

BRAZIL BABY FARM A luxury adoption business

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The raids were well coordinated. One evening in June, 50 Brazilian federal agents in the southern state of Santa Catarina simultaneously swept down on the home of Lawyer Carlos Cesario Pereira, 40, a maternity hospital and a number of clandestine nurseries. Police recovered 20 children ranging in age from newborns to 3-year-olds, arrested seven suspects and detained 22 Israeli couples who were seeking to adopt children. The Israelis were later released because they apparently did not realize that the adoption proceedings might be illegal. Police claimed that Cesario was involved in the illegal adoption of Brazilian children by foreign couples, primarily Israelis. Cesario and two of his associates are suspected of trafficking in minors to obtain a profit. Although lawyers like Cesario routinely help foreigners expedite adoption proceedings, arranging adoptions for profit has been illegal in Brazil since November 1984. Cesario has admitted that he handled 150 adoptions at an average price of \$5,000 a child, ten times what an attorney would normally charge for the paperwork involved in the process. He claims, though, that his fee included medical costs and that he was simply providing a humanitarian service. A federal prosecutor is reviewing evidence to determine what charges may be brought against Cesario. Brazil has an abundance of abandoned children, including an estimated 300,000 who live in the streets. Most, however, are dark-skinned, and foreign couples generally prefer fairer babies. As a result, light-skinned infants are at a premium for would-be adoptive parents and unscrupulous operators alike. Cesario's special rapport with Israelis began in 1982 when he helped one couple with an adoption. Others later learned of him by word of mouth. According to police, Cesario ran a highly sophisticated operation out of a town near the port of Itajai. The region has a large population of German descent, which accounts for the abundance of light-skinned infants. Police claim that about 60 people worked for him, including doctors, nurses, baby-sitters, court officials, notaries and drivers. In addition, women he hired allegedly masqueraded as social workers to persuade poor women to give up their babies. Their reward: 1,000 cruzados (\$72) for each infant procured. Rosi Jorje, 18, says she met a "social worker" last October when she was six months pregnant. Since the father of her baby, a sailor, had disappeared, she accepted the woman's help. In exchange for medical care, Jorje promised to give up her baby when it was born. "The social worker told me if I decided I still wanted to keep the baby, that would be all right too," she explains. "When Daniela was born, I said I wanted to keep her. The social worker ^ said, 'That's too bad,' and took her from me." She never saw her baby again. Members of Cesario's group met prospective parents at the Itajai airport and escorted them to his luxurious farmhouse, where they were permitted to spend **time** with several babies available for adoption. Once a couple had selected a child, adoption papers, possibly obtained under illegal circumstances, were provided. "Cesario took advantage of very poor Brazilian people and the sentimental needs of foreigners who would pay anything for a baby," said Alcioni de Santana, the federal police superintendent in Itajai. "There is trafficking in babies

everywhere in Brazil, but I've never seen anything like this." Since the raid, De Santana's office has been crowded with women like Jorje who are desperate to find their children. Said she: "Daniela was lovely. She had blue eyes and dark hair, just like me. I don't want another baby, just her." Of those who had been arrested, she added, "I hate them. I hope they go to jail forever."