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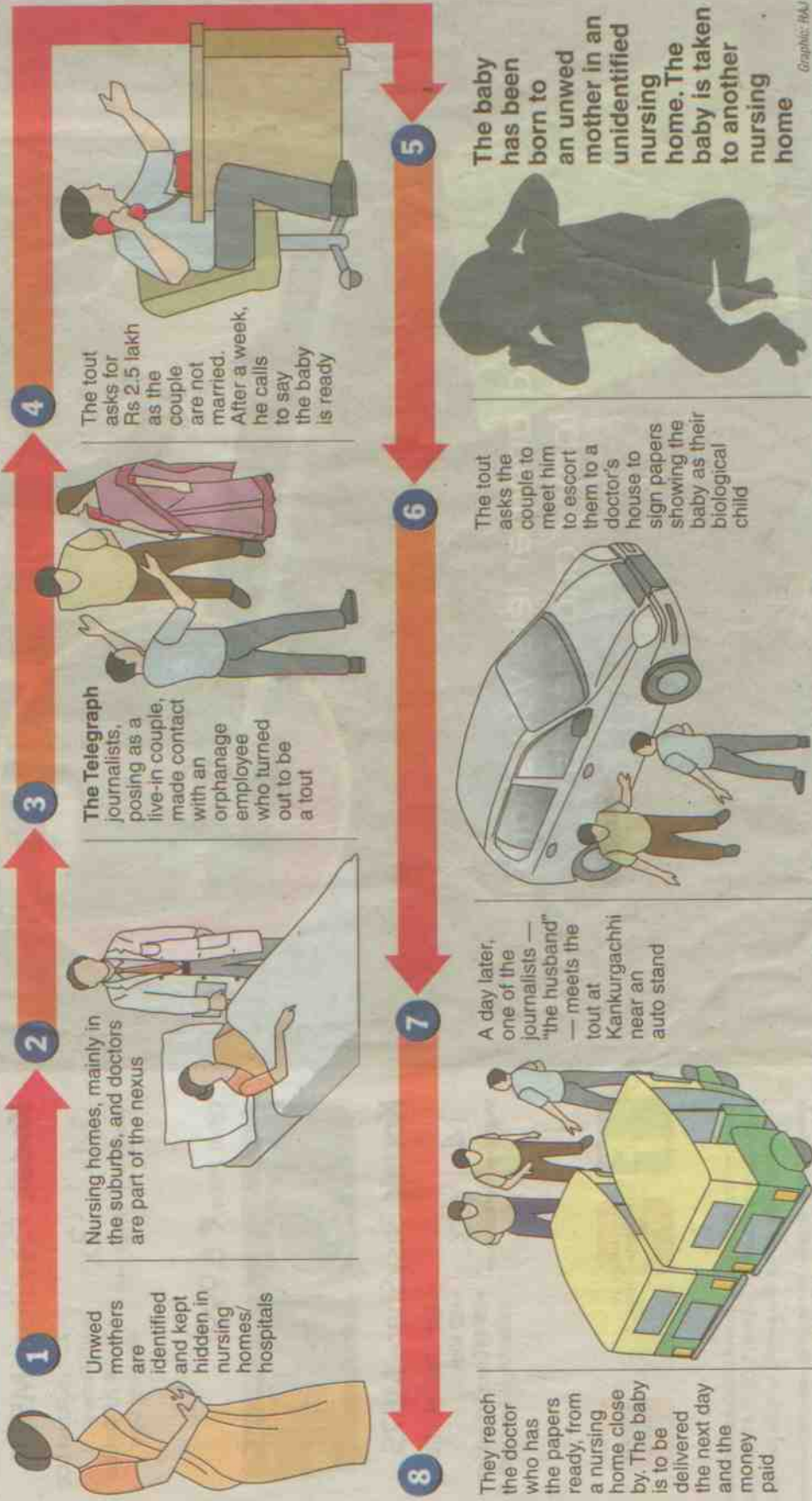
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BABIES FOR SALE

The Telegraph expose: Newborn and legal papers, all for Rs 2.5 lakh

HOW DEAL WAS MADE

Illegal adoptions are common, even official agencies admit. Buying a baby is also easy and quick, if one is ready to spend, an investigation by **The Telegraph** reveals. Two of our journalists worked their way into a network that sells babies and found out how it works



**CHANDREYEE GHOSE
AND SANJOY
CHATTOPADHYAYA**

A baby can be bought for Rs 2.5 lakh in Calcutta for adoption through an illegal process that in the end yields legal papers, two **Telegraph** journalists have found.

The duo, posing as a live-in couple, set up the adoption of a newborn for themselves in two weeks by knocking on the right door, somewhat accidentally. In the normal, legal process it could take years, though the cost would have been only around Rs 30,000-40,000.

Here is how it happened, in the words of the two journalists who worked on the exposé from September 20 to October 4.

It's September 20. The search for a baby leads us to a narrow by-lane in the north-eastern suburbs, quiet at 1.30 in the afternoon, bar the barking of street dogs. A signboard at the mouth of the lane points to an orphanage that is just a few steps away, housed in a brown building.

The orphanage office on the top (third) floor appears closed, except for the presence of one solitary sentinel. He sizes us up with sharp, shifty glances and asks us to step in after removing our shoes.

"Who told you about us?" the middle-aged, short and stocky man with thinning hair asks several times. "Have you any references?" he enquires when told we are looking for a baby to adopt and have been making the rounds of various adoption agencies for the past two years. We add that we lost Rs 70,000 when the man who had promised us a baby ran away with the cash.

The man's cloudy eyes light up with interest. He says even his orphanage has no babies to offer for adoption and has stopped registering couples.

"*Ami onek couple-der upokar korechhi* (I have helped many couples). But the whole process has to be illegal," he says.

A live-in couple cannot adopt a baby legally. A baby will cost money, perhaps a lakh or more, but it won't go waste! this time, the man assures us. At the end of a week we can walk home with a child.

It hasn't taken us more than 15-20 minutes to get to the point where he is talking money and delivery schedules — when many couples have not succeeded even in getting their names registered on the list of an adoption agency for two years.

"Had you come three days ago, I could have got you a baby immediately," brags the man in a whitish half-sleeved shirt, the kind he would wear on the other occasions we meet him. "A nursing home is going to provide you with the baby. They will make the required documents too. All you have to do is pay the required sum, go to the nursing home and sign the birth certificate of the child and other necessary documents. We will deliver the baby to your house. We work in a team."

The man says he doesn't want anyone in that office to

hear our conversation, and that future discussions will be on the phone.

"By the way, do you have any preferences about the baby's sex?" he asks.

We only want to know if it will be healthy. "It will be in tiptop condition," he promises.

While leaving, we tell Ashim-da (that's how he identified himself) we will call at 8.30 the same evening.

We phone an hour before time, the first of many calls to be made and received till October 4, to be greeted at the other end by a hesitant Ashim-da who seems to be taking time to place us. We say we are impatient and he throws at us a flurry of queries: about our family, medical history and if we have a marriage certificate.

"Then the whole process has to be illegal," he repeats when we tell him again that we don't and assure him that money is no bar.

"Most babies come from unwed mothers whom we have to maintain for some months. Only when they are ready to hand over the child, the baby will come to couples like you," Ashim-da adds.

"*Touch-e thakben* (keep in touch)," he says as we hang up, setting the date for the next conversation two days later. All calls are to be made in the evenings.

September 22 turns out to be the day the price is named.

Ashim-da explains that the nursing home where the unwed mother will be kept prepares false documents that show the adoptive mother to be the one giving birth. This means the adoptive parents get both the mother's discharge certificate as well as the birth certificate of the child with their names on them. Since the papers delivered will be "legal", the cost will go up to around Rs 2.5 lakh.

"Are you ready to pay

the price?" he asks.

We say money is not a problem. We just want a baby, fast.

"Do not mention money or baby on the phone," Ashim-da warns us.

"*Sundar jinis paben* (You will get a beautiful thing). If you need, I can provide a nurse too," he says before hanging up.

The next conversation takes place on September 25 when Ashim-da calls at 9 in the morning, saying an unwed mother has been found and has already gone into labour. We have to be prepared.

We talk again the next morning and the following

part of the payment will be made the next day. Although Ashim-da is keen to seal the deal on October 3 itself, we put it off for the following day.

On October 4, one of us, accompanied by an acquaintance, meets Ashim-da at 4.15pm in a north Calcutta neighbourhood. He arrives a little late and is upset that the "wife" has not been brought along. "It would be a waste of time for all of us. We need both the parents' signatures on the hospital admission and discharge forms," he says, a trifle tense.

A few exchanges later, we are escorted to a doctor's house nearby, a one-storey building next to a temple. The tall, lean and elderly doctor is not pleased to see just one "parent" — the "wife", he is told, is unwell.

"*Ekla ele amar somoy nosto* (why did you come alone? This is a waste of time for me). I had to get all the documents from the nursing home," he says with a frown.

No documents are signed. We promise the doctor and Ashim that this will be completed the following day when the child, a boy as it turns out, is delivered. Ashim gives us the phone number of a nurse who will help with caring for the baby.

We call a stop at this point for legal reasons. First, a live-in couple are not permitted under law to adopt. Second, the method of adoption pursued here is illegal and punishable as a criminal offence.

This criminal path to the cradle is, however, becoming increasingly popular as desperate couples buy happiness at a high price instead of waiting endlessly for a baby to be delivered to them through the official channel.

The clandestine network is easy to grease, fast and effective.

● Transcripts on Page 4



day when we express the wish to see the mother; a demand Ashim-da firmly turns down.

"Even I don't know in which nursing home she (the mother) is kept. We get information through a network. This way nobody knows which adoptive couple gets which baby. Thus everybody's identity is kept secret."

We are asked to keep handy our voter's ID, PAN card and property documents and half the amount of money.

After a few days' lull, Ashim-da phones on October 2 to inform us that the baby is "ready". One of us meets him in the evening near a diagnostic centre in the area where his office is located to tell him that

NATION

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'In affairs, girls become pregnant. They are hidden for 5-6 months for this work,'

The following are transcripts of the conversations between The Telegraph's reporters and Ashim-da, who promised to facilitate the illegal adoption of a baby and provide legal papers for a price of Rs 2.5 lakh.

September 20

TT: You said to call in the evening. So....

Ashim: Yes, yes. Do you have a marriage certificate?

TT: No, we told you we have a problem.

Ashim: Ok, ok. So what's the matter with your having an issue (child)?

TT: We have a problem....
Ashim: Tell me everything. I need to know. Don't hide anything. Hope you live here.

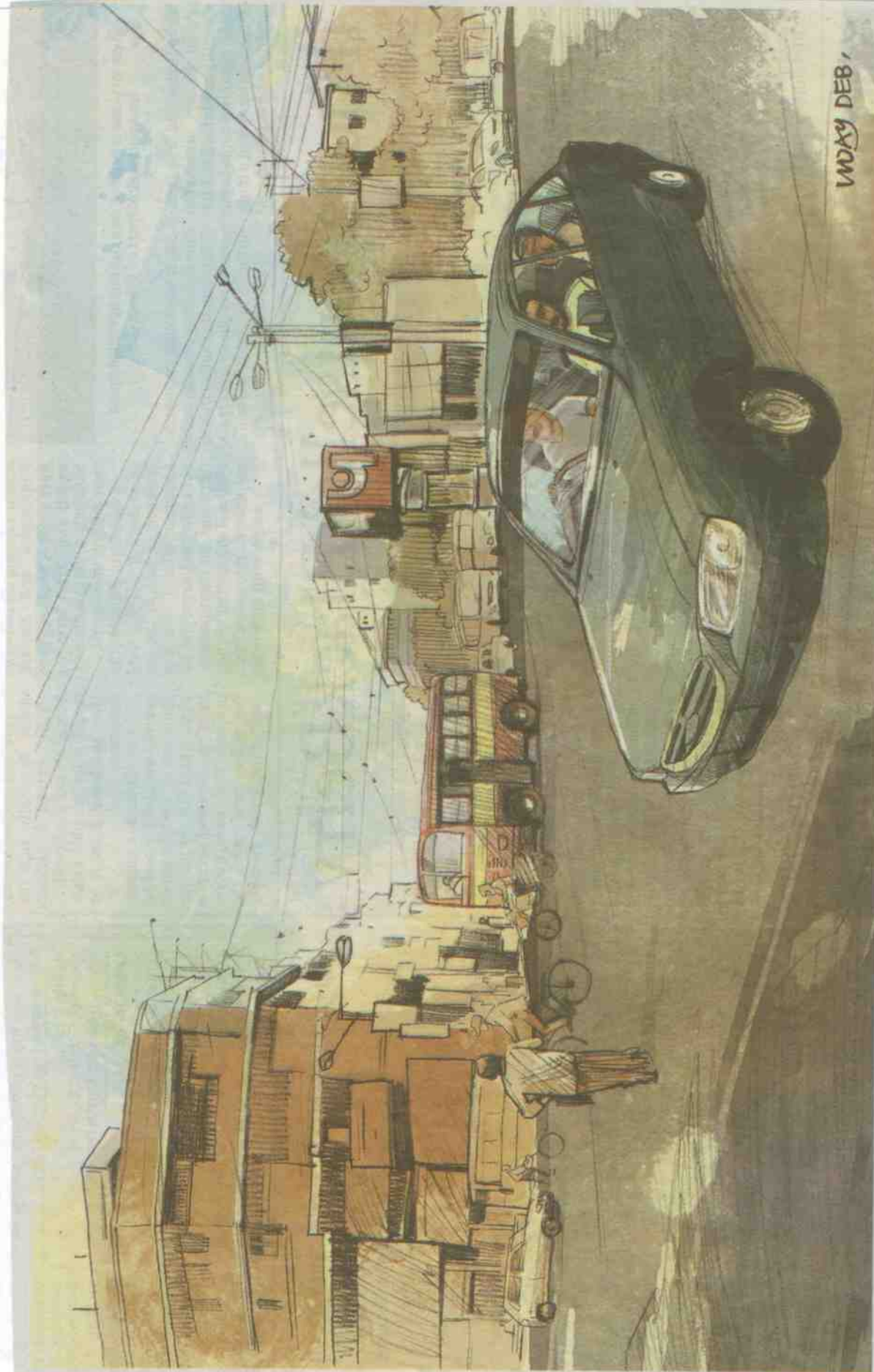
TT: Yes, we live in Calcutta.
Ashim: No, I was wondering if you would be able to raise a newborn.... The problem (live-in relationship) you have, no home will give you.

TT: We are ready to pay. You just tell us what to do.

Ashim: Don't worry. Let me see, I will tell our network. Let's see what we can do....

TT: You have given us hope. We have been making the rounds for two years. Desperate, we are now calling you. Shall we finally get a baby?

Ashim: Of course you will. Call in the evening. Call after one or two days. If I hear anything I will tell you....



WDAY DEB /

Illustration shows the meeting between The Telegraph reporter, who was accompanied by an acquaintance, and Ashim in a car in north Calcutta on October 4. From here, the reporter, his acquaintance and Ashim went to the doctor's home

Whatever happens will be illegal but all this will be made legal. You will be taken to a nursing home where you will be made to sign for the baby. Everything will be fool-proof... Let me tell you how it works. Unwed mothers are kept in nursing homes and from there babies are given, if the mother does not hand over the baby it can't be given...

Ashim: It might so happen, we could tell you tomorrow, something might develop. You will have to come right away. Will you be able to?

TT: Of course, why not?

September 22

TT: I know I am bothering you again and again.

Ashim: I have put our network on the job, people are making enquiries. Tell me, can you organise a birth certificate?

TT: Do we have to arrange a birth certificate?

Ashim: Can you?

TT: Please do it for us.

Ashim: This will have to be original. Not so easy.

TT: We are ready to pay. We will pay for this difficult job.

Ashim: There's news of an unmarried mother. She's there. For three-four months, she will be kept in a nursing home, which will cost money.

Doctors have been spoken to. I see that keeping the mother will be expensive. Then a birth certificate has to be made.

Which means... it will cost 2 to 2-1/2.

TT: 2-1/2 lakh? Ok, we will pay.

Ashim: Please don't discuss money over the phone....

TT: Does my wife have to be admitted?

Ashim: No, no. I've planned everything out. You'll just

have to sign.
TT: Can you tell us which nursing home?

Ashim: Will tell you one or two days ahead...

TT: Hope we will get a healthy baby.

Let me tell you how it works. Unwed mothers are kept in nursing homes and from there babies are given

Ashim: Don't go mentioning 'baby' on the phone. Don't worry, you will get a beautiful thing.

September 27

Ashim: I have alerted the network all around. There is a chance of something turning up in a few days. I'm trying an NGO too. If it can organise something, I've told them you can't show marriage proof.

TT: Ok, ok.

Ashim: If you take (the baby) from an NGO, there will be a court involved. Then proof

will be needed. That will be a problem for you. Don't worry, I will do it the way it suits you.

TT: Ok. Can I say something? I'm desperate to see the mother. Money is not an issue. I can

month. So tell me which is better?

October 2

Ashim calls saying there's news. An appointment is made for 4pm in the northeastern suburbs. The rest of the conversation is in our car. The TT reporter wants to bring along his "elder brother" to meet Ashim in the final round, during the transaction. Ashim agrees to meet him.

Ashim: Ok, then in the evening. Let's meet in someone's house. A lot of people are after me. Some have made advances of Rs 10,000-25,000.

But I say is this a grocery (shows list of waiting parents)? Know

why the cost is more? Because this works like a chain. The nursing home where it (perhaps the baby will be born) will be done, that nursing home will confirm and the baby will be shown as having been born to you. The illegal thing will become foolproof.

You will get the birth certificate in a month. All papers will be made inside Calcutta. From a nursing home at Phoolbagan, Maniktala, Bag-

marl or near the airport. You will just sign. So the job will be

proof work. No cheating...

water-tight. We have links with doctors all over. The doctor will do the work fast, the baby will be given from there. This will be completely foolproof. The place you went first was the wrong place. We don't cheat where a mother's emotions are involved. We won't cheat. We will return the money if the work is not done.

TT: Ok.

Ashim: I've been informed that's why I'm telling you. The news has been passed along the chain. I've heard the baby has been born.

TT: The baby is in which nursing home?

Ashim: Quite far. The baby is brought here. The mother is discharged. The unwed mother wouldn't see

all this. The mothers have to be hidden. Sometimes they are from good families. The family is involved. So they have to be kept in nursing homes in the interiors, such as Barulpur, Basirhat, Bongaon, Diamond Harbour, Duttapukur, Hasnabad, Barasat.

Unwed mothers don't create trouble. Married, poor mothers at times cause trouble. They may enquire about the baby later.

That's why we do fool-proof work. No cheating...

You be prepared.

October 3

Ashim: Can you come tomorrow? I've talked to the doctor. He said taking you to the nursing home will be troublesome, so we go to his house. Bring your wife and no one else.

TT: But my brother wants to talk. Can't I, my brother and you talk to the doctor tomorrow? I haven't told my wife anything yet. If she knows, she will get too anxious.

Ashim: No, no. Your and your wife's signatures will be needed. That remains. This is final (repeats thrice).

TT: So which nursing home do we go to?

Ashim: No need to talk about this on the phone. Lots of things can happen.

TT: No, I've become so tense I asked you the hospital's name.

Ashim: Don't get tense. Now everything is confirmed. You have to come to Maniktala. From there I'll take you to the doctor's house in an auto. The two of you will sign and give your address. Decide a name for the baby. That name has to be entered in the birth certificate. It's a boy. You're very lucky, I swear.

TT: Thank you. Can we do a medical test on the baby? Can my doctor examine the baby?

Ashim: Till you have the papers, you can't go to another doctor. They will ask for the papers. We will fix everything. Don't worry.

TT: I've a doctor in Durgapur (where the TT reporter has

said his ancestral home is). I've told him everything. He said he would do a check-up.

Ashim: Listen, we will give the baby after a check-up. We don't hand over before that. We don't accept if the baby is

(The) nursing home will confirm and the baby will be shown as having been born to you. The illegal thing will become foolproof

not all right. Two years back, we faced a problem. One person brought his own doctor for a check-up but could not show any papers. Then that doctor started such black-mailing! That was a huge thing. That's why we no more allow anyone. However much you know the doctor, you must be careful.

TT: Ok...

Ashim: Tomorrow we go to the doctor. Day after we hand over. Then you pay. If I can't hand over the papers, my work is done. Meanwhile, if any money is needed to be paid to the nursing home or the doctor, I will tell you.

TT: Of course. Which nursing home?

Ashim: I've confirmed everything. You come to Maniktala.



TT: Where in Maniktala? Should I bring a car?

Ashim: No, auto is better. We will go to the doctor's house.

TT: Why not go to the nursing home? Where's the doctor's house....

Ashim: Near Bagmari bazaar

TT: In Maniktala
TT: Then can we go to the nursing home first, see the baby and then go to the doctor's house....

Ashim: No, the baby is in a different nursing home. There the original mother is shown as the mother. This nursing home is just for the signature. This will show that your wife was admitted there so the birth certificate can be done.

TT: Does that mean we can't meet the mother and the baby.

Ashim: No, no.

TT: Can't it be done? Please. No one will know.

Ashim: Even we can't see. Forget about you. We don't move unless we are sure. For you we have to keep the baby in the nursing home for two extra days. They wanted to hand over today itself. I told them your problem. I said you have some urgent business. That's why I postponed it from Sunday.

TT: Ok, thanks.

Ashim: The doctor we are going to is a gynae. Don't say anything in front of him. He will just show in the papers that your wife was admitted to the nursing home. It will be shown as a normal delivery where the patient can be released in a day. Payment has been settled with the doctor. Don't say anything. You just sign and leave.

TT: Ok, we will pay you the entire amount.

Ashim: Yes, based on your signature we will prepare a discharge certificate. The register will have to show your wife's name. Otherwise, how will a genuine birth certificate be made? Then we will send it to the corporation. You only have to collect it. All this is illegal but, finally, everything will be legal.

TT: So when will we get the baby?

Ashim: I want to hand over on Tuesday (two days from then).

TT: I want to see the baby. I am dying to see the baby.

Ashim: It's somewhere else. Before handover, they don't allow anyone to see it. There're lots of things. What if someone says 'you didn't give it to us, you gave it to someone else'? They don't tell us where the baby is. We accept the baby at a point. It will be brought to your home. We have a nurse. She will bring it to your house. She will tell you everything. Have you talked to an ayah?

TT: Yes, yes. Everything is ready...

So what time tomorrow at Maniktala?

Ashim: ...We will go to the doctor's after 5

(TT meets the doctor the next day, escorted by Ashim. The doctor had the papers showing the adoptive parents as the biological parents of the baby. This is the point where TT stopped because it would have been illegal to proceed further.)