

## 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

## WAR IN UKRAINE Is Putin's position shaking in Russia?

AL JAZEERA ONLINE

Despite ongoing peace talks, an end to Russia's war on Ukraine appears nowhere in sight.

And as Ukrainian cities are being attacked, a quieter pressure is growing in Russia, which is increasingly isolated on the international stage.

Punishing sanctions are taking effect and dissent -- which authorities are determined to crush -- is rising, reportedly even in the Kremlin.

As the war rumbles on, observers are asking: is Vladimir Putin's position shaking?

The Russian president enjoys a solid level of support among legislators, as evidenced by a recent vote days before the war began to recognise the separatist, self-proclaimed Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics of Ukraine.

Of 450 members of the Duma, 351 backed the move, in line with Putin's approval.

However, some observers have suggested that with sanctions hitting the economy hard, a push to remove Putin from power may gather pace.

Volodymyr Ishchenko, a Ukrainian sociologist who has studied revolutions in the post-Soviet arena, disagrees.

"I don't think that the revolution is the likeliest outcome of the sanctions," he told Al Jazeera, arguing that increased grievances are not enough to start a revolt.

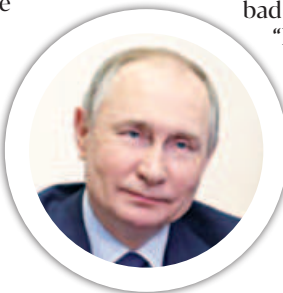
Rather, "a split among the elites, unity of the opposition, coordination and mobilisation structures" were needed.

"As for the opposition, it's in a bad shape," Ishchenko said. "Navalny's movement is repressed. Besides, the opposition is split by the war. The Communists and many other parties who could ally with the opposition strongly support the war now." Ishchenko told Al

Jazeera that the exodus of mostly anti-war Russians -- estimated to be more than 200,000 people since February -- has made mass revolt even more unlikely.

"The palace coup is more likely than a revolution now. Although, I am not sure that a possible elite conspiracy against Putin would make a move before a major defeat in Ukraine.

"So, in the end, the balance of forces on Ukrainian battlefields would determine the possibility of either a coup, or revolution, or the survival and consolidation of Putin's regime. Not the other way around."



## 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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