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First Couples Pose for Census Photos

By Alexey Eremenko

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Putin and his wife, Lyudmila, center, talking to a census taker at their Novo-Ogaryovo residence on Saturday. **Alexey Druzhinin**

The first nationwide census in eight years picked up steam over the weekend, with both the president and the prime minister attempting to lead the populace by example, meeting with census takers before cameras Saturday.

President Dmitry Medvedev, who met a census taker in his residence in the Moscow region's Gorki village, offered the young woman tea and cookies before answering her questions and even telling how he worked as a census taker in 1989.

He said it took him a week to poll every household in the building he was assigned, but he succeeded.

“In the end, I reached those who did not respond immediately anyway — I was a persistent man and had more time, being a postgraduate student,” Medvedev said, RIA-Novosti reported. "Eventually, they opened doors and gave all the data."

Prime Minister Vladimir Putin met a census taker at his own Moscow region residence, in Novo-Ogaryovo. His wife, Lyudmila Putina, was also present for the cameras in a rare public appearance.

Both leaders and their spouses informed the census takers about their age, education, marital status, housing conditions, employment, involvement in migration processes, sources of income, usage of Internet and other telecommunication devices and even the way their households process waste — a question added at the insistence of environmental activists, RIA-Novosti reported.

Other public figures who have already participated in the two-week census include St. Petersburg Governor Valentina Matviyenko and Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill, the official web site for the census said Friday.

Kirill dismissed fears from some believers that participating in the census was a sin, citing the example of Jesus' parents, whose participation in a Roman census took them to Bethleham on the night that Jesus was born, according to the Gospel of Luke. Kirill also said he regretted that the census does not include a question about religion.

The census started Thursday and will end Oct. 25. Preliminary data is expected to be available only in April. State Statistics Service chief Alexander Surinov said Friday that the census has proceeded well so far, RIA-Novosti reported.

The last census, held in 2002, put the populace at 145.2 million, but the State Statistics Service estimated last year that it has shrunk to 141.9 million.

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