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Plane Carrying Yevgeny Prigozhin Crashes in Russia

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ostorozhno_novosti / Telegram

A plane carrying Wagner mercenary chief Yevgeny Prigozhin has crashed northwest of Moscow, Russia's emergencies ministry said Wednesday.

The apparent death of the Kremlin-linked businessman, whose mercenary forces had taken on a leading role in the war on Ukraine, comes nearly two months after his aborted revolt against Russia's military leadership.

Authorities initially said that all 10 people on board the private Embraer Legacy jet were killed when it crashed near the Tver region village of Kuzhenkino.

Russia's state aviation agency Rosaviatsia published the flight manifest confirming Prigozhin was among the individuals on board the plane.

Prigozhin's name appeared alongside that of Dmitry Utkin, believed to have played a crucial role as a co-founder and top commander within the Wagner mercenary group.

Five other passengers and three crew were also on board.

Interfax later reported that search operations have ended and the bodies of all 10 people on board have been recovered from the wreckage, citing a source in the emergency services.

The cause of the crash remains unknown.

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Russia's Investigative Committee has opened a criminal case on violation of traffic safety rules and the operation of air transport after the plane crash, RIA Novosti said, adding that an investigation team was sent to the crash site.

The Wagner-linked Grey Zone Telegram channel claimed the plane had been shot down by the Russian military's air defense systems, but this information could not be verified.

A Russian government official, speaking on condition of anonymity, told The Moscow Times that they believe neither the fact of the crash nor its location were a coincidence.

"Not far from the president's residence in Valdai, there are four divisions of S-300 PMU1s [missile defense systems] guarding the sky," the source said. "On June 24 — a march on Moscow. And on August 24 — two missiles. It all adds up."

"Look how it was falling — it was shot down just like that. The plane just fell out of the sky," the source added.

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Independent journalist Andrei Zakharov, citing an unnamed source, said Prigozhin on Wednesday was returning to Russia from a trip in Africa, where Wagner mercenaries have operated for years and where Prigozhin was recently filmed for a recruitment video.

"It would be a miracle if he's on another plane," the source said.

Prigozhin's press secretary declined to comment on the incident, Russian journalist Ksenia Sobchak reported.

"It's a completely clear message to all the elites, to anyone who had any subversive thoughts about the direction of the special military operation, and [other thoughts] in general," Sobchak said in a Telegram post.

A photo published by the Bumaga news website showed the windows of the PMC Wagner Center, the mercenary group's headquarters in St. Petersburg, lit up in the shape of a cross.

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In June, a mutiny led by Prigozhin plunged Russia into its most serious security crisis in decades. The Wagner chief eventually abandoned his march on Moscow, where he sought to

overthrow the country's military leadership, as part of a last-ditch deal that offered him immunity from criminal prosecution.

On Tuesday, Prigozhin appeared on video recruiting new fighters for deployment in Africa, however, the exact location of where the video was filmed was unknown.

The Kremlin has yet to comment on the crash.

As the news broke, President Vladimir Putin was attending an event commemorating the 80th anniversary of the Soviet victory in the Battle of Kursk during World War II.

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