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Putin Faces No Real Opposition, Spokesman Says

By AFP

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Moskva News Agency

Russian President Vladimir Putin faces no real competition ahead of next year's election, his spokesman said on Tuesday, adding that there could be "no rivals" to the long-time leader.

Putin has led Russia since the turn of the century and presided over its seismic Ukraine offensive.

He has won four presidential elections and briefly served as prime minister in a system where political opposition has become virtually non-existent.

"We have repeatedly said that President Putin is undoubtedly the number-one politician (and) statesman in our country," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told Russian news agencies, accompanying Putin on a trip to China.

"In my personal opinion... he has no rivals at the moment and cannot have any in the Russian

Federation," he said.

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Putin has not yet officially announced whether he will run in the forthcoming presidential election, expected in March 2024, but has said he will comment by the end of the year.

Presidential elections in Russia are officially set by parliament and held every six years. The term of office was lengthened from four years previously.

There may be a second round if no candidate is able to secure more than 50% of the vote.

In practice, this has never happened and Putin has been pronounced victor by wide margins.

Rights groups say national elections in Russia have largely become a rubber stamp for Putin and the ruling party.

Dozens of prominent Russian dissidents have left the country or been jailed, including opposition leader Alexei Navalny, who is serving a prison sentence on a range of charges.

In August, Navalny was handed a new, 19-year prison sentence on extremism charges.

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