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Stalin Eyes Power in Indian State Election

By AFP

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Born just days before his namesake died in 1953, the Indian Stalin has admitted that his name had caused some awkward moments in Russia. **Arun Sankar / AFP**

A politician named after Soviet dictator Josef Stalin was poised to win power in an Indian state Friday while elections in another key region of the country were too close to call.

Exit polls suggested M.K. Stalin's Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) party had won the elections across Tamil Nadu in southern India by a big margin.

M. Karunanidhi, a left-wing four-time chief minister of the state, named his son after Stalin in tribute to the communist leader.

Born just days before his namesake died in 1953, the Indian Stalin — a committed democrat — admitted in a 2019 newspaper interview that his name had caused some awkward moments in Russia.

"As soon as I landed at a Russian airport, I was asked to mention my name. When I said 'Stalin' many people at the airport started looking at me," he told the Times of India.

"While checking my passport, officials asked me several questions before I was allowed in," he said of the 1989 trip.

"Many people in Russia didn't like Josef Stalin."

Tamil Nadu's election results are due to be announced on Sunday, along with those of several other states including Kerala, Assam and most significantly West Bengal in eastern India.

A first victory in West Bengal for Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) would be of seismic importance in Indian politics.

Modi and his close aide Amit Shah have campaigned aggressively across the state, including holding dozens of rallies involving sometimes hundreds of thousands of people.

These events, as well as those held by other parties, have been blamed in part for the brutal explosion in coronavirus cases in India.

Exit polls suggested the race in West Bengal between the BJP and the ruling Trinamool Congress (TMC) of Mamata Banerjee, a fierce Modi critic, was too close to call.

But the polls indicated Modi's BJP will retain power in Assam and secure victory in Puducherry, handing twin defeats to Congress, the main national opposition party.

In Kerala in the south, where the BJP until now has played only a bit part, a left-wing alliance was predicted to retain power with a comfortable victory over a Congress-led coalition.

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