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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Birth Rate Up 6%, Death Rate Down 3% in Early 2012

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The birth rate was up more than 6 percent in the first three months of this year. **Vladimir Filonov**

More than 450,000 babies were born in Russia in the first three months of this year, a 6.5 percent increase over the number born in the same period of 2011, Health and Social Development Minister Tatyana Golikova said Thursday.

From January to March of this year, 486,600 people died in Russia, a 3.3 percent decrease compared to the same period in 2011, Golikova said, Interfax reported. But the figure still outpaced the birth rate, as it has annually for more than a decade.

President-elect Vladimir Putin and outgoing President Dmitry Medvedev have both identified Russia's demographic situation as one of the biggest challenges facing the country.

In one of Putin's campaign articles published in the run-up to the March 4 presidential vote, he pitched a strategy to increase the population from the current 143 million to 154 million by 2050 with the help of measures like providing financial and other support for families with more than two children and by raising migration into Russia by 300,000 people a year.

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