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COAS vows to enhance defense with self-reliance, latest technology

Says path to national progress is defined by indigenous, local industries like POF Wah

RAWALPINDI (APP): Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Syed Asim Munir on Tuesday paid a significant visit to the Pakistan Ordnance Factories (POF) in Wah, a crucial hub for the nation's defence production, the military said.

The visit aimed to gain insights into POF's production capabilities, its role in meeting the defence needs of the Pakistan Armed Forces, and its potential for export, according to a statement from the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR).

During his visit, the COAS was briefed on various aspects of POF's operations, including its contributions to the national defence through the devel-

opment and production of a wide range of military equipment.

The army chief had the opportunity to witness first-hand the testing and trials of indigenously designed and manufactured weapons and ammunition, showcasing the organisation's commitment to innovation and self-reliance.

Addressing the officers and staff of POF, Gen Munir applauded their dedicated efforts in bolstering the security and economy of Pakistan, emphasising the pivotal role of POF as the primary defence industry in the country. He acknowledged the significance of indigenous and local industries in the path to national progress.

"The path to national progress is defined by indigenous and local industries like POF Wah. We will continue to work for self-reliance and the adoption of the latest technology, which is essential towards ensuring reliability and strengthening the defence of Pakistan," remarked the army chief.

Gen Munir's visit highlighted the military's commitment to promoting self-sufficiency and technological advancement in the defence sector. The COAS emphasised the need for continuous efforts to enhance the capabilities of indigenous defence industries, aligning with the broader goal of ensuring Pakistan's defence is built on reliable and cutting-edge technology.



WAH: General Syed Asim Munir, NI (M), Chief of Army Staff (COAS) visits Pakistan Ordnance Factories (POF) Wah.

Inflation, poverty, unemployment our opponent in elections: Bilawal

Warns PML-N of fate similar to PTI in future

LARKANA (INP): Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari said that his party's competition is not with any political party or a politician in the elections 2024, but with inflation, poverty and unemployment.

Addressing a public gathering in Ratodero, Larkana, Bilawal said that the PPP will form a government that will be a people's government in real manner and take Pakistan out of the "constitutional and political crisis".

The PPP Chairman

asked the people of Larkana to elect him in the General Elections 2024, the way they did in 2018 as well.

"The people of Larkana always elected me and sent to the National Assembly. I have been raising your (people of Larkana) voice in the National Assembly to fulfil the expectations," he added.

The PPP chief said his party believes in democracy and dissolving the powers at provincial level through the National Finance Commission (NFC). He said that the PPP has been defend-

ing the constitution and the democratic system everywhere.

"The PPP fought against the forces that wanted to snatch the people's rights by forming one-unit," Bilawal added and said his party has failed the conspiracy hatched for the formation of one-unit.

Regarding the recent wave of terrorism in the country, he said that there is a political crisis in the country as we are facing terrorism from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) to Katcha area of Sindh.

PM meets US Special Climate Envoy as WEF annual meeting kicks off

ISLAMABAD (Online): The 54th Annual Meeting of the World Economic Forum has kicked off in Davos, Switzerland.

Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar is representing Pakistan at the forum.

The Prime Minister will attend three key thematic events: Preventing an Era of Global Conflicts, Restoring Faith in the Global System and Preventing Economic Fracture.

He will deliver a key note address on the theme Trade, Tax, Trillion Dollar Promise.

Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar will also hold meetings with government and business leaders on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum. Under the theme "Re-

building Trust", the event aims to reinforce and strengthen the fundamental principles of transparency, consistency and accountability among world leaders.

The annual meeting of the Forum will continue till Friday.

Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar on Tuesday met US Presidential Special Envoy on Climate John Kerry on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum.

During the meeting, they discussed the local and global impacts of climate change.

The two leaders also discussed the climate change related challenges being faced by the developing countries.



DAVOS: Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar meets U.S. Presidential special envoy on Climate John Kerry on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum.

Minister invites Qatari investors to invest in Karachi

KARACHI (APP): Sindh Caretaker Minister for Information, Minority Affairs and Social Security Muhammad Ahmad Shah, on Tuesday, invited investors of the state of Qatar to come forward and take benefit of investment opportunities available in the province.

He extended the invitation to the Consul General of the State of Qatar in Karachi, Nayef Shahein R.

Al-Sulaiti, who called on the caretaker minister here at Karachi, said a statement issued here.

Bilateral relations of Pakistan and Qatar, cooperation in various fields, measures to further extend the bilateral relations and cooperation, investment opportunities in the province and other matters of mutual interest came under discussion in the meeting.

Citizens whose enforced disappearance has been proved be presented at every cost: SHC

KARACHI (Online): Sindh High Court (SHC) has ordered interior secretary that the citizens whose enforced disappearance has been proved be presented in the court at every cost.

A single bench of SHC led by Justice Naimatullah Phulpoto took up petitions regarding recovery of missing persons for hearing Tuesday.

State counsel and Attorney General (AG) appeared in the court.

During the hearing of

the case the state counsel told the court enforced disappearance of both the citizens has been proved in JTI's meeting and investigations.

The court questioned the citizens are missing since so long period. Do something for them. What surfaced during investigation.

The investigation officer told the court Hafiz Farhan Qadri had gone missing earlier too. He went missing again in 2020.



LAHORE: Chief Organizer PML (N) Maryam Nawaz warmly welcome upon arrival at PP-159.

IGP inspires new police recruits at passing out parade

KARACHI (APP): Inspector General of Police (IGP) Sindh Riffat Mukhtar Raja graced the 116th Passing out Parade of Probationary Inspectors (Law) and the 120th Passing out Parade of Recruits at Shahid Hayat Police Training College Saeedabad.

The event celebrated the achievements of 845 police personnel, with 28 probationary inspectors (law) and 817 recruits, including 389 female recruits.

As the chief guest, IGP Sindh, announced by bugle, meticulously inspected the parade, acknowledging the dedication of the officers. During his address, he congratulated the passing-out officers, highlighting the rich legacy of the Sindh Police and the

challenges they face in maintaining law and order.

IGP Riffat Mukhtar Raja urged the new officers to uphold justice, tackle difficulties bravely, and emphasized the omnipresence of accountability. He reminded them of their commitment to justice and their oath to protect society from wrongdoing. Expressing pride in the new additions to the Sindh Police family, IGP Riffat Mukhtar Raja assured efforts to provide a conducive environment for upholding the rule of law. He pledged not to compromise on the honor and dignity of the department, advocating for officers' welfare and highlighting their crucial role as protectors of lives and property.



LARKANA: Chairman Pakistan People's Party Bilawal Bhutto Zardari addressing to Party workers Gathering at Bhutto House Naudero.

Govt to facilitate foreign investment in e-vehicle manufacturing: Younas

KARACHI (APP): Sindh Caretaker Minister for Revenue, Industries and Commerce Muhammad Younas Dagher on Tuesday, said that the government is determined to facilitate foreign investment in electrical vehicle manufacturing in the province.

He expressed the views in a meeting with a 10-member delegation of the Chinese Technology Group Genertec that called on the caretaker minister, said a statement issued here.

Provincial Secretary of Industries and Commerce Abdul Rasheed Solangi, Genertec's partner in Pakistan Tabani Group's Chief Executive Officer Hamza Tabani and others were also present on the occasion.

The minister informed the delegation that under CPEC, Pakistan has completed the project of generating more than 2,640 MW

of electricity in the Thar Coal Power Project.

He said that the Government of Sindh would welcome Genertec's cooperation and investment in setting up an electric vehicle manufacturing plant in the province and production of petroleum, gas and other products from Thar Coal reservoirs.

The head of the delegation Mr. Jin, briefing about his company informed that China General Technology Group (Genertec) is a Chinese state-owned conglomerate spanning the areas of machinery and advanced manufacturing, auto business, pharmaceuticals, and other technical fields with the best technical capabilities.

The company is providing various services in Indonesia, Bangladesh and CPEC member countries, he added.



ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Federal Minister for Information & Broadcasting and Parliamentary Affairs Murtaza Solangi addressing the two-day conference for Civic Hackathon "Problem Identification".

Sindh government implements 45-day weapon ban ahead of election

KARACHI (INP): In preparation for the upcoming General Election 2024, the Sindh government has enacted a 45-day prohibition on carrying and displaying weapons throughout the province.

This decision, made under section 144, comes in response to a request from Inspector General of Police (IGP) Sindh.

While the ban encompasses the general public, exceptions have been granted for the police, Pakistan Rangers Sindh, and law enforcement agencies.

Registered security guards are permitted to carry arms during duty, with the stipulation that weapons must remain inside vehicles during transportation in open surface vehicles, and their display is prohibited.

Station House Officers (SHOs) have been granted authority to register cases of violation. The ban, recommended by the police, aims to prevent any potential untoward incidents during the election period, as highlighted in the official notification.

ECP completes all preparations to hold elections on Feb 8

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has completed all preparations to hold polling for the National and Provincial assemblies next month.

While talking to state-run TV, ECP Spokesperson Syed Nadeem Haider urged the general public to exercise their right to vote on polling day. The spokesperson mentioned that election symbols have been allocated to the contesting candidates, and the ECP is set to start the printing of ballot papers.

PPP demands ROs' removal for 'denying' Arrow symbol

KARACHI (INP): Pakistan People's Party (PPP) demanded the Chief Election Commissioner to remove those Returning Officers (ROs) who have "not" allotted "Arrow" symbols to seven candidates of the party from Punjab for the General Elections 2024.

PPP's In-Charge Election Cell Taj Haider said that "injustice is being done with their party in Punjab. A pattern is emerged during the election schedule which is against the PPP," he added. Taj Haider said that the PPP has also written a letter to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) and demanded the removal of the concerned ROs.

The PPP In-Charge Election Cell said their candidates from two national and five provincial constituencies of Punjab were declared independents and have been issued different symbols instead of the party's traditional "Arrow".



KARACHI: Mayor Karachi, Barrister Murtaza Wahab chairs the meeting of Land Department.

Sindh CM 'distressed' over surge in crimes

KARACHI (APP): Caretaker Sindh Chief Minister Justice (ret'd) Maqbool Baqar on Tuesday expressed his distress over the surge in crimes in both urban and rural areas of the province, with "the law enforcement apparatus continues to be complacent".

The chief minister, in a letter to the Inspector General of Police and Director General of Rangers, said he was distressed over "the surge in crimes in the major cities and rural areas which include robbery, murder, rape, kidnapping, drug trafficking, impersonation, mobile snatching, targeted killing, and extortion

among other serious crimes. The newspapers and electronic media abound with reports of incidents of the above crimes."

Baqar said that in the wake of upcoming general elections, there had been multiple reports of attacks on the candidates, "who in a few cases have even been kidnapped in broad daylight". "The most vulnerable segments of our society, that is, women, children, and the elderly have borne a disproportionate brunt of these crimes. Journalists, lawyers, doctors, businessmen, and other professionals face a bigger threat to their lives and property.



MASHHAD: Officials receiving Sindh Governor, Kamran Khan Tessori on his arrival at Mashhad Airport.

Mayor Karachi directs Land dept to get rid of encroachments of KMC lands

KARACHI (APP): The Mayor Karachi Barrister Dil Muhammad, Financial Advisor Imtiaz Abro, Director Land Sabah-ul-Islam and other officers were also present on the occasion.

The Mayor Karachi said that due to the cases pending in the courts related to KMC land, recovery is decreasing and it would be better that people do not destroy institutions and the city for the sake of personal business, the officers of the Land Department should formulate a strategy in consultation with the Law Department and records required in various cases should be presented on the hearing of the cases, issue special instructions to the concerned staff for this.

Maryam pledges to work 'day and night' for public's welfare

LAHORE (INP): Maryam Nawaz, Chief Organizer of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), on Wednesday declared that February 8 will resound with the roar of the "lion", her party's election symbol.

Addressing a rally in Lahore's Gajju Matta, Maryam expressed gratitude for the warm reception, stating, "Gajju Matta, I thank you wholeheartedly for your overwhelming welcome."

CPPA seeks increase in power tariff by Rs 5.62 per unit

KARACHI (Online): Preparations have been made to drop one more electricity bombshell on people.

According to sources Central Power Purchasing Agency (CPPA) has sent application to National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (NEPRA) seeking increase in power tariff by Rs 5.62 per unit.

CPPA has given this application to NEPRA under head of Fuel Price Adjustment for the month of December. NEPRA said hearing of CPPA will be held on January 31.

Naqvi inspects upgradation of LGH, Ganga Ram hospital

Independent Report
LAHORE: Punjab Caretaker Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi inspected the upgradation work of Ganga Ram Hospital and Lahore General Hospital (LGH) at late night for 3 hours.

Upon noticing the sewerage line running through the hospital's verandah, the CM called the MD WASA, directing the immediate relocation of the line to an alternative site, said a handout issued here on Tuesday.

Emphasising the importance of fostering a green environment, he insisted on the plantation of samplings and landscaping in the vacant

hospital space. CM Naqvi issued a firm directive to ensure the completion of the upgradation work by Jan 31, without any compromise.

Recognizing the urgency of the situation, particularly in the case of LGH emergency services, he stressed that every moment is crucial, and the deadline must be strictly adhered to.

Providing an overview of the ongoing efforts, CM Naqvi highlighted that the upgradation work spans an impressive six lakh square feet. He acknowledged the simultaneous commencement of various

projects aimed at enhancing the overall condition of the hospitals.

Expressing dedication to completing the projects before the stipulated deadline, he underscored the commitment to ensuring public convenience.

The CM affirmed his involvement in monitoring the progress of the undertaken tasks, reinforcing his commitment to the successful completion of the hospital upgradation projects.

Provincial Ministers Dr Javed Akram, Amir Mir, secretary health, secretary C&W, secretary tourism, commissioner and others were present.



MULTAN: Caretaker Chief Minister Punjab Mohsin Naqvi unveiling the plaque to inaugurate the Revamping of Children Hospital Emergency, OPD & Pathology blocks during his visit.

KP becomes first province imposing ban on sale of e-cigarettes to minors

Independent Report

PESHAWAR: In a landmark development, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has imposed section 144 to ban the storage, sale and use of e-cigarettes and vapes to minors and within the vicinity of educational institutions in the province.

"The decision has been taken in wake of the alarming increase in the use of electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes) and vaping devices particularly among children and youth in the province," reads an official notification issued here on Tuesday by the Home and Tribal Affairs Department

of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The concern over increasing use of e-cigarettes and vapes is heightened due to the presence of nicotine in these products which is a highly addictive substance, reads the order.

The use of e-cigarettes and vapes poses significant health risks, especially to children, youth and women (pregnant) as it can lead to addiction and other serious health issues. In response to these concerns and to safeguard the health and well-being of our citizens, especially the younger generation.

2 bandits killed, 4 escaped in alleged police encounter

LAHORE (Online): 2 people died and 4 were escaped in alleged police encounter in Shadbagh.

According to police, with the help of Qasim and Riyaz associates, the dead accused escaped by snatching the official rifle from the police custody.

According to police, while searching for fleeing robbers, 6 people on 2 motorcycles were signalled to stop when the accused opened the fire. During the exchange of fire, the accused were killed by their accomplices while 4 accused were escaped.

Meeting discusses matters relating to PHA Mega city

PESHAWAR (APP): Provincial Caretaker Minister for Relief and Rehabilitation, Justice @ Irshad Qaisar chaired a meeting and discussed matters relating to Pakhtunkhwa Housing Authority (PHA) Mega City.

The meeting was also attended by Caretaker Minister, Dr. Aamir Abdullah, CM's advisor, Ashfaq Khan, Secretary Housing and concerned officials.

The meeting discussed observations

being made during the site visit of PHA Mega City. The meeting was informed that concerned land could be used for housing purposes according to the land revenue laws of KP province.

It was said that 1750 kanal land has been acquired for phase I and allotment of 3434 plots has been done. The meeting was informed that appropriate measures have been taken to prevent flooding and private sector has been involved for investment in the mega housing scheme.



KARACHI: Female police march during the passing-out ceremony at Saeedabad Police Training Centre, in Provincial Capital.

Muslim Hands, AIOU Mirpur hosts capacity building workshop

MIRPUR (AJK (APP): Regional Campus of Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) Mirpur here on Tuesday hosted a day-long capacity building workshop, in collaboration with Muslim Hands International (MHI).

According to AIOU official details, MHI UK-based distinguished NGO with established roots in Pakistan and AJK raising awareness among the masses about the significance of plantation for earning and livelihood in this era of rising dearth and price hikes.

The workshop, led by renowned resource person Dr. Tayyaba Kanwal, provided participants with insights into the cultivation

process, including soil preparation, nurturing, caring, and growth of plants aimed at generating income.

Dr. Tayyaba Kanwal actively engaged participants in hands-on activities, emphasizing the practical aspects of the successful plantation. Discussions included techniques for cultivating Seeds, soil preparation, and the nurturing process crucial for plant growth, aligning with AIOU's commitment to sustainable income sources.

The Chief Guest, Imran Sadiq Malik, commended AIOU Mirpur for its efforts in promoting plantation initiatives in AJK.



LAHORE: Labourers are busy in construction work of Sagian Road with the help of heavy machinery in the Provincial Capital.

10 developmental schemes worth Rs 11.941b approved

LAHORE (APP): Provincial Development Working Party, Punjab, (PDWP) has approved ten developmental schemes of the SHC&ME, RP and literacy sectors with an estimated cost of Rs 11941.6 million.

The schemes were approved in the 42nd PDWP meeting of current financial year, chaired by Planning and Development Board (P&D Board) Chairman Iftikhar Ali Sahoo here Tuesday. The Board Secretary Muzaffar Khan Sial, all the P&D Board members, Provincial secretaries of departments

concerned and other senior representatives attended the meeting. Approved schemes are as follows:

Program for Strategic Transformation / Revamping of old Blocks of Aziz Bhatti Shaheed Hospital Gurjat at the cost of Rs 769.998 million; Program for Strategic Transformation / Revamping of old blocks of ex-DHQS (DHQ Hospital, Sargodha) at the cost of Rs 827.045 million; Program for Strategic Transformation / Revamping of old blocks 351 of ex-DHQS (Rahim Yar Khan, Gujranwala.

Pakistan Army, FC organizes medical camps

PESHAWAR (APP): In response to the onset of winter, the Pakistan Army and Frontier Corps North organized free medical camps in various areas including Bajaur, Mohmand, Khyber, Swat, Dir, Buner, and Chitral.

At these free medical camps, doctors and nursing staff conducted over seven thousand free medical examinations, providing essential medications to the patients, said officials here on Tuesday.

Some cases requiring further treatment were referred to relevant district hospitals.

In addition to medical care, healthcare professionals at the camps raised awareness among the residents about seasonal illnesses.

The initiative, led by the Pakistan Army and Frontier Corps, aims to continue providing health facilities to remote areas through free medical camps.

IGP review up-gradation work of Special Initiative Police Station Civil Lines

RAWALPINDI (APP): Inspector General of Police (IGP) Punjab Dr Usman Anwar here on Tuesday visited Special Initiative Police Station Civil Lines and reviewed its up-gradation work.

He directed the officers concerned to complete all the projects within the stipulated time frame.

Regional Police Officer Rawalpindi Syed Khuram Ali, City Police

Officer, Rawalpindi Syed Khalid Hamdani and other senior officers were present on the occasion.

The IGP inspected different parts of the police station and appreciated its up-gradation work in a short span of time. Rawalpindi police officers briefed the IGP regarding ongoing projects. All projects should be completed as soon as possible, the IGP directed the authorities.

International News

UK announces biggest deployment to Nato exercises in decades

Monitoring Desk
LONDON: Britain will send 20,000 armed forces personnel to one of Nato's largest exercises since the Cold War, Defence Secretary Grant Shapps announced on Monday, warning of increasing threats to the Western-led alliance.

The deployment, which Shapps characterised as the UK's biggest to Nato in four decades, is aimed at "providing vital reassurance" over the "menace" posed by Russian President Vladimir Putin following his invasion of Ukraine, Shapps said.

The British personnel — from the Royal Air Force, Royal Navy and

Army — will be deployed across Europe and beyond for the military alliance's latest "Exercise Steadfast Defender", alongside personnel from 31 other member countries and Sweden, which is a candidate to join the transatlantic alliance.

"Today's Nato is bigger than ever but the challenges are bigger too," Shapps said in a wide-ranging speech in London, in which he warned "the international rules-based order" was facing rising dangers.

"And that's why the UK has committed... the totality of our air, land and maritime assets to NATO", he went on.

"In 2024 I am deter-

mined to do even more and that's why I can announce today the UK will send in some 20,000 personnel to lead one of Nato's largest deployments since the end of the Cold War."

The UK contingent will include fighter jets and surveillance aircraft, the navy's most advanced warships and submarines, and a full range of army capabilities, including special operations forces.

London will send a so-called Carrier Strike Group — which features its flagship aircraft carrier and F-35B fighter jets and helicopters — to the exercises in the North Atlantic, Norwegian Sea and Baltic Sea.

Big win in Iowa moves Donald Trump closer to Biden re-match

Monitoring Desk
WASHINGTON: Donald Trump romped to a landslide victory on Monday in Iowa's caucuses — the first vote in the US presidential race — cementing his status as the presumptive Republican standard-bearer to challenge US President Joe Biden in November's election.

The former president has led polling for more than a year, but the contest offered the clearest insight yet into his ability to convert that advantage into a stunning White House return.

Major US networks took just half an hour to call the race, with Trump taking 51 per cent of the vote and opening an unprecedented 30-point gap over Ron DeSantis — the biggest victory for an Iowa challenger in modern history.

The Florida governor and Trump's other main rival — former UN ambassador Nikki Haley — were locked at 21 and 19pc respectively.



Britain's Prime Minister Rishi Sunak delivers a ministerial statement in the House of Commons, in London, Britain.

Yemen's Houthis say they will target US ships

CAIRO (Internews): The Yemeni Houthi movement will expand its targets to include U.S. ships, an official from the Iran-allied group said on Monday.

"The ship doesn't necessarily have to be heading to Israel for us to target it; it is enough for it to be American," Nasruddeen Amer, a spokesperson for the Houthis, told Al Jazeera.

"The United States is on the verge of losing its maritime security," Amer also said British and American ships had become "legitimate targets" due to the strikes launched

by the two countries on Yemen last week.

Attacks on ships since October by the Houthis, who say they are acting in solidarity with Palestinians, have hit commerce and alarmed major powers in a regional escalation of Israel's more than three-month war with Hamas militants in Gaza.

In the latest apparent attack, a U.S.-owned bulk carrier was reportedly struck by a missile near Yemen's port of Aden, causing a fire in a hold but no injuries on board, according to British Maritime Security firm Ambrey.

One dead, 12 injured in rammings; Israel arrests students in West Bank

Monitoring Desk
NABLUS: Apparently coordinated car-rammings in central Israel on Monday, claimed the life of a woman and injured 12 other people, police and medical officials said, as tensions soared over the more than three-month-old Israeli bombing of the Gaza Strip.

Police described the incident in Raanana, north of Tel Aviv, as a terrorist attack and said two suspects were under arrest.

Major storm hits French territory in Indian Ocean

Monitoring Desk
SAINT REUNION: Hundreds of thousands of people on France's Reunion Island were confined to their homes on Monday, as authorities issued the highest alert for a potentially devastating storm.

Cyclone Belal hit the French Indian Ocean island on Monday, moving in from the northwest packing "extreme winds", according to Meteo-France. "The eye of the storm is passing over the Reunion Island, starting from the northern part."

Iran's Revolutionary Guards attack Israel's 'spy HQ' in Iraq

DUBAI/BAGHDAD (Internews): Iran's Revolutionary Guards said they attacked the spy headquarters of Israel in Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdistan region, state media reported late on Monday, while the elite force said they also struck in Syria against the Islamic State.

The strikes come amid concerns about the escalation of a conflict that has spread through the Middle East since the war between Israel and Palestinian Islamist group Hamas began on Oct. 7, with Iran's allies also entering the fray from Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Yemen.

"In response to the recent atrocities of the Zionist regime, causing the killing of commanders of the Guards and the Axis of Resistance... one of the main Mossad espionage headquarters in Iraq's Kurdistan region was destroyed with ballistic mis-

siles," the Guards said in a statement.

Israeli government officials could not immediately be reached for comment.

In addition to the strikes at northeast of Kurdistan's capital Erbil in a residential area near the U.S. consulate, the Guards said they "fired a number of ballistic missiles in Syria and destroyed the perpetrators of terrorist operations" in Iran, including the Islamic State.

Islamic State claimed responsibility for two explosions in Iran this month that killed nearly 100 people and wounded scores at a memorial for top commander Qassem Soleimani.

"We assure our nation that the Guards' offensive operations will continue until avenging the last drops of martyrs' blood," the Guards' statement said.

Commerzbank merger talk resurfaces as Germany mulls company sales, sources say

Monitoring Desk
LONDON: Five years after Deutsche Bank (DBKGN.DE) and Commerzbank (CBKGD.DE) aborted an attempt to merge, an uncertain outlook for bank profitability and Germany's need to plug a hole in its budget have rekindled speculation about a potential deal.

Germany has said it is looking at all options to raise funds by selling stakes in some of the 100 or more companies it owns.

Though a sale of its remaining 15% holding in Commerzbank is not imminent, Finance Minister Christian Lindner is open to a disposal and ultimately would prefer the government exiting the stake, according to a person familiar with his thinking.

A merger with Commerzbank would allow

Deutsche Bank to further diversify away from volatile investment banking earnings, bolstering its longer-term stability, another factor that could sway the German government, said the person, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Deutsche Bank, which has completed the bulk of a multi-year restructuring plan, has recently stepped up internal discussions on deals, including possible purchases of banks such as Commerzbank and ABN Amro, Bloomberg News reported on Friday, without naming sources.

Deutsche Bank in recent months has come closer to reopening the idea of a merger with Commerzbank, even if there are no live discussions, a second person with knowledge of the situation has told Reuters.



Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Head of the Ukrainian President's Office Andriy Yermak arrive for the meeting with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken (not pictured) during the 54th annual meeting of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.

Saudi Arabia could recognise Israel if Palestinian issue resolved: foreign minister

Monitoring Desk
DAVOS: Saudi Arabia's foreign minister said on Tuesday the kingdom could recognise Israel if a comprehensive agreement were reached that included statehood for the Palestinians.

"We agree that regional peace includes peace for Israel, but that could only happen through peace for the Palestinians through a Palestinian state," Prince Faisal bin

Farhan told a panel at the World Economic Forum in Davos.

Asked if Saudi Arabia would then recognise Israel as part of a wider political agreement, he said: "Certainly," Prince Faisal said securing regional peace through the creation of a Palestinian state was "something we have been indeed working on with the US administration, and it is more relevant in the context of Gaza".

The Florida governor and Trump's other main rival — former UN ambassador Nikki Haley — were locked at 21 and 19pc respectively.

