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In the presence of H.H. Sheikh Hamed bin Zayed

Al Etihad Payments enters into strategic partnership with NPCI International Payments Limited to develop UAE Domestic Card Scheme

Abu Dhabi (09 October 2023): In the presence of His Highness Sheikh Hamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Al Etihad Payments (AEP), a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Central Bank of the UAE (CBUAE), and NPCI International Payments Limited (NIPL), have announced a strategic partnership to advance the development of the UAE's first national Domestic Card Scheme (DCS).

The agreement was exchanged between Saif Humaid Al Dhaheri, Assistant Governor – Strategy, Financial Infrastructure and Digital Transformation at CBUAE, and Dilip Asbe, Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer of NPCI, representing NPCI International Payments Limited.

As part of its Financial Infrastructure Transformation (FIT) programme introduced in 2023, CBUAE's launch of Al Etihad Payments aims to implement an innovative, interoperable, and enabling payments infrastructure allowing licensed financial institutions and payment service providers to further enhance customer experience through advanced payment solutions.

Scheduled to launch in early 2024, the DCS will aim to facilitate the growth of e-commerce and digital transactions in the UAE, bolster financial inclusion, support the nation's digitisation agenda, increase alternative payment options, reduce the cost of payments, and enhance the UAE's competitiveness and position as a global digital payments leader.

NIPL was commissioned for this initiative following a comprehensive selection process that gauged the capacity of its solution in meeting the needs of consumers and merchants, in addition to its ability to build an integrated financial infrastructure. NIPL will operate the DCS and provide fraud monitoring and data analysis support.

Commenting on the agreement, **His Excellency Khaled Mohamed Balama, Governor of CBUAE**, said: "The FIT programme, as well as the signing of this agreement, underscores CBUAE's commitment to accelerating the digital transformation of the financial sector and bolstering digital payments, in line with the ambitions of the UAE's leadership. The development of the DCS is an integral FIT initiative and an achievement in the payments space which seeks to support the growth of digital transactions and e-commerce whilst ensuring business continuity."

Saif Al Dhaheri, Assistant Governor – Strategy, Financial Infrastructure and Digital Transformation at CBUAE, said: "The establishment of a Domestic Card Scheme for the UAE is a momentous step towards achieving the nation's ambitious digital payments strategy, facilitating the transformation of the UAE's financial sector, fostering greater financial inclusion and strengthening the country's economic resilience. We are pleased to collaborate further with our counterparts in India and are confident that we have chosen the ideal partners to accomplish this venture with. We also look forward to establishing an innovation fund that will



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look to support the payment systems of India and the UAE, drive R&D, and foster the capabilities of UAE citizens to ensure their effective management of the DCS.”

Jan Pilbauer, CEO of AEP, said: “It is with great pride that we at AEP support the launch of the UAE DCS initiative under the guidance of the CBUAE and its strategic objectives, and in collaboration with the NIPL. Through the implementation of best-in-class technologies, we are enabling the UAE’s licensed financial institutions to offer consumers, merchants and all other stakeholders of the financial system a more robust payment infrastructure, underpinned by a commitment to facilitate the UAE’s digital ambitions.”

Ritesh Shukla, CEO of NPCI International Payments Limited (NIPL), said, “We are pleased to announce our collaboration with the Central Bank of the UAE and AI Etihad Payments. Together, we will work on building, implementing, and operationalising the UAE’s National Domestic Card Scheme. This partnership aligns perfectly with NIPL’s global mission to offer our knowledge and expertise to assist other countries in establishing their own cost effective and secure payment services. Our DCS solution is based on the principles of sovereignty, speed to market, innovation, digitisation, and strategic independence. We firmly believe that our track record of success, particularly in a dynamic market like India, positions us as the ideal partners for this promising endeavour.”

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