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Today's Edition

| Saturday , October 30 , 2010 |

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## Babies for sale

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

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 northeastern 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 finton condition " he promises

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**Calcutta Weather**

 **Temperature**  
Min : 21.9°C (+0)  
Max : 31.5°C (+0)

**Relative Humidity:**  
Max : 91% Min : 36%  
**Sunrise** : 5:44 AM

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we only want to know if it will be healthy. It will be in a top 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 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 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.



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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.



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