

## INTERNATIONAL

## World should be alarmed if New START treaty expires

## Russia's Medvedev warns

REUTERS, Moscow

Dmitry Medvedev, deputy chairman of Russia's Security Council, said that if the New START treaty expired with no replacement then the world should be alarmed that the biggest nuclear powers had no limits for probably the first time since early 1970s.

The New START treaty, signed in 2010 by US President Barack Obama and Medvedev, who served as Russia's president from 2008 to 2012, limited the number of deployed strategic nuclear warheads to 1,550 on each side.

It is due to expire on February 5 and Russian officials have said they have had no official response from Washington on a proposal from President Vladimir Putin to stick to existing missile and warhead limits for one more year.



"I don't want to say that this immediately means a catastrophe and a nuclear war will begin, but it should still alarm everyone," Medvedev told Reuters, TASS and the WarGonzo Russian war blogger in an interview at his residence outside Moscow.

"The (doomsday) clocks are ticking and they obviously have to speed up," he said. Medvedev gives a sense of hardliners' thinking within the Russian elite, according to foreign diplomats.

In January, US President Donald Trump indicated he would allow the treaty to expire. "If it expires, it expires," Trump said in an interview with the New York Times. "We'll just do a better agreement."

Arms control treaties, Medvedev said, played a crucial role not just in limiting the number of warheads, but also as a way to verify intentions and to ensure some element of trust between major nuclear powers.



Smoke rises from the site of an Israeli airstrike on a building in the southern Lebanese village of Ain Qana yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

## Iran president orders start of talks with US

## Trump hopeful of a deal with Tehran

AGENCIES

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian has ordered the start of nuclear talks with the United States, the news agency Fars reported yesterday.

"Iran and the United States will hold talks on the nuclear file," Fars said, without specifying a date. The report was also carried by the government newspaper Iran and the reformist daily Shargh.

Earlier in the day, Iranian foreign ministry spokesperson Esmail Baghaei said that details of various diplomatic processes to manage tensions with the US are being examined by Iran, adding that Tehran hoped for results in the coming days.

Amid a military buildup by the US Navy near Iran, US President Donald Trump told reporters last week that Iran was "seriously talking" with Washington, hours after Tehran's top security official Ali Larijani said on X that arrangements for negotiations were underway.

"Regional countries are the go-between for messages that have

been exchanged. Various points have been exchanged and we are currently deciding and examining the details of each diplomatic process that we hope will bring results in coming days," Baghaei said.

## Iran summons EU diplomats over IIRGC terror label

## Top US, Israeli generals meet at Pentagon amid tensions

## Iran protester Erfan Soltani released on bail

"This pertains to the process and framework of (talks)," he said, adding that Iran did not receive any "ultimatum" from Trump on negotiations.

On Sunday and yesterday, "representatives of all EU member

states that have an embassy in Tehran were summoned to the foreign ministry", after the EU's designation of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as a terrorist group, Baghaei said. "This is the smallest of measures" before other moves are announced, he told a foreign ministry press briefing.

Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on Sunday likened the recent protests to a "coup", warning that a US attack would trigger a broad conflict. Asked about the Iranian leader's warning, Trump told reporters: "Of course he is going to say that."

"Hopefully we'll make a deal. If we don't make a deal, then we'll find out whether or not he was right," he said.

The top US and Israeli generals held talks at the Pentagon on Friday, two US officials told Reuters yesterday, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The officials did not offer details about the closed door discussions between US General Dan Caine, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Eyal Zamir.

## Turmoil offers reset opportunity

## Says WHO chief on US withdrawal

AFP, Geneva

The head of the World Health Organization (WHO) said yesterday that the dramatic cuts of 2025 as the United States headed for the exit created the chance to build a leaner, re-focused WHO.

Washington, traditionally the UN health agency's biggest donor, has slashed foreign aid spending under President Donald Trump, who on his first day back in office in January 2025 handed the WHO his country's one-year notice of withdrawal.

WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told the agency's annual executive board meeting that 2025 was "undeniably one of the most difficult years in our organisation's history", with many donors tightening their belts.

## Pakistan security forces hunt militants

## 22 more killed in different areas of Balochistan

REUTERS, Quetta

Pakistani soldiers were yesterday hunting down separatist militants who stormed schools, banks, and security installations, killing nearly 50 people, in a series of coordinated attacks across southwestern Balochistan province, the military said.

The attacks at the weekend brought Pakistan's largest province to a near standstill as the separatist Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) struck nearly a dozen targets in one of their largest ever operations, killing 17 security officials and 31 civilians.

Pakistan's military has killed 177 BLA fighters in three days of fighting, the interior ministry said yesterday.

Pakistan's government and military have said the group has received support from India, threatening to escalate hostilities between the nuclear-powered neighbours who engaged in their worst armed conflict in decades in May.

Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi said 22 more militants had been killed overnight in different areas of Balochistan, taking the total to 177.

"Security forces, police and intelligence agencies thwarted the nefarious intentions of terrorists by taking timely and effective action," Naqvi said in a statement.

## Rafah crossing to allow 50 people in each way

## Egyptian media reports after key Gaza border reopens

AFP, Rafah



Gaza's key Rafah border crossing was reopened to Palestinians yesterday, an Israeli security official said, but Egyptian state-linked media said only 50 people would be allowed to cross in each direction in the early days.

The resumption of operations comes after Israeli forces seized control of the gateway to Egypt in May 2024 during the war with Hamas.

A partial resumption of operations began on Sunday in a tightly restricted pilot phase that did not involve travel of people, following months of appeals from aid groups.

"As of this time, and following the arrival of the EUBAM teams on behalf of the European Union, the Rafah crossing has now opened to the movement of residents, for both entry and exit," the Israeli official said. Egyptian state-linked media reported that 50 people were expected to cross in each direction in the first days of the reopening.

## Latest Epstein file dump rocks UK royals, politics

AFP, London

Britain's former prince Andrew, his ex-wife Sarah Ferguson and a career Labour politician were yesterday thrust back into the eye of the Jeffrey Epstein storm, as shocking, often intimate emails with the late sex offender rocked political and royal circles.

The cache of documents included multiple emails between notable UK figures and Epstein, often revealing warm relations, illicit financial dealings and private photos.

The fallout continued yesterday, with Prime Minister Keir Starmer's spokesperson saying Peter Mandelson, the UK's former

ambassador to the United States, should be stripped of his membership of the House of Lords, Britain's upper chamber of parliament.

Starmer has also ordered an inquiry into Mandelson's contacts with Epstein, after allegations that he passed a confidential government memo to the disgraced financier.

## Right-winger elected Costa Rica president

AFP, San José

Right-wing political scientist Laura Fernandez won Costa Rica's presidential election on Sunday by a landslide, after promising to crack down on rising violence linked to the cocaine trade.

Fernandez's nearest rival, center-right economist Alvaro Ramos, conceded defeat as results showed the ruling party far exceeding the threshold of



40 percent needed to avoid a run-off.

With 94 percent of polling stations counted, the political heir of outgoing President Rodrigo Chaves had captured 48.3 percent of the vote compared to Ramos's 33.4 percent, according to the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE).

As soon as the first results were announced, members of Fernandez's Sovereign People's party erupted in celebrations around the country, waving blue, red and white-striped Costa Rican flags.

## US, India reach trade agreement

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reciprocal tariff imposed on India during his waves of global "Liberation Day" tariffs last year from 25 percent to 18 percent.

A White House official told AFP that an additional 25 percent tariff Trump had slapped on India for its purchase of Russian oil in August would also be dropped.

Trump added that Modi "agreed to stop buying Russian Oil, and to buy much more from the United States and, potentially, Venezuela. This will help END THE WAR in Ukraine."

The United States is effectively overseeing Venezuelan oil exports since toppling the South American country's leader, Nicolas Maduro, in a military operation in January.

Trump called Modi "one of my greatest friends"

and said they spoke about "many things" including trade and ending Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Modi was one of the first leaders to visit the White House after Trump's inauguration for his second term in January 2025, but that did not stop difficult trade negotiations over the past year.

Russian oil has been the major hurdle.

As recently as December, Russian President Vladimir Putin during a visit to New Delhi that he was ready to continue "uninterrupted shipments" of fuel to India despite US pressure.

Trump also said in October that Modi had promised to stop buying Russian oil, but an agreement did not materialize at the time.

"Wonderful to speak with my dear friend President Trump today.

Delighted that Made in India products will now have a reduced tariff of 18 percent," Modi said in a post on X yesterday.

The Indian leader, however, made no mention of oil sales.

India emerged as a major buyer of Russian oil after the start of the Ukraine war, providing Moscow with a crucial export market as Europe sharply reduced purchases.

In 2024, Russia supplied nearly 36 percent of India's total crude imports, around 1.8 million barrels of discounted oil per day.

Modi added that "President Trump's leadership is vital for global peace, stability, and prosperity."

Trump has repeatedly claimed credit for ending the brief but intense armed conflict between nuclear-armed neighbours India and Pakistan in May.

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