

Russia on path to normal life after deal ends Wagner mutiny

International Desk

Russia is slowly returning to normal life after heavily armed Russian mercenaries on Saturday night withdrew from the southern Russian city of Rostov under a deal that defused an unprecedented challenge to the Russian leadership and halted their rapid advance on Moscow.

The Moscow stock exchange, banks and financial institutions are expected to operate as usual today, Reuters quoted Russia's Central Bank as saying on Sunday.

However, Moscow's mayor had declared it a non-working day when mercenary leader Yevgeny Prigozhin was leading his Wagner forces towards Moscow.

Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyenin had on Saturday asked people to refrain from trips around the city because of a counter-terrorism operation.

Fighters of the Wagner group returned to their bases, in return for guarantees for their safety, and the leader, Yevgeny Prigozhin, will move to Belarus, according to the agreement mediated by Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko.

The mutiny was later aborted in a deal that spared Prigozhin and his mercenaries from facing criminal charges. The deal also exiled Prigozhin to Belarus.

Moscow's non-working order remains in place even though the mutiny was aborted.

"On June 26, trading and settlement on all Moscow Exchange markets will be conducted as usual, including all trading periods and instruments," Moscow Exchange said in a statement. SPB Exchange, Russia's second-largest bourse, said it would also be operating as

normal.

The central bank said banks should ensure the continuous and smooth operation of Russia's financial markets.

The country's Federal Road Agency urged residents of the Moscow region on Sunday to refrain from traveling along the M-4 "Don" major expressway until 10 a.m.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has not made public comments since the deal was struck to de-escalate the crisis.

State television said Putin would attend a meeting of Russia's Security Council this coming week, without elaborating.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the deal that sent Wagner fighters back to their camps was aimed at avoiding confrontation and bloodshed.

Russia back in investors' focus

Investors were watching for ripple effects from the aborted mutiny in Russia, with some expecting a move into safe havens such as U.S. government bonds and the dollar when markets open later on Sunday. After Saturday's events some investors said they were focused on the potential impact to safe-haven assets such as U.S. Treasuries and on commodities prices, given that Russia is a major energy and grains supplier.

"It certainly remains to be seen what happens in the next day or two, but if there remains uncertainty about leadership in Russia, investors may flock to safe havens," said Gennadiy Goldberg, head of U.S. rates strategy at TD Securities in New York.

"Markets typically do not respond well to events that are unfolding and are uncertain," particularly re-



Fighters of Wagner private mercenary group pull out of the headquarters of the Southern Military District to return to base, in the city of Rostov-on-Don, Russia, on June 24, 2023. ● REUTERS

lating to Putin and Russia, said Quincy Krosby, chief global strategist at LPL Financial.

"If the uncertainty escalates, you're going to see Treasuries get a bid, gold will get a bid and the Japanese yen tends to gain in situations like this," Krosby said, mentioning typical safe-haven assets that investors buy when risks rise.

Early signs of mutiny

According to U.S. media on Saturday, U.S. spy agencies picked up signs days ago that mercenary chief Prigozhin was preparing to rise up against Russia's defense establishment, AFP reported. Intelligence officials conducted briefings at the White House, the Pentagon and in Capitol Hill about the potential for unrest in nuclear-armed Russia a full day before it unfolded, the Washington Post and New York Times reported.

Spy agencies first began tracking indications that Prigozhin and his Wagner mercenary force intended to move against the Rus-

sian military leadership in mid-June, the Post said. The Times said the information was both solid and alarming by mid-week, leading to the flurry of briefings.

Globally attention

The aborted mutiny has sparked attention globally with supporting or opposing reactions. It revived an old fear in Washington about what happens to Russia's nuclear stockpile in the event of domestic upheaval.

Images of tanks on Russian streets brought to mind the failed 1991 coup by communist hardliners that raised concerns about the security of the Soviet nuclear arsenal and the possibility of a rogue commander stealing a warhead, said former U.S. intelligence officials.

"The IC (intelligence community) will be super-focused on the (Russian) nuclear stockpile," said Marc Polymeropoulos, a former senior CIA officer who oversaw the agency's clandestine operations in Europe and

Eurasia. "You want to know who has control of the nuclear weapons because you're worried that terrorists or bad guys like (Chechen leader Ramzan) Kadyrov might come after them for the leverage they can get," said Daniel Hoffman, a former senior CIA officer who served as the agency's Moscow station chief.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Sunday said the turmoil caused by the unprecedented challenge to the authority of Putin by Wagner fighters may not be over yet and could take weeks or months to play out.

Blinken in a series of television interviews said tensions that led to the aborted mutiny had been rising for months and that the turmoil could affect Moscow's capabilities in Ukraine.

Italy's foreign minister said it had shattered the "myth" of Russian unity.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said the Wagner revolt, which sparked a flurry of

high-level calls between Western leaders, exposed turmoil in Russia.

"Today, the world can see that the masters of Russia control nothing. And that means nothing. Simply complete chaos. An absence of any predictability," Zelenskyy said in his nightly video address.

China, a key ally of Putin, made no initial public reference to the turmoil, eventually saying after talks with a visiting senior Russian diplomat on Sunday that it supported Russia's efforts to maintain its national stability.

North Korea's vice foreign minister, in a meeting with the Russian ambassador on Sunday, said he supported any decision by the Russian leadership to deal with the recent mutiny, North Korean state media reported.

Vice Foreign Minister Im Chon-il "expressed firm belief that the recent armed rebellion in Russia would be successfully put down in conformity with the aspiration and will of the Russian people," state KCNA news agency said.

NEWS IN BRIEF

French Sunday newspaper on strike

REUTERS – France's flagship Sunday newspaper, Le Journal du Dimanche (JDD), was not published this Sunday after its staff went on strike to protest against the nomination of a new editor-in-chief who worked for a far-right magazine. The newspaper's owner, French media group Lagardere, on Friday named Geofroy Lejeune as JDD's new editor-in-chief, succeeding Jerome Begle who left for Paris Match. Lejeune is the former head of magazine Valeurs Actuelles, which has courted controversy with anti-immigrant covers and was fined for racist insult in 2022.

Russian strikes kill 11 in militant-held Syria: Monitor

AFP – Russian air strikes Sunday on Syria's northwest killed at least 11 people including seven civilians, in retaliation for deadly drone attacks blamed on militants, a war monitor said. Six civilians were killed in Jisr al-Shughur and three militants were killed nearby by Russian air strikes, Rami Abdel Rahman, who heads the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, told AFP.

Thousands of Germans ...

"It is obvious that the conflict between Russia and Ukraine

is a long-planned action of the United States, which is proved by U.S. documents. The U.S. wanted to bring Ukraine into its sphere of influence long time ago. It also coerced Europe into all its military operations. The Ramstein air base is a pivot. The promises of the U.S. are hypocritical. The U.S. military here is not to protect Europe but to launch military operations all over the world," said Oskar Lafontaine, former Finance Minister.

Demonstrators criticized that the U.S.-led NATO continued to add fuel to the conflict between Russia and Ukraine by sending weapons and conducting large-scale military exercises. They called on Western countries to stop providing arms to Ukraine and resolve the crisis in Ukraine through peaceful means.

"We hope that people can re-examine the war by our demonstration as the U.S. has been violating international law through wars. We firmly believe that what brings peace is negotiations not weapons. Only diplomacy and nothing else can end the war," said Luik, organizer of the demonstration.

PA blames Netanyahu for persisting settler terrorism in West Bank

International Desk

The Palestinian Authority (PA) has held Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu fully responsible for persisting terrorism by Zionist settlers against Palestinians across the occupied West Bank, saying the ongoing violence is fueled by his far-right cabinet members Bezalel Smotrich and Itamar Ben-Gvir.

The Palestinian Foreign Ministry further declared in a Saturday statement that the surge in Israeli crimes "reflects a policy adopted by the far-right Netanyahu administration, and is also a direct reflection of the campaigns of incitement to murder Palestinians, especially by extremist racists like Ben-

Gvir and his followers."

"The ruling Israeli coalition systematically undermines any regional and international efforts to restore the political horizon to resolve the conflict and creates more escalation in an attempt to impose the logic of military occupation," the statement added as quoted in a report by Wafa news agency.

Homes, vehicles torched

Earlier on Saturday, several houses and vehicles were set on fire by extremist Israeli settlers in the village of Umm Safa, north of Ramallah.

The report further cited local sources as saying that scores of Israeli settlers, some armed with rifles and guarded by Israeli army

forces, stormed the village and fired indiscriminately at everything they came across, including homes and vehicles, Press TV reported.

The Palestinian ministry also called on the international community to stop its double standards in dealing with international principles, resolutions and agreements signed under the auspices of world bodies.

The shooting attack on Saturday also caused damage to an ambulance. A paramedic was slightly injured by a gunshot while moving a patient in critical condition to a hospital.

Israeli soldiers and settlers have been escalating their terror attacks against Palestinian civilians in the occupied territories, in an attempt

to forcibly expel Palestinians from their lands and make way for expanding illegal Zionist-only settlements.

More than 600,000 Zionists live in over 230 illegal settlements built since the 1967 Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories of the West Bank and East al-Quds. All the settlements are considered illegal under international law. The UN Security Council has condemned in numerous resolutions the Israeli regime's settlement constructions in the occupied territories.

According to human rights groups, acts of violence by Israeli settlers against Palestinians and their property are a daily occurrence throughout the occupied West Bank.



A Palestinian covers his face during clashes with Israeli troops after Israeli settlers attack Umm Safa village near Ramallah, in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, on June 24, 2023. ● MOHAMAD TOROKMAD/REUTERS