

Govt mulls yet another approach to curb cybercrime

ISLAMABAD: (News desk) The government aims to boost its cybercrime laws to regulate social media content through an amendment to the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (Peca) 2016 which would allow it to address lacunae, especially in instances where state institutions are defamed. The intention to amend Peca was recently revealed by Sajid Mehdi, parliamentary secretary of the cabinet division, in the National Assembly. He had said the government was planning to upgrade the law as the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) had limited capacity to counter cybercrimes. "We have tried to block VPNs and blocked X (Twitter),

but the matter is more serious and the prime minister has formed a task force to look into the weaknesses and shortcomings in Peca 2016, these need to be corrected," he said in response to a calling attention notice about fake news on social media. Another motivation to bring this amendment is swift justice, according to Mr Mehdi. In a similar statement, Shaza Fatima, Minister of State for IT and Telecom, said the government was working for speedy trial of those responsible for violation of cybercrime laws. However, a move to bring such cases to a swift conclusion through a dedicated tribunal is already in limbo. The notification for the 'Establishment of

the Telecommunication Appellate Tribunal' was published on September 28, 2024, but the law ministry has not notified its formation despite the passage of three months. The tribunal was proposed by the PTI in March 2020 and in December 2023, the Ministry of Law and Justice formally notified the 'Telecom Appellate Tribunal Ordinance' passed by then president Dr Arif Alvi. But the ordinance lapsed since it could not be tabled in parliament. Speaking to Dawn, an official of the interior ministry said that the law ministry was in the process of establishing the appellate tribunals for cases filed under Peca 2016, which would allow swift trials. Regarding the amend-

ments to Peca, the official added that the "most serious" lacuna in the cyber-crimes law was that there was no punishment for online defamation against the state institutions. Section 37 of Peca 2016 titled 'Unlawful Online Content' states: "The authority shall have the power to remove or block or issue directions for removal or blocking of access to an information through any information system if it considers it necessary in the interest of the glory of Islam or the integrity, security or defence of Pakistan or any part thereof, public order, decency or morality, or in relation to contempt of court or commission of or incitement to an offence under this Act."



Economic Affairs Secretary Dr Kazim Niaz and ADB's Country Director Emma Fan sign an agreement for the integrated and social protection development programme, on Saturday.

Joint parliament session next week to resolve row on seminaries registration

ISLAMABAD: (news desk) As the controversy regarding the madrassah registration bill refuses to die down, a joint session of parliament will be convened in the upcoming week to possibly take up the Societies Registration (Amendment) Bill 2024, which, after its passage by both houses of parliament, was returned by the president with 'objections'. Sources in the National Assembly Secretariat told Dawn that the summary had been prepared to call the joint session on Dec 17, and the date had been finalised after consultations with the JUI-F leadership, currently unhappy with how the abovementioned piece of legislation was being handled. A day earlier, President Asif Ali Zardari cautioned parliamentarians to consider international obligations before altering the existing procedures for registering seminaries. This objection was met with severe criticism by JUI-F leader Hafiz Hamdullah, who took exception to the objections made by the president. Mr Hamdullah, in a post on social media, challenged President Zardari's competence and even stated that parliament was actually 'operated' by the Financial Action Task Force — a global anti-terror watchdog. Mr Ghauri said if President Zardari cannot bear the pressure, then he should step down with dignity.

Plea against 'killings' during PTI protest to be heard on 23rd



ISLAMABAD: (news desk) A court will hear on Dec 23 a petition about the alleged killings, injuries, and disappearances of PTI workers during the party's protest in the federal capital last month. District and Sessions Judge Mohammad Azam Khan has scheduled the hearing to address the petition filed by PTI Chairman Barrister Gohar Ali Khan. His legal move aside, the PTI chairman while speaking to reporters outside the court said he was "in favour of comprehensive, unconditional negotiations at every stage". His petition accuses Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi, Information Minister Attaullah Tarar, Defence Minister Khawaja Asif, senior police officials and some unidentified individuals of being involved in the killing and disappearances of PTI workers.

\$300m ADB loan secured to strengthen social protection

ISLAMABAD: (news desk) The government has signed a \$330 million loan agreement with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to support the Integrated Social Protection Development Programme (ISPDP). The agreement, signed here on Saturday, aims to scale up poverty reduction and human development initiatives while strengthening climate change responsiveness. Economic Affairs Secretary Dr Kazim Niaz and ADB Country Director Emma Fan signed the agreement

on behalf of their respective sides. The programme builds on the ongoing ADB-funded programme for strengthening and expanding social protection systems in the country through the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP). The institutional capacity of BISP, the country's flagship social protection agency, will be enhanced to transition to adaptive and climate-resilient social protection. This will include improving access to education pathways for

children and youth from low-income families and increasing access to health services and nutrition supplies for beneficiaries who are in disaster-prone areas. Speaking at the signing ceremony, Mr Niaz highlighted the importance of the additional financing from concessional lending agency for enhancing institutional capacity and improving access to education and healthcare, particularly among women, adolescent girls and children from low-income families. He expressed gratitude for

ADB's continued support in this regard. Ms Fan reaffirmed the bank's commitment to supporting the government's objectives in strengthening social safety nets. She stated that the additional financing would help achieve the programme's objectives of inclusive growth, poverty reduction skills development, and healthcare access for vulnerable populations. The signing of the loan agreement marks a significant step forward in enhancing social protection systems in Pakistan.

National Party leader shot dead in Panjgur

GWADAR: (news desk) A local leader of the National Party, Abdul Ghaffar Baloch, was shot dead by unidentified assailants in the Chatikan area of Panjgur on Friday evening. Police officials said the veteran leader, who served as the party's vice president of Gwargo tehsil, was attacked by armed motorcyclists as he exited a mosque after performing evening prayers. "Abdul Ghaffar Baloch sustained multiple gunshot wounds and died on the spot," a senior police officer confirmed, adding that the attackers fled the scene immediately after the shooting. The victim's body was shifted to the district hospital for post-mortem examination and was later handed over to his family following the completion of medico-legal formalities. Authorities have registered a case against unidentified attackers and launched an investigation. Police have termed the incident a targeted killing, but no group immediately claimed responsibility for the attack.

Tarar discusses strengthening media ties with Turkish communications head

ISTANBUL: (news desk) Federal Minister of Information, Broadcasting, National Heritage and Culture Attaullah Tarar on Saturday met Turkish Presidency's Head of Communications Fahrettin Altun and discussed various issues with him, including strengthening cooperation in the media sector, promoting public diplomacy and eliminating Islamophobia. They also discussed measures to counter disinformation and misinformation, exchange media delegations, and prepare joint productions. They agreed to telecast Turkish dramas like Ertugrul Ghazi in Pakistan, including a joint broadcast of PTV and Turkish state TV TRT. Pakistan's Ministry of Information and Broadcasting and the Turkish Directorate of Communications also agreed to form a working group and appoint focal persons from both sides. The minister said that Pakistan and Turkiye have historical and fraternal relations and that there are vast possibilities for cooperation in the field of media. He said public relations would be more stable with enhanced media cooperation between the two countries. Cooperation and joint ventures in the field of entertainment and tourism were also discussed in the meeting.

Polio reaches Charsadda as eight districts test positive for virus

ISLAMABAD: (news desk) The presence of poliovirus has been detected in eight districts, a day after four more cases of the crippling diseases were confirmed. According to the Regional Reference Laboratory for Polio Eradication at the National Institute of Health, wild poliovirus type 1 (WPV1) has been detected in environmental samples collected from one uninfected and seven already-infected districts. The virus reached Charsadda, a previously uninfected district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The tally for the infected districts has reached 83 this year. Other than that, the country has reported 63 cases of poliovirus. The reported cases and presence of the virus in environmental samples are indicators of the virus' prevalence. According to a lab official, sewage samples collected from Charsadda, D.I. Khan, Rawalpindi, Qambar, Jamshoro, Qilla Saifullah, Barkhan and Mastung have tested positive for WPV1. "This is the first positive sewage sample detection this year from Charsadda," the official said, adding the district borders Peshawar, where the virus has been prevalent for several months, indicating continued transmission of WPV1. "This year, 63 polio cases have been reported in the country. The resurgence of poliovirus has put children nationwide at serious risk from a disease that can leave them paralysed for life," the official said.



FAISALABAD: Deputy Commissioner Nadeem Nasir administers polio drops to a child at the Children Hospital during a polio eradication campaign, on Saturday.

Sons of six former judges among 44 named for selection to LHC

LAHORE: (news desk) For 25 vacant positions of judges in the Lahore High Court (LHC), members of the Judicial Commission of Pakistan (JCP) have recommended the names of six kin of former judges and five women lawyers among others, but none from the minority communities. Interestingly, Chief Justice Aalia Neelum, who is the first woman top judge of the

LHC, recommended 21 advocates, including one woman, for elevation but none from the district judiciary of Punjab. Senior puisne judge of the Supreme Court Justice Syed Mansoor Ali Shah, who served as LHC CJ before being elevated to the apex court, recommended three district & sessions judges (D&SJs) for elevation to the high court. CJ Neelum nomi-

ated Advocate General Khalid Ishaq, Additional Attorney General Hassan Nawaz Makhdoom, who is also a partner in the firm of Law Minister Azam Nazeer Tarar, Malik Awais Khalid, son-in-law of former senator Dr Khalid Ranjha, Chaudhry Sultan Mehmood, a chamber fellow of Justice Shehram Sarwar Chaudhry, Haroon Dugal, former secretary of the La-

hore High Court Bar Association, Mohammad Siddique Awan, Chaudhry Iqbal Ahmad Khan, Asif Saeed Rana, Ajmal Zahid, Abdul Basit Khan Baloch, Ameer Ajam Malik, Shireen Imran, Malik Waqar Haider Awan, Asad Mahmood Abbasi, Shahzad Mehmood Butt, Syed Ahsan Raza Kazmi, Khalid Ibn-i-Aziz, Jawad Zafar, Haris Azmat, Amjad Pervez and Shahyari Tariq.

Justice Shah told draft rules carry his suggestions

ISLAMABAD: (news desk) In a prompt response to a letter of senior puisne judge of the Supreme Court Justice Syed Mansoor Ali Shah, chairman of the Judicial Commission of Pakistan's (JCP) rule-making committee Justice Jamal Khan Mandokhail on Saturday assured him that most of his suggestions have already been incorporated into the draft rules on judges' appointment. Justice Mandokhail, in his two-page letter, copies of which have also been shared with other

JCP members, reminded Justice Shah that the committee had met twice to deliberate upon the framing of draft rules. In these meetings, the committee also took into consideration the JCP Rules, 2010. In his five-page letter to the chairman of the rule-making committee, Justice Shah had called upon the JCP to urgently finalise 'clear and transparent rules' for appointing judges to constitutional courts, warning that any appointments without such a framework would be unconstitutional and

could undermine judiciary's independence. The detailed letter, written on Dec 12, underscored the constitutional obligation under Article 175A(4) that required the JCP to establish procedures and criteria for assessing and appointing the judges, and expressed deep concern that absence of those rules would jeopardise the rule of law, democracy, and public confidence in the judiciary. Justice Mandokhail said he received the letter on Dec 13, after the JCP had

been reconstituted under the 26th amendment, of which both he and Justice Shah besides other judges were members. Since the JCP is vested with the power to make rules under the constitution, the letter added, the commission in its Dec 6 meeting unanimously authorised JCP chairman Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Yahya Afridi to constitute a committee to fulfil the constitutional obligation. Subsequently, the CJP with Justice Shah's consultation constituted a panel and tasked it with drafting



rules related to the regulation of procedure, including the procedure and criteria for assessment, evaluation and fitness for appointment of judges under Article 175A(4), t

he letter said, adding that the committee in its two meetings took into consideration the JCP Rules, 2010, and deliberated upon the framing of draft rules.