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MODI ARRIVES TO A WONDERFUL SUCCESS

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
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An elated and euphoric Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday announced that August 23 will be celebrated as a 'National Space Day' and Chandrayaan-3's landing spot on the Moon will be named as 'Shiv Shakti' point and the place where the Chandrayaan-2 lander crash-landed on the Moon's surface in 2019 and left its imprints will be known as 'Tiranga point'.

Effusively congratulating the scientists in Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), the Prime Minister said "you have brought the country to the front row in the comity of the nation".

He pointed to the ISRO scientists sitting on the front row and said in Hindi "aap desh ko isro main le aaye".

Modi, who was presented framed pictures of the lander on the moon by ISRO head S Somnath, made the sign of a salute in recognition of the "achievement and hard work" of the organisation as he proceeded with his address to the scientists.

The scientists received his speech enthusiastically and clapped repeatedly as the Prime Minister turned teary-eyed while pointing to the "momentous achievement" of the soft landing which he said "has made each Indian proud" and see it as "his own achievement", feeling "as if he has passed a big exam".

Modi, who flew down to Bengaluru to ISRO morning directly from the Greek capital of Athens after summit talks, made the announcement that August 23 will be celebrated as a "National Space Day" and "Chandrayaan-3's landing spot on the Moon to be named as 'Shiv Shakti' point".

India did the soft landing on August 23 and thus achieved the recognition as the first country in the world to successfully go to the southern side of the lunar surface which is yet not explored by the space missions of other countries.

Terming the success of the Chandrayaan-3 mission as an



Prime Minister Narendra Modi at success of Chandrayaan-3 Mission, at ISRO Telemetry Tracking and Command Network (ISTRAC) in Bengaluru on Saturday. ISRO Chief S Somnath is also seen

PTI

'extraordinary moment' in the history of India's space programme, he also declared that the place where the Chandrayaan-2 lander crash-landed on the Moon's surface in 2019 and left its imprints would be known as "Tiranga point."

"There is a scientific tradition of naming the location of a touchdown. India has decided to name the lunar region where our Chandrayaan-3 landed. The place where Vikram lander descended will be known as Shiv Shakti point," announced the Prime Minister as the scientific community, along with the ISRO chief, clapped on.

"In Shiv, there is resolution for the welfare of humanity and Shakti gives us strength to fulfil those resolutions. This Shiv Shakti point of the Moon also gives a sense of connection with Himalayas to Kanyakumari," the Prime Minister said while addressing

Team ISRO at the space agency's Telemetry Tracking and Command Network (ISTRAC). The Prime Minister took the occasion to convey the hard work of ISRO to the countrymen.

"From Southern India to the South of the Moon, this was not an easy journey," Modi said and added that ISRO even created an artificial Moon in its research facility.

The Prime Minister credited the zeal for innovation and science among the youth of India to the successes of such space missions.

"Successes of Mangalyaan and Chandrayaan and preparation for Gaganyaan have given a new attitude to the young generation of the country. Your big achievement is awakening a generation of Indians and energising them," Modi said.

among children of India and every child is seeing his or her future in the scientists, he said.

"Space technology is also the basis of our PM Gati Shakti National Master Plan. This is helping a lot in the planning, execution and monitoring of projects. This scope of space application, which is increasing with time, is also increasing opportunities for our youth," the Prime Minister added.

He requested ISRO to organise national hackathons on 'Space Technology in Governance' in collaboration with various departments of Center and State Governments. "I am confident that this National Hackathon will make our governance more effective and provide modern solutions to the countrymen," the Prime Minister said.

Emphasising the importance of taking the lead in science and technology in this period of the 21st century, the

Prime Minister said India has become the youngest talent factory in the world.

"From the depths of the ocean to the heights of the sky, to the depths of space, there's a lot for the young generations to do," Modi said as he high-

lighted opportunities ranging from 'Deep Earth' to 'Deep Sea, and the next generation computer to genetic engineering. "New opportunities are constantly opening up for you in India," he added.

The Prime Minister underlined that guidance for future generations is a necessity and it is them who will further the important missions of today.

He said scientists are their role models and their research and years of hard work have proved that anything can be accomplished if you set your mind to it.

Concluding the address, the Prime Minister said the people of the country have faith in the scientists, and when the blessings of the people are bestowed, India will become a global leader in science and technology with the dedication shown towards the country.

"Our same spirit of innovation will make the dream of a developed India come true in 2047," Modi said.

After reaching the national Capital, the Prime Minister said the excitement generated by the success of Chandrayaan-3 has to be channelised to power scientific temper among youngsters to realise the dream of a developed India by 2047.

Addressing a function organised at the airport by the BJP to celebrate the success of Chandrayaan-3 and welcome the Prime Minister on his return from his two-nation tour, Modi said at the BRICS Summit in South Africa and

during his visit to Greece, he received several congratulatory messages over the success of the lunar mission.

Modi was welcomed at the Delhi airport by BJP president JP Nadda and Lok Sabha members from the national Capital, while scores of people had gathered at the function to celebrate the Chandrayaan-3 landing on the Moon.

The Prime Minister also spoke about his meeting with ISRO scientists and the decision to name the landing point of the spacecraft as 'Shiv Shakti'. He also said the point where Chandrayaan-2 had crash landed on the Moon has been named as "Tiranga".

The excitement generated by the success of Chandrayaan-3 has to be channelised to power scientific temper among youngsters, Modi said.

"We have to attract the new generation to science. The 21st century is technology driven and only that nation will move forward which has mastered science and technology," he said.

"The need of the hour is to walk the path of science and technology with greater strength if we have to realise the dream of a developed India by 2047," said Modi, adding that the new generation has to be encouraged to imbibe scientific temper early in their lives.

He said technology needs to be used to deliver good governance, last-mile delivery of services and for improving the quality of life of the common

people. "I have directed different departments to use space sciences, power of satellites for quick response delivery of services with transparency and perfection," he said.

Earlier, welcoming Modi on his return, BJP president Nadda said the Prime Minister's guidance and direction had made Chandrayaan-3 a successful project.

"It was a reflection of your commitment and dedication that you went to Bengaluru directly and met the ISRO scientists who achieved a landmark for India with their hard work," Nadda said.

Meanwhile, Union Home Minister Amit Shah said the announcement by the Prime Minister to celebrate August 23 as National Space Day will remind future generations of India's success in the lunar mission and inspire scientists to achieve new heights.

Shah said a true leader stands by his people through every circumstance, and this was reflected when the Prime Minister who flew directly to Bengaluru from Greece this morning to meet the ISRO scientists behind Chandrayaan 3.

The Prime Minister's inspiring address to the scientists in Bengaluru was an ode to India's stupendous achievement that reached the skies, Shah said in a statement.

He said with the historic success of India's lunar mission, the country's scientists have imprinted an indelible mark on the sands of time.

Mahabali is in new avatar

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

As Kerala is getting ready to celebrate Onam — the national festival of the State — the legend of Mahabali based on whom the festival is centred has collapsed like a pack of cards thanks to scientific temper and what is mentioned in Bhagawatham, an epic composed by Veda Vyasa.

The name Mahabali finds mention only in Bhagawatham and that too as a small character, according to poet Akkitham Achyuthan Namboodiri, who was honoured with Jnanapeetham as well as Padma Shri by the President of India.

This has been further substantiated by K Unnikrishnan Namboodiri, vedic scholar and revered as an authority on Kerala's heritage.

Rest of the country celebrate Onam as Vamana Jayanthi while in Kerala, Vamana, one of the reincarnation of Lord Vishnu is portrayed as a villain who defeated Mahabali in a war of nerves.

The proponents of Onam in Kerala claim that Mahabali was a ruler par excellence and his tenure was marked as an era of honesty and strict administrative regime.

"But what derails this legend is the fact that there was no Kerala when Mahabali was exiled to the nether world by Vamana.



world," said Namboodiri while addressing the delegates of Sreemad Bhagawath Sapthaha Jnana Yagam, a week long integrated programme in Sanskrit on science and technology being held at Thiruvananthapuram.

Both Akkitham and Namboodiri quotes Bhagawatham to prove their arguments.

Mahabali had been defeated and killed by Lord Indra in the battle for heaven and was

brought back to life by Sage Sukacharya.

Bhagawatham said Mahabali wanted to conquer heaven and he was blessed in this pursuit by Sukacharya.

"Since Mahabali was blessed by Sukacharya in his bid to conquer the heaven, the only person who could stop from that mission was Lord Vishnu.

"The Lord disguised himself as a Bramachari named Vamana and appeared before Mahabali seeking alms. Bali who was blinded with pride and arrogance told the Brahmachari that he could ask for anything under the Sun and it would be granted immediately. Vamana requested the King for just three measures of land and the latter asked him to take the required land. Vamana measured earth and heaven with the first two steps and found himself without any place to acquire the third measure," said Namboodiri.

The vedic scholar quoting Bhagawatham said Bali, as an atonement for the arrogance offered the Brahmachari his own head to keep the feet for third measure of land. Vamana before placing his feet on the head Bali gave him salvation and the chapter on Bali concludes with it.

Professor MG Sasibhushan, eminent historian, is of the view that Mahabali and his story are mere myths.

"But there are evidences in historical records that Onam was celebrated as Vamana Jayanthi. By 15th century agriculturists who belonged to the Nair and Eezhava community started to celebrate Onam as a harvest festival. There is no proof of the existence of Mahabali and the general belief is that he is a manufactured character," said Prof Sasibhushan.

Onam has become the State's biggest shopping festival while Mahabali is being portrayed as a comic character identifiable with his pot-belly and handle-bar moustache. Instead of reverence, what comes to mind is a kind of sympathy for Maha Bali," says Namboodiri.

The Chandrayaan created history by landing at the South Pole of the Moon

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UTTAR PRADESH

TOUGH CALL FOR SAMAJWADI

The Samajwadi Party leads the INDIA coalition against the ruling NDA, vying for a dominant Opposition role. But divergent opinions reverberate on various fronts. The RLD leaders have voiced concerns that national parties frequently seek support from smaller parties before elections but tend to renege on commitments afterward. This criticism is directed at the Samajwadi Party, with RLD leaders contending that Akhilesh Yadav's leadership failed to provide sufficient opportunities to RLD candidates in the Legislative Council elections, writes BISWAJEET BANERJEE

As the nation prepares for the high-stakes clash of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, all eyes are on Uttar Pradesh, where the chessboard of new political alliances is rapidly taking shape. The battleground State is not only pivotal due to the sheer number of Members of Parliament (MPs) it sends to the Lok Sabha, but also due to the intriguing dynamics that promise an electrifying showdown.

At the forefront of this clash stands the Samajwadi Party, a key player in the INDIA coalition, which is meticulously positioning itself as the chief contender against the ruling NDA. Led by Akhilesh Yadav, the party is setting the stage for an enthralling face-off by seeking to establish its dominance as the leader of the Opposition alliance in the State.

In a significant development, Opposition parties in India have come together to form a formidable coalition known as the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA). The primary objective of this alliance is to unite India's fragmented Opposition forces in preparation for the eagerly anticipated 2024 parliamentary elections, with the ultimate goal of unseating Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

"The emergence of the INDIA coalition has injected a sense of hope into India's democratic landscape, as it presents a viable alternative to the incumbent ruling party. However, this alliance is not without its challenges, with one of the foremost hurdles being the creation of a cohesive platform capable of mobilising voters from diverse backgrounds," Nomita P Kumar, of Giri Institute of Development Studies (GIDS) in Lucknow, said.

The success of coalition INDIA depends on its performance in Uttar Pradesh, which has always been considered the crucible of Indian politics. The importance of this vast State, home to 23 crore people, stems from the fact that it is generally said that the road to Delhi passes through Lucknow.

In this background, the role of coalition partners in India assumes importance. This all depends on who will lead the alliance in Uttar Pradesh. With the Samajwadi Party being the main Opposition party, Akhilesh Yadav, the national President of SP, is the obvious choice to lead the coalition in Uttar Pradesh. Yet, Akhilesh Yadav's journey to leadership is strewn with challenges. In the absence of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) from the coalition, the Samajwadi Party finds itself as the primary Opposition force within the INDIA alliance in Uttar Pradesh. This situation not only heightens the spotlight on Yadav's leadership but also magnifies the intricacies of coalition politics in the State. With the Congress maintaining a limited presence in Uttar Pradesh, the task of forging a formidable Opposition front becomes even more demanding.

The recent game-changing verdict from the Supreme Court, reinstating Rahul Gandhi's Lok Sabha membership, has breathed new life into the Congress party cadre. However, while this development invigorates the Congress ranks, it is clear that more than just legal victories are required to disrupt the entrenched political spectrum of the State.



The Congress realised this and therefore made organisational changes in its Uttar Pradesh unit of the party. Former MLA Ajay Rai was appointed as president of the Uttar Pradesh Congress Committee (UPCC). He joined his new assignment on August 24 where he declared that Rahul Gandhi would be the next Prime Minister. He also advocated that Rahul should contest the election from Amethi because the people of that region want him to contest the next election.

"If not Rahul, who else?" he asked in a press conference in Lucknow on Thursday.

This Rai's query raises further questions about the leadership issue within coalition INDIA, because Uttar Pradesh's political landscape is a complex tapestry where electoral strategies, alliances, and ground-level connect intricately blend to create a narrative that can either challenge the status quo or fortify it.

All the big contenders in coalition INDIA have started moving their pawns in the political chessboard meticulously. Behind a closed-door meeting in Lucknow, the SP leadership has voiced its eagerness to play a pivotal role in seat-sharing discussions among the alliance partners in UP. Akhilesh Yadav has hinted at his party's inclination to take the lead in steering the Opposition alliance in the State and if the coalition wins, want a lion's share in the government.

The numerical strength of the Samajwadi Party lends credibility to its aspirations. Out of Uttar Pradesh's 80 Lok Sabha seats, the BSP holds 9, the SP has 3 (after losing two in by-elections), and the Congress possesses the sole seat of Rae Bareilly. With 111 MLAs in the Vidhan Sabha, the SP leads the alliance in terms of legislative support.

In the 2019 elections, the SP joined hands with the BSP and the Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) to forge the "Mahagathbandhan". The SP contested 37 seats, while the BSP and the RLD contested 38 and three seats, respectively. The Congress was allocated two seats. Although the Samajwadi Party secured victories in just five of the 37 seats it contested, it claimed the second position in 31 seats. Akhilesh Yadav himself

emerged victorious from the Azamgarh parliamentary seat but later vacated it following the 2022 Assembly elections, in which the SP faced defeat in the Azamgarh by-election.

Maintaining political supremacy in Uttar Pradesh poses a daunting challenge for the Samajwadi Party due to the State's intricate political dynamics. Forming alliances may be facile, but sustaining them post-elections often proves intricate, with smaller parties inclined to shift loyalties based on their political calculations.

Within the INDIA alliance in Uttar Pradesh, significant political players include the Samajwadi Party, the Congress, the Rashtriya Lok Dal, and the Apna Dal (Kamerawadi). Although they acknowledge the paramount need to present a united front to effectively counter the ruling BJP, differences exist among these constituents.

Divergent opinions reverberate on various fronts. The RLD leaders have voiced concerns that national parties frequently seek support from smaller parties before elections but tend to renege on commitments afterward. This criticism is directed at the Samajwadi Party, with RLD leaders contending that Akhilesh Yadav's leadership failed to provide sufficient opportunities to RLD candidates in the Legislative Council Elections.

On the flip side, Apna Dal (Kamerawadi) emphasises the significance of addressing the aspirations of Other Backward Classes (OBCs) within the INDIA coalition.

Seat-sharing negotiations loom as another potentially contentious issue among the INDIA coalition partners. While formal discussions on the seat-sharing formula are pending, separate dialogues among leaders have initiated the conversation. The Congress is poised to contest 15-20 seats in UP, particularly following reports suggesting potential Muslim support in this Lok Sabha election. Indications point toward Priyanka Gandhi's potential candidacy from Sultanpur, Rahul Gandhi from Amethi, and Sonia Gandhi's pursuit of re-election from Rae Bareilly. Additionally, the Congress has cast its gaze upon Pratapgarh, where Aradhan Shukla "Mona", the leader of the Congress Legislature Party in the Vidhan Sabha, may enter the electoral fray.

Conversely, the RLD seeks to stake its claim to 12 seats in the western region of UP, leveraging caste dynamics. Public meetings for Jayant Chaudhary have been scheduled in 12 parliamentary constituencies, encompassing Mathura, Kairana, Muzaffarnagar, Meerut, Bulandshahr, Aligarh, Amroha, Fatehpur Sikri, Baghat, Aligarh, Hathras, and Bulandshahr. These events aim to underscore RLD's influence and exert pressure on the INDIA coalition partners.

As the 2024 Lok Sabha elections draw ever closer, Uttar Pradesh's political landscape remains fluid, with leadership aspirations and seat-sharing negotiations poised to sculpt the State's political trajectory. The outcomes of these deliberations will significantly influence electoral dynamics and may ultimately determine the balance of power in India's most populous State.

(The writer is political editor, The Pioneer, Lucknow)

“IN THE 2019 ELECTIONS, THE SP JOINED HANDS WITH THE BSP AND THE RASHTRIYA LOK DAL (RLD) TO FORGE THE "MAHAGATHBANDHAN". THE SP CONTESTED 37 SEATS, WHILE THE BSP AND THE RLD CONTESTED 38 AND THREE SEATS, RESPECTIVELY. THE CONGRESS WAS ALLOCATED TWO SEATS. ALTHOUGH THE SAMAJWADI PARTY SECURED VICTORIES IN JUST FIVE OF THE 37 SEATS IT CONTESTED, IT CLAIMED THE SECOND POSITION IN 31 SEATS. AKHILESH YADAV HIMSELF EMERGED VICTORIOUS FROM THE AZAMGARH PARLIAMENTARY SEAT BUT LATER VACATED IT FOLLOWING THE 2022 ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS, IN WHICH THE SP FACED DEFEAT



BRICS: Alternative model of global governance

The recent BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) conference in Johannesburg, South Africa (Aug 22-24, 2023), reaffirms the formation of an alternative global governance system. Way back in 2001, an economist for Goldman Sachs named Jim O'Neill coined the original acronym 'BRIC' to refer to Brazil, Russia, India, and China. He also predicted that all these emerging economies might dominate the global economy by the year 2050. However, it hardly garnered attention in global discussion forums and among intellectuals as the US was then the supremely dominating unipolar power. Nevertheless, with the global economic crisis in 2008, the international community came to realise that there are other nations in the Global South like India, China, etc, which can easily stabilise and further dictate terms in the international financial system in the long run.

It was the first time in 2008 when the BRIC came into discussion with Chinese President Hu Jintao, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, and Russian President Vladimir Putin on the sidelines of the G-8 Summit in St Petersburg, Russia. But before that, the foreign ministers of the BRIC nations met on the margins of the 61st UN General Assembly in New York City in 2006 and outlined the main objectives of the future group. These high-level meetings finally led to the crystallisation of the intergovernmental organisation on June 16, 2009, in Yekaterinburg, Russia, when the heads of the four founding members gathered for its first summit. The main objectives and goals set by the BRIC were: to promote economic cooperation, trade, and investment flows among the members and with other developing countries; to advocate for a more legitimate and representative international system, including reforming the UN Security Council; to strengthen people-to-people exchanges and cultural, educational, and sports cooperation; to act as a bridge and voice for the interests of the Global South, and finally to use the economic strengths of each member to build relations and avoid com-



petition. However, these original objectives have undergone massive changes with the sharp rise of China since 2012 with the beginning of the Xi Jinping regime in Beijing. Additionally, what has tremendously affected the intergovernmental relationship between India and China is the ongoing border clashes on the Line of Actual Control and over the McMahon Line, covering more than 3,488 km and dividing into three sectors: Eastern, Western, and Middle Sectors. Apart from China's much-talked-about and controversial Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), the String of Pearl Strategy, and finally, the Wolf Warrior Diplomacy tactics are fast becoming potential threats to its neighbour India. Under Xi, China has revived its imperialistic agenda and is reclaiming its global status by using money, muscle power, and diplomacy.

Furthermore, within the BRICS, the current concern is the Russia-Ukraine war continuing since February 2021. Putin's aggressive agenda and

blatant violation of international norms, including the UN Charter, while forcefully occupying the eastern flanks of Ukraine, are making geopolitical equations worse every single day. In fact, Putin could not travel to a BRICS member nation, ie, South Africa, this time for the latest summit, fearing his arrest as the International Criminal Court (ICC) has already issued an arrest warrant against him. South Africa is an ICC member and would be compelled to arrest Putin if he enters its territory. Therefore, the spy-master has avoided attending the latest BRICS summit and has deputed his Foreign Minister and confidant Sergey Lavrov instead. On March 17, 2023, after conducting an investigation of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide, the ICC issued arrest warrants for Putin and Maria Lvova-Belova, the Russian Commissioner for Children's Rights. The ICC indictment alleges that both are responsible for war crimes involving the unlawful deportation and transfer of children from Ukraine to Russia. Meanwhile, Moscow has denied the alle-

gations and labelled the charges as completely outrageous. The biggest irony is that the ICC has no power to arrest such suspects and can exercise its jurisdiction only within its member nations. The Russian Federation is not a member of the ICC at present. Besides, Putin's war game in Ukraine and NATO's constant supply of lethal weapons to the latter are creating an environment of almost a Third World War in Europe, putting the whole world at risk of another catastrophe immediately after the harrowing COVID-19.

Furthermore, Brazil and South Africa, two other members of the BRICS community, are undergoing significant economic and political upheavals recently. Especially the chaos brought by Jair Bolsonaro, the outgoing President, and currently, Lula's populist political agenda may once again herald disaster for Brazil. With all these in mind, the future of BRICS and its new members will face turbulent times in the days to come.

For Delhi, it would be challenging to balance its growing relationship with the US and the West while spear-

heading a forum where China is the most dominant power. Beijing's agenda for de-dollarisation and creating an economic spectacle for dethroning the Bretton-Woods institutions would not augur well for the rest of the BRICS community, including the newly inducted ones. The reason is that BRICS is a relatively new platform, while the US-led global liberal order is an old and experienced system, so to say. Indeed, the US and the West-led institutions have already witnessed multipronged crises and have learned the art of survival. So only with the assurance of China, the largest economic giant in the world, a dwindling Russia under Putin, and a fast-emerging global power like India under strongman Narendra Modi, bracing for its own identity, power, and influence with a strong tilt towards the US, could possibly create a serious push-and-pull game within BRICS in the coming days. And the game has already begun; India displayed its power and branding at the Johannesburg summit with the announcement of its rare space science marvel, successfully landing the Chandrayaan-3

mission at the South Pole of the Moon. Frankly speaking, Prime Minister Modi is a highly ambitious statesman who has already committed his country to a five-trillion-dollar economy and developed country status in the coming days. Equally ambitious is Xi, who is already on the road to acquiring the status of China's lifetime president and ruling until his death, similar to the country's founder Mao Zedong. Remember, these two leaders are running the two most populous countries in the world, and they are neighbours intensely competing for global power and position. Therefore, BRICS is setting a new power game that will be sharper and tougher in the years to come.

It's time for India to take sides instead of playing double roles, as many strategic experts suggest. However, it is a challenging game to be on one side of the spectrum, as the world has become increasingly interdependent today, unlike the pre-Cold War days.

This summit is historically significant in the sense that it has paved the way for the expansion of the group from

mere five to eleven now. The new members joining the grouping are Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). In fact, it is the second expansion of the organization after a gap of 13 years, when South Africa was welcomed in 2010. The addition of Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE is of great significance as they are oil-rich nations of the world. With the entry of Argentina, another member from the South American region has come, following Brazil. Now, the two big nations and powers from South America can well represent the priorities for the rest of the Latin American countries. All these new members will formally join the forum by January 1, 2024.

Despite all the intricacies of the global governance system and within BRICS itself, the latter is certainly redefining a new system for emerging economies and developing nations, especially for the Global South.

Finally, the BRICS turning the tide against the US will once again divide the world at a time when many developing nations are either confused or have not been able to decide which side to take. The BRICS has already been branded as an anti-Western global platform. The smearing of BRICS as an anti-American group needs to be minimized in the global media.

On the other hand, the advocates of the longstanding global liberal order must understand that their system is declining, and people are rapidly losing trust in it. Hence, an Asian order spearheaded by China could be an alternative framework for many, but it has its limitations due to its neglect of universal human rights and purely authoritarian style. It is time to reinvent a new global order wherein multipolar identities and interests are accommodated. Possibly, BRICS could be an alternative system that can guide the world into a new order, despite the serious problems and growth prospects within the organization's members. Let's wait and watch how BRICS takes the world forward.

(The writer is currently president of the Global Research Foundation)

The BRICS turning the tide against the US will once again divide the world at a time when many of the developing nations are either confused or have not been able to decide which side to take. Already, the BRICS has been branded as an anti-Western global platform. The smearing of BRICS as an anti-American group needs to be minimised in the global media



MAKHAN SAIKIA

PERSPECTIVE

Mystery behind demise of Wagner Group boss

Two months after challenging Vladimir Putin's leadership in an apparent but abortive "mutiny", Yevgeny Prigozhin — the former owner of the mercenary private military company Wagner Group — has joined a long list of prominent Russians to die in mysterious circumstances.

Prigozhin's private jet apparently crashed on a routine flight from Moscow to St Petersburg just after 3pm local time. Confirmation of Prigozhin's likely demise came in the form of announcements by Russia's authorities and a Telegram channel linked to the Wagner group. Conveniently, there was also video footage of the plane falling out of the sky and burning on the ground.

With him on the aircraft was Dmitry Utkin, widely considered to be his second in command at the Wagner Group. Other passengers are reported to have included Valery Chekalov, the head of Wagner security, Yevgeny Makaryan, who has been described as Prigozhin's bodyguard and other Wagner Group personnel.

While it is unlikely that we will ever know for sure how, why and on whose orders Prigozhin might have been killed, it is far less difficult to imagine that he finally paid the price for his march on Moscow at the head of a column of his Wagner Group troops at the

end of June 2023. The deaths of other top Wagner personnel in the crash spell the likely end of the group in its current form.

At the time, Prigozhin went to great lengths to paint his mutiny as directed against the top brass in the Russian ministry of defence and not as a direct challenge to the Russian President, Vladimir Putin. Yet the brief episode exposed cracks in the regime. Unopposed by local and regional security forces, Prigozhin's troops were able to take Rostov-on-Don and the headquarters of Russia's southern military district and command centre of the war in Ukraine. They also marched to within 200 km (125 miles) of the Russian capital, again mostly unopposed.

Following a deal brokered by Belarusian president Alexander Lukashenko, Prigozhin called off his rebellion, agreeing to relocate his men and himself to Belarus and Wagner's overseas bases — mostly in Africa.

Despite some concerns over an increasing Wagner presence closer to Nato members Poland and Lithuania, little of the agreed relocation seems to have happened. Prigozhin himself appears to have enjoyed significant freedom of movement in Russia in the weeks after his abortive mutiny, including making an appearance on the sidelines of the Russia-Africa summit at the end of July.



Putin's purges
Though abrupt, his death is not unexpected. Under Putin, a former KGB operative himself, Russia has carried out several high-profile assassinations and assassination attempts, including in the UK and Germany, to go after alleged traitors and Putin critics.

Many opposition figures in Russia have either died mysteriously or been assassinated.

The list includes figures such as Alexei Navalny (who survived novichok poisoning), former deputy prime minister Boris Nemtsov, anti-corruption lawyer Sergei Magnitsky, and journalist Anna Politkovskaya.

Meanwhile, some regime critics may have thought themselves to be beyond his reach in the UK or other countries, have also been disposed of.

These include oligarch and former friend turned critic, Boris Berezovsky, and former spies Alexander Litvinenko and Sergei Skripal, who were both poisoned (although Skripal survived) have been targeted.

Putin's message here has been clear for two decades: opposition will not be tolerated and will probably have fatal consequences.

Prigozhin's likely assassination reaffirms this message spectacularly. But it is not the only step that Putin has taken to reassert control. On the day of Prigozhin's death, one of his presumptive allies in the military establishment, Sergei Surovikin — a former commander of Russian forces in Ukraine — was apparently dismissed as head of the Russian aerospace forces. This

followed weeks of speculation following his disappearance after the Prigozhin mutiny.

Other top military officials critical of Russia's conduct of the war in Ukraine, including the commander of the Russia 58th Combined Arms Army, Ivan Popov, were dismissed. Other officials, considered close to Prigozhin, including the deputy head of military intelligence, Vladimir Alexeyev, are still unaccounted for.

Outside the military, alleged critics of Putin's war in Ukraine have not been safe either. A series of mysterious deaths struck fear into Russian oligarchs in the months after the full-scale Russian aggression against Ukraine began in February 2022. Since then, criticism from the Russian business elite has been muted.

The apparent assassination of Prigozhin would therefore seem to be business as usual for Putin. It was foreshadowed in the Russian president's speech on June 24, the morning after Prigozhin's mutiny began, when he vowed to punish the "traitors", as he described them.

Back to business as usual?
Prigozhin's demise also draws a line under the apparent power struggle within the Russian military. As the chief architects of the war in Ukraine, Defence Minister Sergey Shoigu and chief of

general staff Valery Gerasimov are the most obvious beneficiaries of Prigozhin's death and the wider purges of critics inside and outside the military.

Putin, and his inner circle, clearly have prevailed on this occasion. This is not surprising, given how little direct and public support Prigozhin received over the course of his mutiny. In this sense, Putin's regime is still highly effective and has demonstrated its capacity to survive domestic challenges.

But the underlying problem — a disastrous military campaign in Ukraine — has not gone away with the death of Prigozhin. Putin may have silenced one of the most outspoken critics of the conduct of the war, and have others arrested or murdered, like prominent pro-war bloggers Igor Girkin and Vladen Tatarsky. But many who share Prigozhin's misgivings without backing him publicly will have survived Putin's clean-up operation.

Putin can be sure that they will now be extra careful not to stand too close to high windows or accept cups of tea from anyone connected with Russia's security services. But this may not be the only lesson they have learned from Prigozhin's demise — and that will likely worry the Kremlin and increase the paranoia of Putin and those around him.

(The Conversation)

