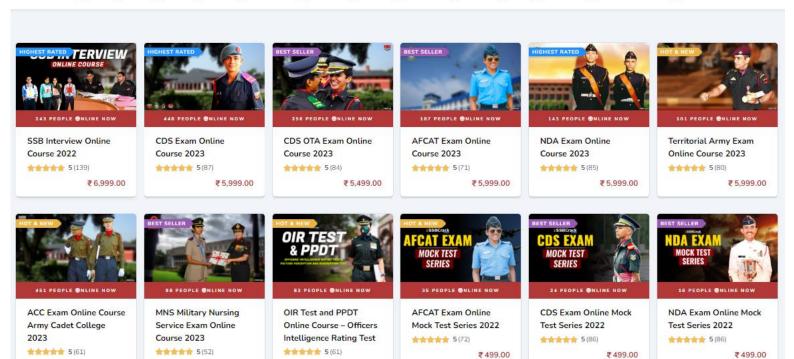


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Wagner Chief Vows To Topple Russian Military Leaders

Why In The News?

- The Head Of Russia's Wagner Mercenary Group Has Vowed To "Go All The Way" To Topple Russia's Military Leadership, Hours After The Kremlin Accused Him Of "Armed Rebellion".
- It's Believed That There Are Now Tens Of Thousands Of Mercenaries Fighting
 For Russia In Ukraine With The Wagner Group. Recently, Its Troops Played A
 Major Part In The Long And Costly Fight To Take The City Of Bakhmut From
 Ukrainian Forces.
- The Wagner Group Is A Private Army Of Mercenaries That Has Been Fighting
 Alongside The Regular Russian Army In Ukraine. The Wagner Group Describes
 Itself As A "Private Military Company", But Now The Russian Government
 Seems To Be Taking Steps To Rein It In.



What Is Wagner Group?

- The Wagner Group (Officially Called PMC Wagner) Was First Identified In 2014,
 When It Was Backing Pro-Russian Separatist Forces In Eastern Ukraine.
- At That Time, It Was A Secretive Organisation, Operating Mostly In Africa And The Middle East, And Is Thought To Have Had Only About 5,000 Fighters -Mostly Veterans Of Russia's Elite Regiments And Special Forces.

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- Since Then, It Has Grown Considerably.
- It Said The Organisation **Started Recruiting In Large Numbers In 2022** Because Russia Had **Trouble Finding People For The Regular Army.**
- About 80% Of Wagner's Troops In Ukraine Have Been Drawn From Prisons, The US National Security Council Said At The Start Of This Year.
- Although Mercenary Forces Are Illegal In Russia, The Wagner Group Registered
 As A Company In 2022 And Opened A New Headquarters In St Petersburg.



What Is The Wagner Group Doing In Ukraine?

- The Wagner Group Was Heavily Involved In Russia's Capture Of The City Of Bakhmut, In Eastern Ukraine. Ukrainian Troops Say Its Fighters Were Sent Into Attacks In Large Numbers Over Open Ground, With Many Killed As A Result.
- At First, The Defence Ministry Did Not Mention That The Wagner Group Was
 Involved In The Fighting. However, It Later Praised Its Mercenaries For Playing
 A "Courageous And Selfless" Role.



How Was The Wagner Group Started?

The Wagner Group Is Believed Involvement Of A Former Russian Army Officer,
 Dmitri Utkin. A Veteran Of Russia's Wars In Chechnya, He Is Thought To Have Been Wagner's First Field Commander And To Have Named The Group After His Former Radio Call Sign.





- The Current Head Is Yevgeny Prigozhin, A Rich Businessman Nicknamed
 "Putin's Chef" Because He Provided Catering For The Kremlin. The Wagner Group's First Operation Was Helping Russia Annex Crimea In 2014.
- In The Weeks Before Russia's Invasion Of Ukraine, It Is Thought Wagner Carried
 Out "False Flag" Attacks To Give The Kremlin A Pretext For Invading.



Wagner's Clash With Russia's Military Commanders

In Recent Months, Mr Prigozhin Has Repeatedly Accused Russia's Defence
Minister, Sergei Shoigu, And The Head Of The Army In Ukraine, Valery
Gerasimov, Of Incompetence And Of Deliberately Undersupplying Wagner Units
Fighting In Ukraine.

- The Russian Defence Ministry Has Now Said That "Volunteer Formations" In Ukraine Must Sign Contracts With It, By The End Of June.
- The Wagner Group Was Not Named In The Announcement, But The Move Is Seen As An Attempt By The Government To Gain More Control Over It.
- Mr Prigozhin Issued A Furious Statement Declaring His Forces Would Boycott The Contracts.



Where Else Is The Wagner Group Operating?

- Since 2015, Wagner Group Mercenaries Have Been In Syria, Fighting Alongside Pro-government, Forces And Guarding Oilfields.
- There Are Also **Wagner Group Mercenaries In Libya**, Supporting The Forces Loyal To General Khalifa Haftar.
- The **Central African Republic (CAR)** Has Invited The Wagner Group To Guard Diamond Mines, And It Is Thought To Be **Guarding Gold Mines In Sudan.**
- The **Government Of Mali,** In West Africa, Is Using The Wagner Group Against Islamic Militant Groups.
- Yevgeny Prigozhin Is Thought To Make Money From These Wagner Group Operations.
- The US Treasury Says He Uses Its Presence To Enrich Mining Companies, Which He Owns, And It Has Placed Them Under Sanctions.

Crimes Wagner Group Alleged To Have Committed?

 In January, A Former Commander Claimed Asylum In Norway After Deserting From The Mercenary Outfit. He Claims To Have Witnessed War Crimes In Ukraine.

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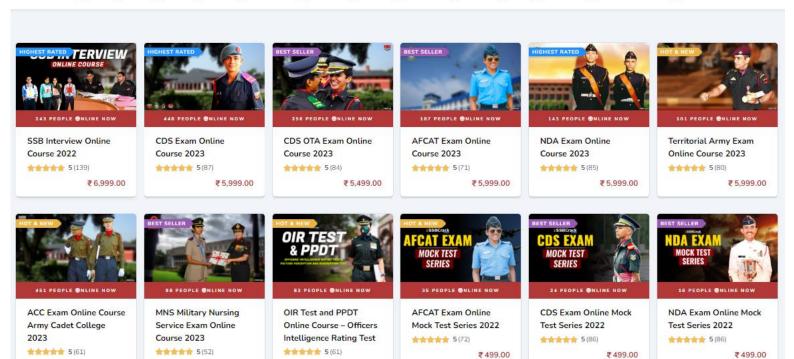
- Three Wagner Group Mercenaries Are Alleged By Ukrainian Prosecutors To Have Killed And Tortured Civilians Near Kyiv In April 2022, Alongside Regular Russian Troops.
- German Intelligence Says Wagner Mercenaries May Also Have **Massacred Civilians In Bucha In March 2022.**
- The **United Nations And The French Government** Have Accused Wagner Members Of **Committing Rapes And Robberies** Against Civilians In The Central African Republic.
- In 2020, The **United States Military Accused Wagner Mercenaries** Of Having Planted Landmines And Other Improvised Explosive Devices In And Around The **Libyan Capital, Tripoli.**





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