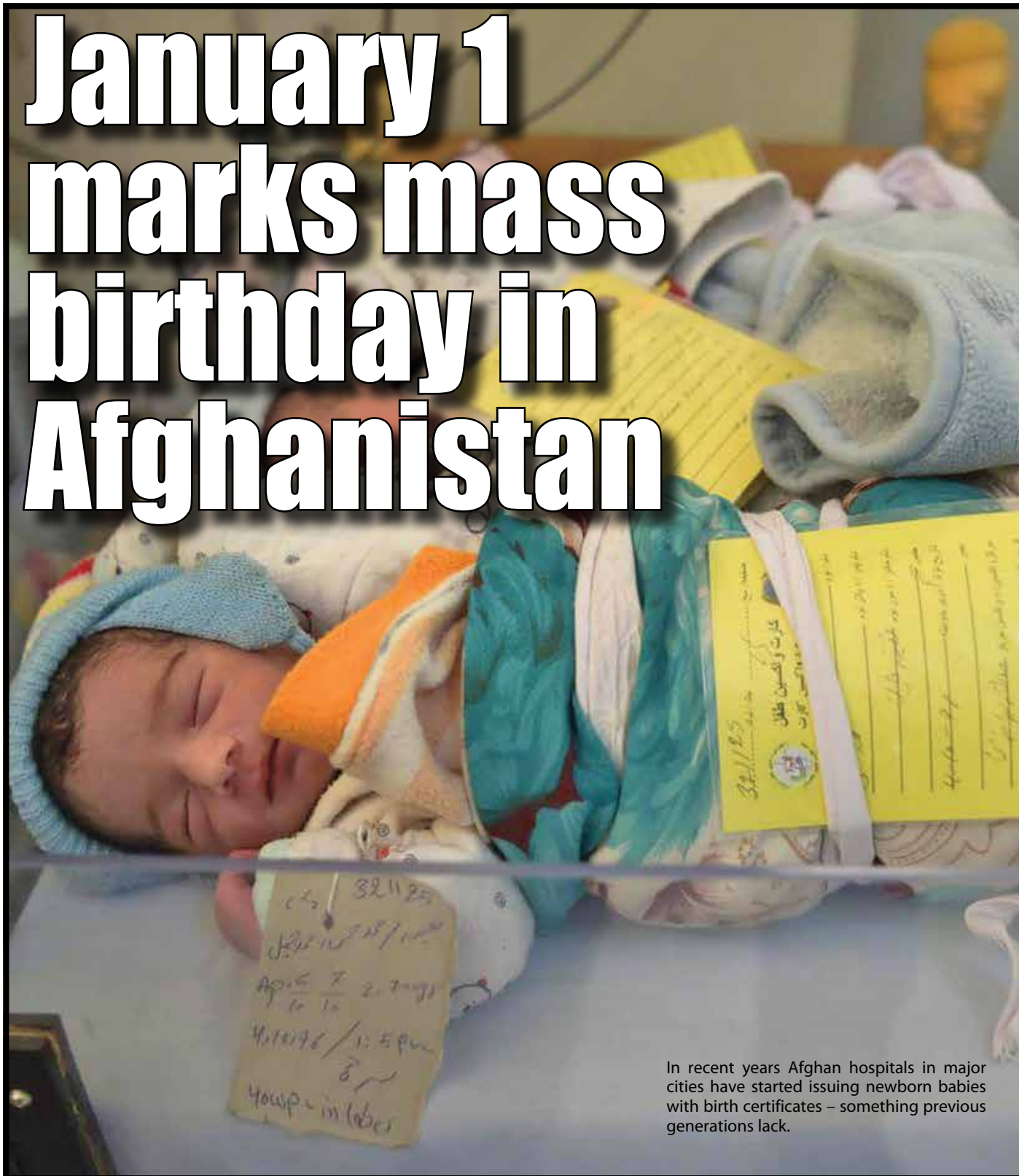


January 1 marks mass birthday in Afghanistan



In recent years Afghan hospitals in major cities have started issuing newborn babies with birth certificates – something previous generations lack.

Kabul

January 1 is Samad Alawi's birthday. It's also the birthday of his wife, his two sons, 32 of his friends and thousands of other Afghans – a date chosen for convenience by a generation who do not know when they were born.

In the absence of birth certificates or official records, many Afghans have long used the seasons or historical events to help determine their age.

But the explosion of social media networks such as *Facebook*, which require users to register their birthday, and the growing demand for passports and visas have forced Afghans to pick a day – any day.

January 1 has become a common choice, although the date is more about practicality than parties.

"It seemed all Afghans had birthdays on January 1," Samad Alawi, who is 43, said.

Even those who know their real birth date often choose January 1 because they do not want the hassle of converting their birthday from the Solar Hijri, an Islamic calendar used only in Afghanistan and Iran.

The first day of the year in Hijri usually corresponds to March 21.

"When I first created my *Facebook* account in 2014 it was just easier to choose January 1 as my birthday from the drop down list," Alawi told said.

"The internet was also slow and it was difficult to convert the date to a Western calendar."

Even the official identity card, or *Tazkira*, held by most Afghans offers little official clarity, with a person's age "determined based on physical appearance".

"My *Tazkira* says I was three years old in 1365 in the Hijri calendar (1986). That is the year my *Tazkira* was issued," Abdul Hadi, who is now 34, said.

"There is no blank space for a date of birth in an Afghan *Tazkira*. How can you remember your date of birth if you don't have one on the record?"

Authorities are trying to change that.

In recent years Afghan hospitals in major cities have started issuing newborn babies with birth certificates – something previous generations lack.

The government also plans to issue e-*Tazkiras*, or computerised national ID cards, to Afghans which would include their date of birth, if it is known. But the process has been stalled for years by political and technical problems.

In the absence of official records, some educated parents resort to recording their children's birthdays on slips of paper which are often kept in a copy of the *Koran*.

"I hope one day all Afghans have their proper date of births so that social media doesn't have to tell them how old they are," Alawi said. (AFP)

Israel finds 2,700-year-old 'governor of Jerusalem' seal

Jerusalem

Israeli archaeologists unveiled on Monday a 2,700-year-old clay seal imprinted with images and Hebrew words that may have belonged to a biblical governor of Jerusalem.

The round button-sized seal was found in a building in Jerusalem's Old City near the Western Wall and dates back to the 7th century BC, from the time of the First Jewish Temple, said the Israel Antiquities Authority.

The artefact bears an engraving showing two men wearing robes and facing each other in a mirror-like manner.

Below them is an inscription in ancient Hebrew that reads "to the governor of the city",

or mayor.

"It's a very rare find," said Shlomit Weksler-Bdolah, excavator of the Western Wall plaza for the Israel Antiquities Authority.

"The find's great importance is that until now, we only know the expression of city governor (of Jerusalem) from the Bible," she told AFP.

"This is the first time we find it in the archaeological context, in an archaeological dig of a structure from the seventh century BC," she added.

The seal does not mention the name of the governor or the city of Jerusalem, but Weksler-Bdolah said she believed it referred to the Holy City.

She said a scientific examination of the seal would be conducted soon and was expected to corroborate its link to Jerusalem.

According to her, the seal was apparently attached to an object to be delivered to someone on behalf of the governor of the city.

News of the discovery comes as tensions swirl around Jerusalem after US President Donald Trump designated the city as Israel's capital.

Jerusalem's status is perhaps the most sensitive issue in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Israel sees the entire city as its capital, while the Palestinians want the eastern sector as the capital of their future state. (AFP)



Shlomit Weksler-Bdolah, excavator of the Israel Antiquities Authority holds a 2,700-year-old clay seal which she says belonged to the "governor of the city" of Jerusalem uncovered near the Western Wall