

WORLD

Germany, EU criticize US over Russian gas pipeline sanctions

Swift response to measures against firms building Nord Stream 2

BERLIN — Germany and the European Union have criticized White House sanctions against companies involved in building a Russian natural gas pipeline to Germany, accusing US President Donald Trump of interfering in national and bloc sovereignty.

Russia's Foreign Ministry also said in a statement on Saturday that Moscow "will continue to implement its economic projects regardless of anyone's sanctions".

US President Donald Trump signed a bill on Friday that included legislation imposing sanctions on firms laying pipes for Nord Stream 2, which seeks to double gas capacity along the northern Nord Stream pipeline route to Germany.

The sanctions, which are opposed by the European Union, were included in a sprawling defense spending bill Trump signed at a ceremony at Joint Base Andrews, an air force installation outside Washington DC.

They target companies building the nearly \$11 billion Nord Stream 2 pipeline under the Baltic Sea to Europe's leading economy, Germany.

US lawmakers have warned the pipeline "would enrich a hostile Russian government and vastly increase President Vladimir Putin's influence in Europe at a time of heightened tension across the continent".

On Saturday, the group behind the pipeline said it would aim to complete the project quickly in an effort



Specialists work onboard the deep sea pipe-laying ship *Solitaire* for the Nord Stream 2 pipeline in the Baltic Sea on Sept 13. STINE JACOBSEN / REUTERS

to minimize the damage of US sanctions.

"Completing the project is essential for European supply security. We, together with the companies supporting the project, will work on finishing the pipeline as soon as possible," Nord Stream 2 said in a statement.

While an EU spokesman criticized "the imposition of sanctions against EU companies conducting legitimate business", the German government said Berlin rejected "these sorts of extraterritorial sanctions".

"They will hit German and European companies and constitute an interference in our internal affairs," said Chancellor Angela Merkel's spokeswoman Ulrike Demmer.

German Finance Minister Olaf Scholz said Berlin "firmly rejects" US sanctions but would not retaliate.

Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova also slammed the United States, accusing it of seeking to prevent other countries from developing their economies.

"A state with \$22 trillion in public

debt is banning solvent countries from developing their economies," Zakharova wrote on her Facebook page, adding: "The American ideology does not like global competition. Soon they'll be asking us to stop breathing."

Washington, which has been seeking to sell more of its own liquefied natural gas, or LNG, to European countries, has said Nord Stream 2 will make Europe too reliant on Russian supplies.

XINHUA—AGENCIES

Briefly

UNITED STATES

Trump invites Johnson to White House

US President Donald Trump has invited British Prime Minister Boris Johnson to visit him at the White House in the new year, British media reported on Sunday. Trump's invitation was made after the British prime minister's election win this month, The Sunday Times newspaper reported. Britain wants to strike a new trade deal with the United States after it leaves the European Union at the end of January.

NEW ZEALAND

Death toll from volcano rises to 19

The death toll from a volcanic eruption in New Zealand earlier this month has risen to 19 after police said on Monday another person died at an Auckland hospital overnight. There were 47 people visiting the tourist destination of White Island when the volcano erupted on Dec 9, killing 13 people initially and leaving more than two dozen others hospitalized with severe burns.

MEXICO

Ambassador caught shoplifting resigns

Mexico's ambassador to Argentina has resigned citing health problems following new allegations of shoplifting after video from late October showed the diplomat attempting to steal a \$10 book. Ricardo Valero was recalled earlier this month by Mexico's foreign ministry amid the fallout from the Oct 26 incident at a well-known Buenos Aires book store in which he can be seen on security camera footage taking the volume from a shelf and then hiding it inside the pages of a newspaper he tucked under his arm. The ministry accepted Valero's resignation on Sunday.

INDIA

Nine die in Delhi apartment block fire

At least nine people, including four women and three children, died in Delhi in a fire that broke out in a residential building early on Monday, confirmed an official in the city's Fire Department. The four-story building is situated in the Kirari area of northwest Delhi. Assistant Divisional Officer of the Delhi Fire Services Ajay Kumar said that three of the victims were burnt to death beyond recognition. The fire had been completely extinguished, and relief and rescue work still was going on, he added.

AFGHANISTAN

Taliban claim attack that killed US soldier

The Taliban claimed responsibility for an attack on Monday on US troops that killed one US soldier and, according to the insurgents, wounded several more. The killing is likely to have consequences for ongoing talks between the US and the Taliban. President Donald Trump in September declared negotiations "dead" after the Taliban killed a US soldier in a Kabul bombing. Negotiations have since restarted in Doha, but were earlier this month put on a "pause" following yet another bombing, this time at the Bagram air base.

ITALY

Venice faces new exceptional flooding

The Italian city of Venice faced more intense floods on Monday while still recovering from the exceptional high tide that hit it in November. The tide peaked at 1.44 meters on Monday morning, lower than forecasters' predictions of 1.5 meters. High tides are considered exceptional if they are above 1.4 meters.

REUTERS—AP—XINHUA—AFP

Macao and Zhuhai reflect on value of strong bond, cooperation

By CHEN HONG

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The sky over Macao and Zhuhai was brightened by 160,000 fireworks on Sunday night.

In celebration of the 20th anniversary of Macao's return to the motherland, the special administrative region staged a grand fireworks show in front of the landmark Macao Tower and Hengqin Financial Island jointly with Zhuhai, a coastal city in South China's Guangdong province. It was the first large cultural event jointly hosted by the two neighboring cities.

During the 30-minute show which started at 9 pm, fireworks were launched from two large vessels, eight special-effects platforms and 56 unmanned surface vessels on both sides of the Sai Van Bridge of Macao.

Accompanied by music and laser lights, 600 unmanned drones formed the shapes and patterns of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge, the Ruins of St. Paul's as well as characters like "Zhuhai & Macao are one family" and "20" as a background of the show.

Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes, director of the Macao Government Tourism Office, said it was the largest fireworks show in the territory over the past 20 years and had integrated many wonderful new elements and brand new cross-border cooperation ideas.

She noted that Zhuhai and Macao will further promote tourism and bolster the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area as a world-class travel destination.

Yang Chuan, director of the Hengqin New Area Administrative Committee of Zhuhai, one of the show organizers, said the joint event worked as a bridge to bring residents in the two cities closer in terms of cultural fusion and communication.

He expressed the hope that cooperation with Macao could be expanded.

"It's a useful trial to consolidate the advantages of both sides, deepen the mutual understanding and



Macao and its neighboring city Zhuhai jointly held a firework show to celebrate the 20th anniversary of Macao's return to the motherland on Sunday. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Students from Macao and Zhuhai take part in a flash mob in front of the newly built Hengqin Port in December.

accumulate experience for more large-scale cooperation in culture and tourism in the future," Yang said.

Hengqin, located on an island in Zhuhai, is next door to Macao. The

106.46 square kilometers region is expected to become a global tourism destination with a modern industrial system, green ecosystem and smart services after getting approval from the State Council in April.

According to local officials, the development of Hengqin will promote the moderate economic diversification of Macao and become a demonstration zone for the deep integration of Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao.

Many were amazed by the spectacular fireworks show and expressed their excitement to reporters.

A woman surnamed Lee in Macao said its economy has grown markedly since returning to the motherland 20 years ago. She said the show has strengthened the feeling that Zhuhai is developing together with Macao.

"We are very lucky," she said.

Celebration events

Besides the fireworks display, many groups in Zhuhai and Macao have jointly held a variety of activities to mark the 20th anniversary of Macao's handover.

On Dec 7, the Zhuhai and Macao

youth federations jointly held an unveiling ceremony for a memorial stone in a park in Zhuhai, a symbol for the friendship of the youth in both cities and to inspire young people there to pursue new dreams.

Alex Mok, head of the Macao Youth Federation, said at the ceremony that the construction of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area and Zhuhai-Macao cooperation provide the biggest development opportunity for young people in the two cities.

"We will lead the young people in Macao to understand our motherland and get involved in the development of the Bay Area as the 20th anniversary of Macao's return now becomes a new starting point," Mok said.

On the evening of Dec 8, more than 1,000 young students from Zhuhai and Macao staged an evening party — in diverse styles

including dances, choruses, martial arts and instrumental performances — to narrate the stories of Macao's return and integration with the country's development and the growth of Macao and Zhuhai.

On Dec 14, the General Union of Neighborhood Associations of Macao and the women's federation of Xiangzhou district of Zhuhai put a musical film online to showcase links between the people of Zhuhai and Macao, as well as their close relations. On Thursday, several youth federations in Zhuhai and Macao organized young people from both sides to stage flash mobs at a couple of iconic venues.

Complementary growth

Given its proximity in geographical location and emotional intimacy to Macao, Zhuhai has been doing what it can to meet what Macao needs and prioritizing coordinated development with Macao in terms of rules, industrial synergy, space expansion and livelihood collaboration.

In order to support moderately diversified development of Macao, Zhuhai has explored ways to keep consistency with Macao in terms of rules and regulations.

For example, Zhuhai has had trials in the fields of cross-border offices, cross-border finance, schooling of children of the Hong Kong and Macao professionals working in Zhuhai, practices of physicians from Macao in Zhuhai, opening the social security system on a trial basis for Macao residents and cross-border legal services.

The local government focuses on six industries to meet the development demands of Macao. It comprises technological innovation, finance, health-care and professional services as well as culture, tourism and exhibition.

Zhuhai will expand the space for manufacturing, living and promote ecological protection for Macao to solve its problems of land shortage and high development costs.