

THE TIMES OF INDIA

WEDDING TRAIL: RAHMAN SRINIVAS DEPOSITIONS HELPED CONVICT JAYA 13



MODI GIFTED RARE ROGAN ART BY MUSLIM FAMILY TO OBAMA 12

AMIT SHAH PITCHES 'OBC' PANKAJA MUNDE FOR MAHA CM 12



Cos paranoid about losing trade secrets

► Continued from P 1

With competition in the IT and FMCG sector rocketing, the pastures have never been as green, says Kumar N, head of Secret Eye detective agency. Companies are paranoid about losing trade secrets along with talent. One of his favourite stories is of tailing the director of a reputed FMCG company who had sent feelers to a rival firm. "He would meet the competitor's guy on the flight, while on business trips to Delhi, Bangalore and Chennai," Kumar recalls. "He would hand over important documents."

It was a close call though. "Once he walked up and said, 'I have seen you before. Are you following me?' I pointed to my 'wife' and replied, 'I'm travelling with family. Why are you keeping an eye on me?'" Kumar says, chuckling. "The idiot believed it and merrily continued." While he'd rather spend time tracking the "more personal" cases like matrimonial investigation, Kumar admits that, of late, his attention has been focused on corporate assignments.

"A number of corporate houses are merging or expanding their business," adds Naman Jain, managing director of Sleuths India, a leading agency that specializes in corporate investigation. "They try to poach their rivals' staff by offering lucrative salaries or better positions. After a person moves to a different firm, their loyalties shift too." With offices in Mumbai, Delhi, Bangalore

Who monitors private eyes?

The detective sector in the country is technically an unlicensed one, with a 2007 bill pending in the Parliament, says Gautam Giri from Sharp Detective Agency. There are, however, regulatory associations like the Association of Private Detectives and Investigators-India (APDI) based in Delhi, and the World Association of Detectives (WAD). Those setting up their own agency need to be members of one or both, depending on the area of operation. Work experience, referrals from other agencies, trained staff and office premises are necessary. Some also apply to the police for the Private Security Agencies Regulation Act (PSARA) licence. "It is an added regulatory measure that the reputed agencies take," Giri says. The fees for PSARA are Rs 10,000 for five years in Mumbai, Rs 25,000 for Maharashtra and Rs 1 lakh for operation across the country.

and Hyderabad, Sleuths India's clientele includes industry giants like Hindustan Unilever, Reckitt Benckiser, Yamaha and Acme Infosoft. Depending on how high-profile a detective agency is and the complexity of the assignment, fees can range from 10,000 for a day to tens of lakhs.

"In certain cases the employee has diverted intellectual drawings, R&D research, registered trademarked data, etc, to competitors," says Gautam Giri from Bandra's Sharp Detective agency, which too has seen its assignments double. "Billions of rupees and thousands of jobs are lost due to theft of trade secrets," he points out. The monies and reputation involved see companies signing up for sleuths despite having watertight non-disclosure agreements in most offices.

Suspects are usually those who have spent decades in an organization and are familiar with its inner workings, says

Jain, whose agency specializes in corporate investigation. "It could be anyone from the CEO to a member of the IT help staff," he explains. "The position doesn't matter. It's about the kind of information that they have had access to."

Assignments pan out over months or wrap up in days, depending on their complexity. Suspects are followed to faraway restaurants, tracked on trains and airplanes, and observed by undercover detectives at their workplace. As more and more evidence is collected, sensitive information previously entrusted to the suspect is gradually taken away, says Kumar. Responsibilities are shifted and before the employee moves out, he or she might be asked to sign a more stringent non-disclosure contract. Seldom is it revealed that they have been spied on. "The guy in question often doesn't have a clue what has been going on," Kumar adds, chuckling. "It is all very discreet."