

# Stalin's 133rd Birthday Passes

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TBILISI, Georgia — People across the vast territory where Josef Stalin once imposed his terror have marked the 133rd anniversary of the dictator's birth, some in hatred but others in reverence.

In Moscow, several hundred Russian Communists led by party boss Gennady Zyuganov laid flowers Friday at Stalin's grave on Red Square, while smaller rallies were held across Russia and several former Soviet republics. In southern Ukraine, several ethnic Crimean Tatars trashed an exhibition on Stalin.

According to the prominent Russian right group Memorial, Stalin ordered the deaths of at least 724,000 people during the purges and repression of the 1930s, while millions died as a result of the forced labor system in the gulag, the Soviet prison system.

But some people believe he was a strong and valiant leader whose grip on the nation was needed for security, and his popularity in Russia has been climbing amid Kremlin-backed efforts to defend his image.

(AP)

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