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# Pre-nuptial snoops in demand

**NEW DELHI:** The wedding, to be celebrated in sumptuous Indian style, was due for last month and everything was progressing smoothly until the groom suddenly lost interest.

Suspicious of an affair, the bride did what increasing numbers of anxious lovers and nervous families are doing in India: she rang a private detective to find out why.

In a country where nine out of 10 marriages are still arranged and modern social pressures are putting the institution under pressure, the industry of snooping on lovers has expanded fast over the last five years, say insiders.

In this case, an investigation by the agency AMX — “marriage is a gamble”, says its website — revealed that the groom had recently discovered he was HIV-positive.

The discovery was made by an attractive female undercover agent sent by the agency, who befriended the groom and found his medicine.

The wedding was eventually called off, like 20 per cent of cases after a probe, AMX boss Baldev Kumar Puri said.

“A pre-matrimonial investigation is your duty. A post-matrimonial investigation is much more costly.”

Puri and others, like Kunwar Vikram Singh, director of the Lancers agency here, are in a growth industry being driven by social

changes and the way in which weddings are arranged.

In cities, families are relying increasingly on small advertisements in newspapers and websites or specialist dating agencies to find the perfect match for their children.

The problem is that everyone exaggerates, or even lies, about his qualities.

Kunwar said: “Unlike the old days when a close-knit society meant that marriages were usually held between known families, these days marriages are increasingly being arranged through unknown, unfamiliar sources.

“There is an increased risk involved in dealing with strangers.”

To bridge the trust gap, families take on private detectives to assess candidates without their knowledge.

Information given by potential partners can be verified, such as their financial position, educational achievements, health and even sexual orientation. Suspicions about business or personal liaisons can be checked out, as well as former amorous relationships.

The detectives are sometimes students recruited from university campuses, older people who are unlikely to be suspected, former policemen specialised in investigations or medical employees with access to health records.

An investigation can normally be carried out in seven to 10 days and

costs 15,000 to 300,000 rupees (RM1,000 to RM20,600) depending on the complexity and travel required. The family’s wealth is also taken into account.

For Puri, there’s nothing unethical about running background checks on a potential life partner. “People are coming because they want to be 100 per cent sure. It’s like a medical check-up; you do it once a year just to be sure that everything is okay.”

In recent years, attitudes towards dating have changed dramatically in India among the middle classes, who enjoy far more freedom than their parents.

But when it comes to marriage, parents are still heavily involved and Kumari said couples often had too little time to really get to know their prospective spouses, which is why private investigators are being brought in.

Kunwar said he had a female client from the army who wanted him to look into a divorced businessman she was planning on marrying.

“The businessman took her out. He behaved like a perfect gentleman. The marriage was fixed and the wedding cards were sent. But then he was always postponing their meetings.”

And the outcome of his investigation?

“He was married to a beautiful woman in Kolkata.” — AFP



Private investigators in India are up to their eyes in work checking out the background of prospective spouses. — AFP picture