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3 Russians Vie to Be 7 Billionth Person

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Nikolayeva holding Pyotr in a Kaliningrad hospital Monday. Babies in St. Petersburg and Kamchatka also might be the world's 7 billionth resident. **Pavel Shirokov**

The global population officially topped 7 billion on Monday, and a worldwide fight immediately erupted over which lucky baby was the first to reach the milestone — with three infants from the distant corners of Russia vying for the crown.

The first recorded Russian birth came at 12:19 a.m. in the Far Eastern city of Petropavlosk-Kamchatsky when a 3.6-kilogram boy named Alexander came into the world, regional officials declared.

While they quickly claimed him as the record-setting baby, doctors in the westernmost Russian city of Kaliningrad cried foul — saying a 3.6-kilogram boy named Pyotr Nikolayev born there at 12:02 a.m. was the real deal, despite the time difference, according to Interfax.

"He was born on this day, and that is a great honor," said the boy's mother, Yelena Nikolayeva, as she held up a certificate for photographers naming her son as the world's 7

billionth resident. "I do not know what opportunities it will give our child."

Not to be outdone, Anastasia and Roman Yegurnovykh came forward hours later in St. Petersburg to say their child — a 2.8-kilogram girl named Nelli who was born at 12:05 a.m. in hospital No. 9, was the true breakthrough baby, RIA-Novosti reported.

That's not even taking into account babies in the Philippines and India — where at least six babies were born between 12 a.m. and 8 a.m. — who also laid claim to the title.

Kamchatka Governor Vladimir Ilyukhin pointed to geography as the only way to settle the matter — at least in Russia.

"Of course, there are many contenders for the title of the 7 billionth baby on the planet. But our country is known for starting in Kamchatka. Therefore, we believe that this child was the 7 billionth child and was born in Kamchatka, Russia," he said in a statement on the regional government's web site.

Experts said it was probably impossible to ever truly settle the question — given that 500,000 babies are born worldwide every single day.

A leading Russian demographer said he found the whole argument somewhat silly, given the country's rapidly declining birthrate.

"I think it is far more likely that the child was born in either Africa or Asia than here," Anatoly Vishnevsky, director of the Institute of Demography of the State University, told The Moscow Times by phone. "The fact is the birthrate here is declining fast, while every minute a child is born in other parts of the world."

Government statistics show that Russia has lost more than 5 million people since 1995, with the population currently standing at just under 143 million, down from 148.5 million 16 years ago, according to the State Statistics Service.

That led Prime Minister Vladimir Putin to vow earlier this year to pump 1.5 trillion rubles ($50 billion) into programs to boost the birthrate 30 percent in just five years.

The United Nations had declared Oct. 31 as the landmark day that the Earth's population would eclipse the 7 billion person mark, but was less inclined to declare which baby crossed the finish line first.

"In Russia, we will issue three certificates, and a final decision will perhaps be made at UN headquarters," Alexander Mordovin of the Russian office of the UN Population Fund told RIA-Novosti. "If the 7 billionth person is not officially chosen, we will assume that all of these children will hold the title."

Still, the honor does carry some value. For her trouble, Marina Bogdanova, the 22-year-old mother of the boy born in Petropavlosk-Kamchatsky, was given a free two-room apartment by the regional government.

The United Nations has long trumpeted Oct. 31 as the milestone day as a way to draw attention to the fast-expanding global population.

The world reached 1 billion people in 1804 and took more than 100 years to hit 2 billion in 1927. The 3 billion mark was passed in 1959, with 4 billion surpassed just 15 years later. The population hit 5 billion in 1987, followed by 6 billion in 1998, UN stats show.

"Seven billion is a number we should think about deeply," Dr. Eric Tayag of the Philippines Department of Health told The Associated Press following the birth of Danica May Camacho in a crowded Manila hospital, whose arrival was among those in the running for the milestone.

"We should really focus on the question of whether there will be food, clean water, shelter, education and a decent life for every child," he said. "If the answer is 'no,' it would be better for people to look at easing this population explosion."

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