

Bill for unified 'digital ID' to be tabled in NA today

KARACHI: (news desk) The government plans to present a bill in the National Assembly today (Monday) to create a digital identity for citizens, with the aim of centralising social, economic, and governance data. The agenda of Monday's sitting, issued by the National Assembly Secretariat, stated that the Minister of State for IT and Telecommunication, Shaza Fatima Khawaja, will introduce The Digital Nation Pakistan Bill, 2024. The legislation would "provide for the transformation of Pakistan into a digital nation, enabling a digital society, digital economy and digital governance," the agenda stated. The bill, aimed at digitising the economy and promot-

ing e-governance, was approved by the federal cabinet in June. According to sources, the government plans to create two new bodies: the National Digital Commission (NDC), headed by the prime minister, including all four chief ministers and heads of organisations like the State Bank, FBR and PTA; and the Pakistan Digital Authority, to be led by top industry experts. One of the major propositions under the new regime is a digital identity for every citizen. It would include data about an individual's health, assets and other social indicators. The bill's objective, as stated by officials, was to improve access to departments man-

aging ID cards, land records, birth certificates and health records. The digitisation effort would also target government departments, which will be given goal-oriented plans to improve services. "The basic objective of this bill is to support the aim of the Global Digital Compact and enable the building of Digital Public Infrastructure [DPI] of Pakistan," digital expert Habibullah Khan told Dawn. Mr Khan, who is also the CEO of Penumbra, a digital design studio, explained DPI as a "stack of technologies" comprising three key digital systems — Digital ID, universal payments interface, and data exchange.

The stack enables countries to "accelerate the digitisation" and speed up development efforts by decades, said Mr Khan, who has been involved in DPI research. When asked why new entities are needed to implement this programme when several organisations with similar functions are already operational, Mr Khan said digital transformation of this scale, which involves several regulators, departments and bodies, cannot be done by any one ministry. "Eleven out of the top fifteen countries in the UN's e-gov index have a supra-ministerial body to lead national digital transformation. This is why these bodies are being created," he said.



PRIME Minister Shehbaz Sharif administers polio drops to a child, on Sunday

Diesel cut by Rs3, petrol price stays unchanged

ISLAMABAD: (news desk) The government on Friday reduced the price of high speed diesel (HSD) and kept unchanged that of petrol for the next fortnight, ending December 31, in line with international prices. The finance ministry said Ogra had worked out the consumer prices of petroleum products, based on the price variations in the international market during the last two weeks.

The ex-depot price of HSD was reduced by Rs3.05 per litre (1.18pc) to Rs255.38 per litre for next 16 days from Rs258.43 over the past fortnight. Most of the transport sector runs on HSD. Its price is considered inflationary as it is mostly used in heavy transport vehicles like trains, trucks, buses, tractors, tube-wells and threshers and particularly adds to the prices of vegetables and other eatables. Transport fares seldom come down with lower diesel rate. The ex-depot petrol price was maintained at Rs252.10 at present. Petrol is mostly used in private transport, small vehicles, rickshaws and two-wheelers and has a direct bearing on the budget of middle- and lower-middle class. The government announced Rs3.32 per litre cut in the price of kerosene oil to Rs161.66, and Rs2.78 per litre reduction in the ex-depot price of light diesel to Rs148.95 per litre.

Centre now wants talks with Kabul, says KP CM



PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur on Sunday criticised the federal government for rejecting his earlier proposal to engage in talks with the Afghan interim government, only to now pursue the same strategy to resolve issues with Kabul. Speaking to the media at the Chief Minister's House, Mr Gandapur said his call for direct negotiations with Afghanistan was dismissed and his statement was taken out of context. Without referring to anyone, he said that when they disagreed earlier, he was compelled to speak out because KP is the province bearing the brunt of these issues. "Now, the federal government has approached me, saying the problems will not be resolved without negotiations (with the Afghan interim government)," he said, regretting that he still did not see any seriousness from the federal government.

PM Shehbaz launches year's last polio drive

ISLAMABAD: (news desk) Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Sunday launched the last anti-polio campaign of the year to ensure the complete eradication of polio from the country amidst an uptick in cases. The last anti-polio campaign of 2024 is set to begin on Monday in 143 districts of the country, focusing on addressing the alarming rise in polio cases and ensuring maximum immunisation coverage, according to a Dawn.com report.

Pakistan is one of the last two countries in the world,

alongside Afghanistan, where polio remains endemic, with the disease mostly affecting children under five, and sometimes causing lifelong paralysis. Despite global efforts to eradicate the virus, challenges such as security issues, vaccine hesitancy, and misinformation have slowed progress. Speaking at the launch ceremony of the anti-polio drive in Islamabad, PM Shehbaz said, "We will win this war (against polio) despite the difficulties faced in the past, polio cases increased and approximately

60 cases in Pakistan have come forward which is a great challenge and matter of great concern."

The prime minister personally administered polio drops to children at the ceremony. PM Shehbaz also appealed to parents across the country, saying, "I would like to respectfully request the parents to help us in this campaign and by giving polio drops to their children to safeguard their future."

"I would like to acknowledge with a deep sense of gratitude the efforts of our international partners, Bill

Gates Foundation, World Health Organisation and the Government of Saudi Arabia," the prime minister added. The development comes as the tally of polio cases nationwide rose to 63. The virus has been detected in eight more districts, bringing the affected districts to 83 this year. Earlier in the day, Prime Minister's Focal Person for Polio Eradication Ayesha Raza Farooq, in a pre-recorded message, said the "last anti-polio campaign of the year 2024 is being launched from December 16."



Senate Chairman Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani on Sunday said that 18th Amendment was instrumental in empowering the provinces to take ownership of their health-related affairs

National Action Plan at 10: assessing Pakistan's post-APS response

Islamabad (news desk) JUST eight days after the APS massacre, political leaders convened to address the collective heartbreak that had Pakistanis demanding real action and real change. Parliament then passed the "National Action Plan (NAP) for Countering Terrorism and Extremism", consisting of 20 points of varying signif-

icance. This NAP aimed to present a comprehensive strategy with a wide range of measures, including improving law enforcement capabilities and intelligence sharing, addressing challenging issues such as sectarian violence and extremism, and countering terrorist propaganda. Ten years after the APS attack, the militant land-

scape within the country has grown increasingly complex, with terrorism evolving into new and varied forms. This shift raises pressing questions about the current status and effectiveness of the NAP: Has it achieved its objectives in reducing terrorism, or does it require reassessment to address today's challenges? The National

Counter Terrorism Authority (Nacta), founded by ordinance in 2009 and ratified by parliament in 2013, was envisioned as the lead agency for coordinating Pakistan's counterterrorism efforts. Despite this mandate, Nacta has faced persistent challenges in realising its potential, primarily due to institutional hurdles.

CDWP clears 15 projects worth Rs423bn

ISLAMABAD: (news desk) The Central Development Working Party (CDWP) has cleared 15 development projects worth Rs423 billion, including foreign financing of Rs78bn (about \$280 million).

The meeting, chaired by Planning Minister and Planning Commission's Deputy Chairman Ahsan Iqbal, recommended nine projects worth Rs404.75bn to the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (Ecne) for final approval, while approving six projects worth Rs17.95bn itself. Under the current financial rules approved by the National Economic Council (NEC), the CDWP is empowered to approve projects costing up to Rs7.5bn while the projects of higher estimated costs are approved by Ecne on the recommendations of the CDWP after clearance on technical grounds. One of the key projects referred to Ecne is the "Economic Transformation Initiative, Gilgit-Baltistan", valued at Rs26.76bn.

Provinces must take ownership of health-related issues, says Gilani

ISLAMABAD: (news desk) Senate Chairman Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani on Sunday said that 18th Amendment was instrumental in empowering the provinces to take ownership of their health-related affairs, allowing for local solutions to be tailored in accordance with the specific needs of their populations.

Addressing a health awareness and recognition seminar, he observed that devolution of powers had helped create a more inclusive, participatory framework for healthcare governance. "It is time to reaffirm our collective dedication to improving healthcare in Pakistan. Together, we can ensure that our people not only receive the care they deserve but also live in a society that values health as a cornerstone of its development," the chairman said. Recalling his stint as prime minister, Mr Gilani mentioned taking concrete steps to strengthen the healthcare sector, focusing on improving primary healthcare services and bridging the gap between urban and rural areas in access to medical care. He said the government had promoted public-private partnerships under his leadership to enhance resource mobilisation and encourage investments in human resource development to address the shortage of skilled healthcare professionals.

SBP to declare new policy rate today amid calls for massive cut

QUETTA: (news desk) As the Monetary Policy Committee convenes on Monday to announce the new policy rate amid speculations that the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) will take a cautious approach to cut the policy interest rate despite significant room for a cut due to declining inflation, traders and businessmen urged the government to reduce it by 500 basis points in one go to support economic growth.

A considerable reduction has become the need of the hour as it would help bring bank mark-up rates back to single digits, making credit more affordable for businesses and consumers alike, said Chairman of FPCCI's Pakistan-Iran Business Council Asfandiyar Khan Mandokhail. Speaking to the media here on Sunday, Mr Mandokhail, who is also convener of FPCCI's Central Standing Committee for Halal Products and Services, has said a substantial reduction in the policy rate would not only stimulate economic activities but also benefit the government. An undue delay would lead to unnecessary loss to the country's economy, especially when the government was also seriously considering bringing policy rates down to single digits, he added. "A timely action would mark a notable improvement in our economic stability and demonstrate the effectiveness of our recent policy measures," he said.

Pakistan has made progress against terror financing: US assessment

WASHINGTON: (news desk) Pakistan has made substantial progress in countering terrorist financing and addressing regional extremist networks, a US State Department report states while also highlighting significant security challenges including a sharp rise in terrorist attacks in 2023. The report released this week commends Pakistan for completing its updated National Risk Assessment (NRA) on money laundering and terrorist

financing in 2023. This assessment evaluated 87 terrorist organisations, conducted sectoral vulnerability analyses, and identified donations and extortion as key funding sources for terrorism. According to the assessment, 41 groups remain active in Pakistan, leveraging cash couriers and illegal money transfer services. Porous borders with Afghanistan are flagged as critical vulnerabilities facilitating illicit financial flows.

The report notes that consistent with its commitment to relevant UN resolutions, Pakistan prosecutes its returning citizens who participated in foreign wars. "There were about 100 Pakistani nationals in northeast Syria" in 2023, it mentions. "To date, Pakistan has declined to repatriate any of its nationals," it adds. The State Department underscores Pakistan's efforts to disseminate the findings to law enforcement and other stakeholders,

directing them to implement targeted policy and operational priorities. Notably, Pakistan extradited a dual US-Pakistani citizen to the US in December to face prosecution for terrorism-related crimes. The US report notes that Pakistan collects biometric information at land crossings through its International Border Management Security System. The Customs Service attempted to enforce anti-money laundering laws and foreign exchange r



egulations at all major airports, in coordination with other agencies. In 2023, Pakistani customs managed the entry of dual-use chemicals

for legitimate purposes through end-use verification, while also attempting to prevent their diversion for use in IEDs.