

US, EU agree new pact on data transfers

AFP, Brussels

President Joe Biden yesterday said the US and EU had reached a new agreement on the transfer of personal data that would replace previous arrangements that were struck down by Europe's top court over spying concerns.

The urgently needed arrangements came as US tech giants faced a barrage of lawsuits from EU activists who are concerned about the ability of US security services to access the personal data of Europeans. This will be a third attempt for a new data arrangement and succeeds deals that were invalidated after successful lawsuits argued that US laws violated the fundamental rights of EU citizens.

The deal "underscores our shared commitment to privacy, to data protection and to the rule of law", Biden said in a joint press appearance in Brussels with EU commission president Ursula von der Leyen.

The new pact, which still needs to be finalised, will almost certainly face intense legal scrutiny that began after revelations by Edward Snowden of mass digital spying by US agencies.

Max Schrems, an Austrian activist and lawyer, has spearheaded the legal onslaught and yesterday dismissed the "political announcement" by Biden and Von der Leyen that would likely fail in court.

Once the text lands, "if it is not in line with EU law, we or another group will likely challenge it," Schrems warned.

The previous deal, known as Privacy Shield, was struck down in 2020 and was the successor to another EU-US deal, Safe Harbour, which was itself torpedoed by a similar court ruling in 2015.

Businesses have since resorted to legally uncertain workarounds to keep the data flow moving, with hope that the two sides could come up with something stronger in the long term.



This picture taken Thursday and released from North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) yesterday shows what state media reports a new type inter-continental ballistic missile (ICBM) -- the Hwasongpho-17 -- in an undisclosed location in North Korea. The test was hailed by leader Kim Jong Un as a deterrent against any US military moves. In return, the US imposed new sanctions on entities and people in Russia and North Korea.

PHOTO: AFP

US slaps new sanctions on Myanmar military

AFP, Washington

The United States yesterday announced new sanctions against the Myanmar military for "atrocities" against civilians following last year's coup.

The new measures came days after Washington said it has concluded that Myanmar's military committed genocide against the mostly Muslim Rohingya minority.

"Brutality and oppression have become trademarks of the Burmese military regime's rule," Under Secretary of the Treasury for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence Brian Nelson said.

"Treasury is committed to holding accountable those who are responsible for the ongoing violence and repression."

The sanctions target two military commanders, an infantry division as well as three businessmen and four businesses.

The measures come as Washington increasingly punishes the military both for the February 2021 coup that saw Aung San Suu Kyi ousted and the violence in 2016 and 2017 against the Rohingya, which Washington earlier this week declared was an attempt to "destroy" the Muslim minority.

The new sanctions apply to Brigadier-General Ko Ko Oo, and

Major-General Zaw Hein as well as the 66th Light Infantry Division, which Treasury said has been accused of carrying out a December 2021 massacre in which civilians "were captured, tortured and killed, including some whom members of the military reportedly burned alive."

Three individuals and two companies were also sanctioned for providing arms to the military, while two firms were targeted for assisting other businesses that had been sanctioned previously.

The US officially declared Monday that violence against the Rohingya committed by Myanmar's military amounted to genocide, saying there was clear evidence of an attempt to "destroy" the Muslim minority.

Citing the killings of thousands and forcing close to a million to flee the country in 2016 and 2017, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said he had "determined that members of the Burmese military committed genocide and crimes against humanity against Rohingya."

"The military's intent went beyond ethnic cleansing to the actual destruction of Rohingya," Blinken said.

"The attack against Rohingya was widespread and systematic, which is crucial for reaching a determination of crimes against humanity."



Lanka papers run out of newsprint

AFP, Colombo

Two major Sri Lanka newspapers are suspending their print editions because of a lack of paper, their owner said yesterday, the latest casualties in the island's economic crisis.

The South Asian nation of 22 million people is facing its worst economic meltdown since independence from Britain in 1948 after its foreign reserves hit rock bottom.

Privately owned Upali Newspapers said their English-language daily, The Island, and its sister Sinhalese version, Divaina, will only be available online "in view of the prevailing newsprint shortage".

Other main national dailies have also reduced pages after costs soared by over a third in the past five months and because of difficulties securing supplies from abroad.

School tests for nearly three million out of Sri Lanka's 4.5 million pupils were postponed indefinitely last week after the authorities failed to source enough paper and ink.

The dollar shortage has sparked energy shortages affecting all sectors and led to skyrocketing prices with inflation at a record 17.5 percent in February, the fifth consecutive monthly high.

'Mass bleaching' at Great Barrier Reef

AFP, Sydney

Australia's spectacular Great Barrier Reef is suffering "mass bleaching" as corals lose their colour under the stress of warmer seas, authorities said yesterday, in a blow widely blamed on climate change. The world's largest coral reef system, stretching for more than 2,300 kilometres along the northeast coast of Australia, is showing the harmful effects of the heat, said the Reef Authority. Aerial surveys detected coral bleaching at multiple reefs across a large area of the system, "confirming a mass bleaching event, the fourth since 2016," it said in a report. The Great Barrier Reef, home to some 1,500 species of fish and 4,000 types of mollusc, was suffering despite the cooling effect of the La Nina weather phenomenon. The area, which comprises about 2,500 individual reefs and more than 900 islands, suffers from bleaching when corals expel algae living in their tissues, draining them of their vibrant colours. Though bleached corals are under stress, they can still recover if conditions become more moderate, the Reef Authority said.

STALLED UKRAINE OFFENSIVE  
Russian missiles failure rate up to 60pc: US sources

REUTERS, Washington

Russian precision-guided missiles are failing up to 60 percent of the time in Ukraine, three US

officials with knowledge of intelligence on the issue told Reuters, a possible explanation for the poor progress of Russia's invasion. Since President Vladimir Putin ordered the invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24, Russia has failed to achieve basic objectives such as neutralizing Ukraine's air force

despite a vastly larger armed forces. The US officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the information, did not provide evidence to support the assessment and did not disclose what precisely was driving high Russian missile failure rates. Reuters was unable to independently verify the figures.



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