

[Transcript] Global News Podcast / Wagner's Yevgeny Prigozhin presumed dead in plane crash

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This is the Global News Podcast from the BBC World Service. I'm Alex Ritzen and in the early hours of Thursday the 24th of August these are our main stories. The world reacts to the suspected assassination of the warlord many Russians called a dead man walking as Wagner boss Yevgeny Prigozhin

is said to have been among those killed in a plane crash. We follow responses from Moscow and Kiev as Joe Biden gives his opinion from the US.

There's not much that happens in Russia. I don't know enough to know the answer to that. And Donald Trump's former lawyer is booked on charges of a conspiracy to overturn the result of the 2020 presidential election in Georgia. Also in this podcast Romanian prosecutors share graphic evidence with the BBC related to their case against controversial online influencer Andrew Tate and both will be sentenced at a later date for acting the court heard as digital bandits. The British teenagers who took on big tech swindling money using TVs and fire sticks. He went from being one of Vladimir Putin's closest allies to his arch enemy and now Yevgeny Prigozhin could be dead in an incident that unfolded exactly two months after he launched his failed attempt at a mutiny by marching on Moscow. There's a lot we still don't know but what we do know is that a private jet owned by a company associated with this to Prigozhin, the head of the Wagner mercenary group, crashed near Moscow. Ten people were on board and ten bodies have been found. Video shows the plane falling abruptly out of the sky and a fiery wreckage. The Russian civil aviation authority has said that according to the plane's operator Prigozhin was on board along with his number two Dmitry Udkin. The crash was announced without fanfare on the Russian state-owned news channel Rosya 24. A social media account linked to the Wagner group has alleged the jet was shot down by Russian air defense. It blamed traitors. Vitaly Shevchenko, Russia editor at BBC Monitoring, is following developments and told me more. The latest we have is that the search operation at the site of the crash is over. Ten bodies recovered. We have a statement published by a key telegram account believed to be linked to Wagner

which said that both Yevgeny Prigozhin and his right hand Dmitry Udkin are dead.

What we don't have is any official word on whether Yevgeny Prigozhin was actually on board that flight because the mere fact that his name was on the list of people traveling on board that plane doesn't mean he was there. But there is an increasing amount of unsourced reports coming from various websites, social media accounts, reasonably credible public figures in Russia saying that Yevgeny Prigozhin is dead. And the suggestion from Wagner Associates that it may have been shot down by Russian air defense missiles? Yes, this is what has been claimed by another account that we believe is linked to Wagner and also I've seen a number of videos filmed by eyewitnesses who took out their phones and started filming this plane tumbling out of the sky spinning out of control and some of them said they had heard two explosions and then they jumped to the conclusion that this aircraft had been shot out of the sky. This, however, is entirely unconfirmed and speculative. But of course, given what Yevgeny Prigozhin did back in June when he mounted his brief and unsuccessful mutiny against Russia's top military commanders, of course a lot of people

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believed that he was a dead man walking and what he did was completely unforgivable in the eyes of the Kremlin. So he lived and borrowed time in the eyes of those people. So there's rife speculation about how Vladimir Putin may have exacted vengeance. But again, that's all unconfirmed

at the moment. Yeah, because Prigozhin primarily criticized the military leaders and Sergei Shoigu, the Defense Secretary. How will Vladimir Putin be feeling? Well, after that mutiny, it's clear that Vladimir Putin's authority has suffered. When his top military commanders were challenged that way, of course, he needed to take action. So a lot of people are saying now that Vladimir Putin may have taken action now. Vitaly Shevchenko. So how did Yevgeny Prigozhin rise to such influence in Russia and to lead a mercenary group with a presence in many countries? Our analysis editor, Ross Atkins, has more on his story. Yevgeny Prigozhin took an unorthodox route to a powerful position in Russia. In 1981, he was sent to prison for robbery and theft. And when released in 1990, he became a hot dog salesman in St Petersburg. But by 1997, he was running a

top restaurant and winning lucrative catering contracts. Those brought connections to the top. Prigozhin even served food to world leaders and to Putin himself. And Prigozhin's role was becoming

about much more than food. In 2014, Russia annexed Crimea and launched an insurgency in eastern Ukraine. Prigozhin was involved. Of that time, he said a group of patriots was born, which later acquired the name Wagner Battalion. And soon, the Wagner group reached far beyond Ukraine. The FBI accused Prigozhin of interfering in the 2016 US election. In Syria, Wagner fighters supported

pro-government forces. More recently, there are multiple reports of Wagner's military and commercial

activity in Africa, with the EU accusing the group of committing torture and extrajudicial summary or arbitrary executions and killings. And then came the war. When Putin wanted to give his invasion of Ukraine impetus, Prigozhin and his fighters were called in. But as Wagner's death toll grew, so did Prigozhin's fury, expressed first in video rants and then in a short-lived mutiny. In the aftermath, Putin condemned the mutineers and traitors. But for Prigozhin, charges were dropped. No arrest followed. And we asked, why wasn't Putin punishing Prigozhin? Perhaps he was biding his time.

Ross Atkins. In Moscow, this is how people on the street reacted.

It's a tragedy that the plane crashed. That means there were casualties.

Well, it was to be expected, because some of the things Prigozhin did or didn't do,

I don't know, but we think he did. They should be punished. Not necessarily by the main man in this country, could be someone else. He had a lot of enemies, as far as I know.

We're worried about everyone, our heart's ache for everyone in the world.

From there, our reporter Will Vernon has this analysis.

I don't think this news has surprised anyone here today. Around an hour after that plane crash, the Russian Federal Aviation Authority, Ross Aviatia, released a statement confirming that Yevgeny Prigozhin's name was on the passenger manifest of that plane.

And that is very fast for that particular agency. Ross Aviatia usually takes much longer to respond to incidents like this. And that already raised a few eyebrows here.

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Because after all, speculation has been swirling for some time now, just exactly about what fate would await Yevgeny Prigozhin.

When Yevgeny Prigozhin launched his mutiny exactly two months ago, his Wagner mercenaries seized a major Russian city and even marched on Moscow. You know, that was a major humiliation for the Kremlin. And Vladimir Putin is not the kind of man to forget that.

So I think if Yevgeny Prigozhin was killed in that plane crash today, which seems likely, I think that will come as no shock whatsoever to most people here.

In fact, I think most people will probably be surprised that it didn't happen sooner.

Now, we don't know what exactly caused that crash. Russian media are saying that investigators are looking into a number of different possibilities, including what they're calling external actions. Will Vernon in Moscow. In the Ukrainian capital, Kiev, people said they were not surprised by the reports and that they would not mourn Yevgeny Prigozhin's death.

This news brings only happiness. I want more news like this. It would make things much easier for Ukraine. I believe he staged his death in order to flee, so that no one knows where he's hiding. I don't think it'll change anything at the front line, but it will probably live spirits, though it's nice to know that there's one less plane out there and 10 less Russians.

A Ukraine correspondent, James Waterhouse, told us more about the reaction there so far.

In the absence of a complete military victory for Ukraine, which has long been in the balance, a collapse of the Russian regime has been seen as another hope for a way out of this full-scale invasion. During the Yevgeny Prigozhin's failed arm mutiny in June, several Ukrainian soldiers posted videos of them watching with bags of popcorn. The only official reaction this time has come from senior presidential advisor Mihail Yopodolyak, who's described the reported plane crash as a warning to Russia's elites ahead of the elections next year. Beware, disloyalty equals death were the words he used. While many in Kiev have described the last two months as political turbulence in Russia as the beginning of the end for Vladimir Putin, events across the border, be stabilizing as they've been, have done little to stem the relentless attrition seen on the vast front lines in Ukraine. James Waterhouse, and that is what we know for now about the situation involving that plane crash involving Yevgeny Prigozhin. Rudy Giuliani, the former mayor of New York and former Trump lawyer on Wednesday, handed himself in to a county jail in Georgia. He's facing several indictments accusing him of trying to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election in Georgia. I spoke to our correspondent in the state capital Atlanta, Barbara Petashia, who told me more about the man who at one stage was one of Mr. Trump's right-hand

men. It's a former federal prosecutor, a former mayor, Mr. Trump's right-hand man, a personal lawyer while he was president, and now he has been booked on criminal charges. He has to settle to pay a bond payment with the court, \$150,000, almost as much as Donald Trump is going to have to pay, which is \$200,000, and he is facing the same number of charges as Mr. Trump, 13, all of which reflects his significant position in Trump's inner circle, and also the way that he was very much in the forefront of advancing claims that the election had been stolen from Mr. Trump

in Georgia. He was very active. He spoke to state lawmakers three times in December, promoting these

falsehoods that there had been election fraud in Georgia. And perhaps the biggest come down, well,

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I shouldn't say the biggest come down, a part of it is that he has been charged under the racketeering law that alleges all 19 defendants participated in a conspiracy to overturn the election, and he had at one point in his life made a name for himself with racketeering cases, and now he faces those charges himself. So that's Mr. Giuliani, but what will happen with Mr. Trump tomorrow? He's going to be booked for a fourth time. This is the fourth criminal case against him, so he'll be fingerprinted. We're expecting he'll probably have his mugshot taken, as Sarah was saying. All the other defendants have so far, and that would be the first time that it would happen with him. He has to pay this \$200,000 bond, but it has particular conditions attached to it for him that prohibit him from intimidating anyone, co-defendants, witnesses, or victims in the case, including on social media. We are, I mean, the other three times he surrendered himself, he's turned it into a bit of a spectacle, sort of presenting himself as the victim of a political witch hunt. I think it would be safe to say he may try to do the same again on Thursday. He's already posted that he would proudly be arrested on Thursday afternoon, and then this time his arraignment is separate. Usually they have to take in place together, but this time that's set to happen in early September in Georgia, and also it might be televised because Georgia law allows it, and none of the others have been, so that would be another first.

Still to come in this podcast.

On our page plan it would have said Universal Music, who would book the ad, but there's very little chance of us actually noticing it.

Why fans think the Rolling Stones are rolling back the years by announcing their new album in a newspaper ad.

In the US state of Wisconsin it's the man who isn't actually there, who looks set to dominate the first TV debate in the race to become the Republican Party's presidential nominee.

Donald Trump has chosen not to appear on stage in Milwaukee.

Eight other candidates will be there, including the Florida Governor, Ron DeSantis, and the former Vice President, Mike Pence. They will all end up having to answer questions about Mr Trump's legal troubles before he then steals the headlines when he turns up to be arrested in Atlanta, Georgia on Thursday. The BBC's North America editor Sarah Smith reports from Milwaukee.

On the airwaves in Milwaukee it's Donald Trump's absence from tonight's debate, that's the talk of the town. Radio host and self-confessed Trump fan,

Dan O'Donnell says he understands the president's reasoning.

The truth is Donald Trump is so far ahead in polls he can risk snubbing Wisconsin voters, even in a key swing state.

Why is Donald Trump so far ahead in the polls at the moment?

Trump did consider debates essential when he was running against Joe Biden three years ago.

The debate venue is decorated with huge Fox News branding.

Donald Trump's war with the conservative network over what he sees as unfavorable coverage is a big part of his decision to stay away.

Yet he'll still dominate the stage, as the other eight candidates will inevitably be asked about all the indictments against him. Like Chris Christie,

the former New Jersey governor who's running specifically to try to knock out

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Donald Trump, but he can't land a blow on an opponent who's absent.

Florida governor Ron DeSantis is currently running a poor second to Donald Trump.

He needs to turn in a stellar performance to turn around an ailing campaign.

He's attacking Trump for not turning up.

Also on stage will be former Vice President Mike Pence, South Carolina Senator Tim Scott, former South Carolina Governor Nikki Haley, the North Dakota Governor Doug Burgum, former Arkansas Governor Asa Hutchinson, and biotech millionaire Vivek Rameshwamy, who performed a cringeworthy M&M rap at the Iowa State Fair, but is still enjoying a small surge in opinion polls.

Yet, however any of them perform tonight, Donald Trump is sure to upstage the debate by surrendering himself to a jailhouse in Georgia tomorrow to be formally booked on charges of election interference. This time there will be a mugshot taken, and once again Donald Trump will have sucked all of the oxygen out of this race, leaving his opponents

gusty. Sarah Smith in Milwaukee.

Now to the latest chapter in the story of Andrew Tate, the former kickboxer who became world famous as an online misogynist or a hypermasculine influencer, depending on who you ask. He's currently facing trial in Romania for human trafficking and forming an organized criminal group with his brother and two other defendants. Andrew Tate is also facing a charge of rape. The group deny all the charges against them. Now the BBC has seen details of graphic evidence compiled by Romanian prosecutors, alleging that Andrew Tate coerced women into sexual acts and discussed treating them as slaves. Our correspondent Lucy Williamson is following the story. Over hundreds of pages Romanian prosecutors outlined the testimony and the evidence they say they've gathered against Andrew Tate. It includes transcriptions of what the prosecution says, a text and audio messages which appear to show how the alleged trafficking operation was managed, and the apparent coercion, control and abuse of women by Mr Tate and his co-defendants. In one transcribed exchange, Andrew Tate appears to coerce an alleged victim into group sex using abusive language. His brother Tristan is also quoted in prosecution transcripts, allegedly talking about slaving women for 10 to 12 hours a day. The BBC can't verify whether these transcripts are accurate because the original evidence is not included in the 300 page summary that we've seen. In that summary, the prosecution also says that women were forced by the defendants

to make pornographic content online and alleges that some women did not control the money they made

and were fined for crying on camera or for not working hard enough. A spokeswoman for the Tate brothers said that they vehemently denied the serious allegations against them and accused the BBC of lacking impartiality, but she didn't provide any detail or respond to the specific allegations we raised. Defence lawyers are expected to challenge the prosecution evidence in a pre-trial hearing later this month. Lucy Williamson. Here in Britain, two teenagers have been found responsible for hacking into the computer systems of a series of major companies. They were key players in a hacking group that launched cyber attacks against firms, including the telecoms giant BT and a computer chip manufacturer. Joe Inwood reports from the court in London. They were audacious attacks against some of the world's biggest tech firms,

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carried out by a pair of British teenagers. In 2021, 18-year-old Ariane Cotage, who is severely autistic and so deemed unfit to stand trial, tried to blackmail BT and EE for \$4 million. Along with a 17-year-old who cannot be named for legal reasons, he then illegally accessed phone numbers to steal around £100,000 from online crypto wallets. Both were also found to have hacked and blackmailed the chip manufacturer in Vidya before being arrested. Acting alone, Cotage then used his hotel TV and an Amazon Fire Stick to target Uber, the online bank Revolut and finally Grand Theft Auto Maker Rockstar Games, threatening to publish valuable code. The jury were asked to determine whether or not Cotage did the acts alleged, not if he did it with criminal intent. Both will be sentenced at a later date for acting the court heard as digital bandits. Joe Inwood. Two separate groups of researchers have developed technology designed to help people who are paralysed and can't speak to communicate faster and more

accurately. The findings have been jointly published in the journal Nature. Experts say this represents a big leap forward towards decoding what people, without a voice, want to say.

Here's our health reporter, Philippa Roxby. Researchers from Stanford University tested their technology on 68-year-old Pat Bennett, who was diagnosed with motor neurone disease 10 years

ago. She now struggles to talk. Surgeons implanted four tiny sensors, the size of pills, into areas of her brain which are key to producing speech. They then trained an algorithm to decode her brain activity as she tries to form words. In a video, she's smiling and laughing with researchers, as her thoughts are translated into sentences on a computer screen in close to real time.

Dr. Frank Willett is one of the researchers. She could say any word of 125,000, so it's a large possible set of words. It's not just a limited vocabulary, and the accuracy was about 23% word error rate. And obviously, that's something we want to improve moving forward, but it's such a big difference from what's been done in the past. In another study in Nature, researchers in San Francisco described trialing similar technology on a woman severely paralysed after a stroke. They were able to convert her brain activity into words spoken by an avatar on a screen, with facial expressions. And they used a speech she made in a wedding video to recreate her voice. The scientists behind the studies are excited by the progress they've made. Their brain-computer interface produces words three times more quickly than previous ones. It's also more accurate than before, although there were still some errors in words. They caution it still early days, and lots of refining and improving of the technology is now needed.

Currently, many people with MND use their eyes to pick out words on a screen, using recordings of their own voice. But that can be time-consuming. By using brain signals, scientists hope to restore more rapid communication to those who can't speak.

Philippa Roxby

These days, any star who wants to make an announcement is obliged to use social media to get maximum exposure. But the Rolling Stones have gone back to basics by appearing to take out an advert in a local paper in East London to reveal what's thought to be the title of their new album Hackney Diamonds. Hard to believe then that back in 1965, when they released I Can't Get No Satisfaction, Mick Jagger thought they wouldn't be performing by the end of the 60s, let alone in the 2020s, as he told Michael Parkinson at the time.

Mick Jagger

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You've been doing this now for how many years of it?

Two years.

Two years. How much longer do you give yourself doing this thing, going around being a sort of a... I don't know. I never thought we'd be... I've been doing it for two years even, you know.

When we started off, I never thought we'd make it very big anyway. And then when we have, we've been making records for two years and everybody still goes around calling us quite a new group, you know, sort of. And I don't know, quite honestly. I think we've sort of pretty well set up for at least another year.

Mick turned 80 last month, but he, Keith Richards and Ronnie Wood are still leading the greatest rock and roll band in the world. So what's the story with what could be their 31st studio album? Here's our music reporter, Mark Savage.

It's almost two decades since The Rolling Stones released an album of new material, but now the wait might be over. Last week, an advert for a glass replacement service was published in the Hackney Gazette, but eagle-eyed fans spotted it was riddled with references to songs like Gimme Shelter and Satisfaction, and then, almost imperceptibly, a copy of the band's famous Lips logo. The record label won't confirm it, but fans have deduced this is the announcement of a new album called Hackney Diamonds. Even the newspaper's editor, Simon Merfitt, didn't know the advert was coming.

The first I heard about it was actually for our readers, rather than having any idea that it was going to be in the paper before it's published. On our page plan, it would have said universal music who booked the ad, but there's very little chance of us actually kind of noticing it, looking at it and kind of working out from the clues that it was actually for The Rolling Stones. We already know that the Stones started work on new material before the pandemic, and that includes the last ever recordings of drummer Charlie Watts, who died two years ago at the age of 80. Paul McCartney and Elton John are also rumoured to have been involved in the sessions, and the band have said any new material will be dedicated to Watts memory. This edition was mixed by Peter Wise, and the producer was Stephanie Prentice. The editor is Karen Martin. I'm Alex Ridson. Until next time, goodbye.