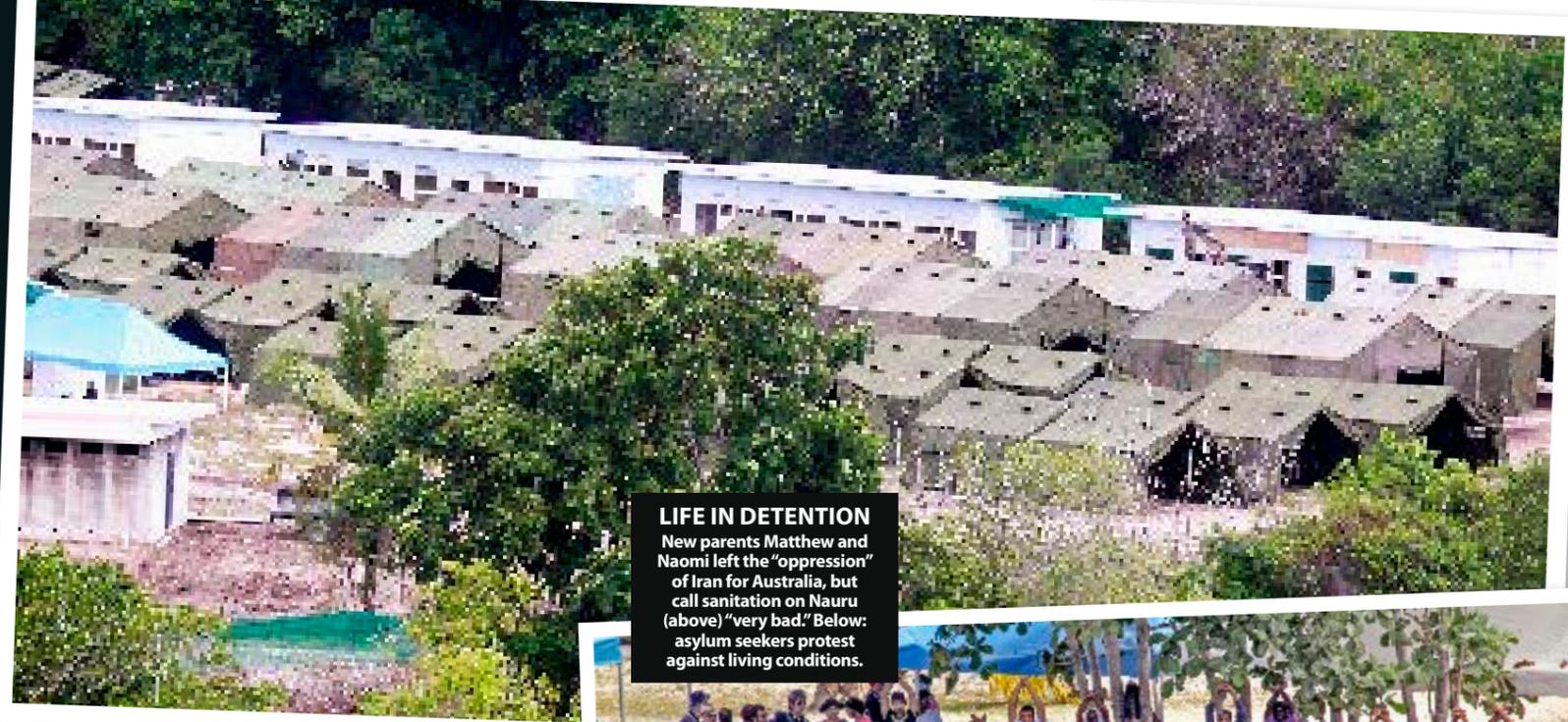




BABIES OF NAURU

# Lives in LIMBO

With 37 babies facing deportation from Australia, their parents make a desperate plea



**LIFE IN DETENTION**  
New parents Matthew and Naomi left the "oppression" of Iran for Australia, but call sanitation on Nauru (above) "very bad." Below: asylum seekers protest against living conditions.



**L**ocked in a Darwin detention centre since last year, mother-of-one Subaita\* looks down at her 14-month-old baby girl and cries. The Bangladeshi refugee has been detained in Darwin since being transferred from the Nauru detention centre for medical reasons in 2015, and sees no end in sight to her confinement. "Sometimes it breaks my heart when my daughter points at something she wants and I can't give it to her," Subaita, who gave birth to Moubani (facing page, bottom centre) in detention in Darwin, tells WHO. "If we were not locked up, we would be able to give her all the things she wants." (\*Names of all asylum seekers in this article have been changed for legal reasons.)

It's a desperate dream for her and dozens of other parents who are now facing a return to offshore detention. On Feb. 3, the High Court ruled the government can return families and individuals who came from offshore detention to the mainland for medical treatment. In total, 267 people, including 37 babies and 54 children, face removal. While the ruling means that the federal government's role in offshore detention does not breach the law, "it did not give a blanket authority for the government's actions," human-rights lawyer Daniel Webb tells WHO. "The court decides the legality, but it is for us to decide the morality."

The situation is grim for all the new parents. When she learnt of the High Court's ruling, Subaita, who arrived in Australia by boat, was "distracted and could barely speak," says Webb, the director of legal advocacy at the Melbourne-based Human Rights Law Centre, which first took the case to the High Court (see box). "She wants what every mother in the world wants and that's a decent



## BABY DARIEN

Married couple Navid and Parand met at a wedding (it was love at first sight, says Navid) and were living a comfortable life in Iran. Navid worked two jobs as a forklift driver and woodwork carver, while Parand worked as a housekeeper. But after Navid converted to Christianity, he says he became at risk of being executed, and the couple fled Iran. They wound up in Indonesia, then caught a "terrible, scary boat" to Australia. Placed in offshore detention, they were transferred to mainland Australia after Parand suffered severe depression during her pregnancy. While on the mainland, she gave birth to Darien (left). "I want to tell the Australian people that my family needs their help," says Navid. "I want a quiet life and for our family to be in peace. I want our son to go to a Catholic school. My wife was a very good cook. One of her plans is to establish an Iranian restaurant when we are released. I ask that my wife and baby be released. I can bear it [in detention] if they can be free."

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life, somewhere safe for her and her child.”

Among the group are many children now attending schools across the country, says Webb. “Kids who have had such difficult, painful lives, and they are just now starting to rebuild them,” he says. “It would be so tremendously cruel to uproot these children and families and condemn them to a life in limbo on a tiny island.”

The government, however, says it is focused on controlling national borders to discourage other asylum seekers from risking their lives by coming to Australia by boat. “The government will take a compassionate approach to this issue,” Immigration Minister Peter Dutton tells WHO. “But ultimately the aim is for the boats not to restart and the deaths at sea to recommence.”

Yet following the High Court ruling, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child issued a warning to the government, with the committee’s chair, Benyam Mexmur, saying “These children and their families face a great risk in being sent to a place that cannot be considered safe nor adequate.” Says Dutton: “The Coalition made it clear that people who attempted to enter Australia illegally by coming on a boat would never be allowed to settle here, that they would be sent to regional processing centres.”

At the time of publication, it remained a painful waiting game for Subaita, a tailor who hopes to start a business in Australia with her husband, also a tailor. “If I can stay in Australia, I believe that I can rear my baby and a peaceful generation,” she says. “It’s my dream to see my daughter as a doctor or as a lawyer to do good things and help others.”

■ *By Rachel Syers*



## BABY JASMINE

Iranians Nousha and Arman fled their country and caught a boat from Indonesia to Australia more than two years ago. Since then, they have been in detention, during which time Nousha, who has Type-1 diabetes, gave birth to their daughter, Jasmine. Nousha has a bachelor of sociology, while her husband, Arman, is a qualified fitter and turner. Due to a lack of insulin and access to medical facilities in offshore detention, Nousha’s eyesight has deteriorated and she has developed kidney and thyroid problems. She was transferred to Australia when her health worsened during pregnancy. “I am so terrified for my daughter’s future,” says Arman. “I would like to start a good life for my family, and make sure my wife regains her health. And I want to buy [any] dress that she likes ... That’s what I would like to do.”

## BABY SAMUEL

Thirteen years ago, professional bodybuilder Matthew saw Naomi on an Iranian street and thought she was so beautiful he gave her his number. A “fairytale” romance followed, and they married in a ceremony with 700 guests. But the couple lived together for only eight months before a friend of Matthew’s was, he says, unjustly jailed, and Matthew feared the same fate. The couple escaped Iran, eventually boarding a boat to Australia. They were sent to Nauru. The couple were transferred to the mainland due to complications with Naomi’s pregnancy. Naomi later gave birth to Samuel. “Life on Nauru is very bad,” says Matthew. “The sanitation and hygiene are extremely poor. We both contracted a number of chronic diseases while on Nauru. We do not want our baby to be on Nauru.”



GETTY IMAGES



Since the ruling, hundreds gathered for “Let Them Stay” protests in Australia, including in Melbourne on Feb. 8.

## FIGHTING TO STAY

Through the single case of Bangladeshi refugee Subaita, who gave birth in a Darwin detention centre last year, Melbourne’s Human Rights Law Centre challenged the lawfulness of the Australian government’s role in offshore detention. “Seeing pictures of 37 gorgeous babies facing sudden, forced deportation to a tent on a tiny island helps us see that this is a simple matter of right and wrong,” says HRLC’s Daniel Webb.



Human-rights lawyer Daniel Webb (in October).