governments have dawdled and delayed on HS2, allowing the high-speed rail link to become an incredibly divisive issue. But Number Ten approved the project in February and are refusing to back down, despite rising anxiety on the Tory backbench regarding spending.

And it's not just cost causing controversy – Old Oak Common as a location itself has attracted criticism. HS2 will largely serve business travel, but West London is hardly a corporate hub, and those arriving at the station will still face a thirty minute journey into Central London.

With the project proceeding at pace, scrutiny is ramping up. On Sunday, the Public Accounts Committee revealed that HS2 is badly off course, in a report also stating that further costs and delays are impossible to rule out.

As the UK enters a recession 'like no other', the spending on HS2 is likely to become more controversial and potentially damaging for Number Ten. Disgruntled Conservative MPs returning to Parliament on June 1st will have taken note of comments made by Tory MP and deputy chair of the Public Accounts Committee, Sir Geoffrey Clinton-Brown, who claimed that his Committee's report is the most damaging he has ever seen. To make matters worse, the Government is also struggling in the court of public opinion – as the latest opinion polls show just 20% of voters want HS2 to be built.

“West London is hardly a corporate hub, and those arriving at the station will still face a thirty minute journey into Central London”

But the Government can lean on support from regional leaders, including Andy Street and Andy Burnham, who recognise that HS2 will free up capacity on local commuter lines and benefit other local transport projects. These are important benefits that have been understated and a public information campaign would be worthwhile.

Repeated delay and indecision has fuelled opposition to HS2, but advancing at pace may just blunt criticism and be welcomed by voters who want certainty and decisive government.

What Trafalgar Is Reading

Samos And The Anatomy Of A Maritime Push-Back [*Bellingcat*](#)

“The result is the most precisely documented push-back of its kind”
- Bashar Deeb on the detention and deportation of refugees in the Aegean.

Storytelling at the Supreme Court [*The New York Times*](#)

“Every Supreme Court decision tells a story, its author attempting to marshal the facts and the law in such a way as to make the conclusion appear not only obvious but inevitable”
- Linda Greenhouse on *Little Sisters of the Poor v. Pennsylvania* and *Our Lady of Guadalupe School v. Morrissey-Berru*.

But if you must read about Coronavirus

What Xi knew: pressure builds on China's leader [*Financial Times*](#)

“His government now faces the most daunting set of economic and financial challenges since Deng Xiaoping began to steer the country out of the wreckage of the cultural revolution in 1979”
- Tom Mitchell on the scrutiny facing Xi Jinping.



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