

# Parties hire private detectives to spy on rivals

Iftikhar Gilani • NEW DELHI

Morning walkers near Chaudhary Charan Singh University, Meerut, were surprised when some Sherlock Holmes-type characters interrupted their exercise routine and inquired about prospective candidates seeking mandate from a particular party. In nearby Shamli, they discussed the pros and cons of a political marriage between the Congress and the Ajit Singh-led Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD).

With stakes running high and the Election Commission (EC) literally counting every breath of the candidates, political parties and in-

dividuals are roping in detective agencies to keep tabs on candidates and gauge the mood of voters.

The agencies provide real time intelligence about the strategies of rivals and even help their clients campaign surreptitiously.

Sources said nearly 180 candidates cutting across the political divide in UP and Uttrakhand, 58

candidates belonging to the Akali Dal, Congress, BJP and Independents from Punjab have so far hired Delhi and Mumbai-based detective agencies.

With more and more political parties depending on their services, detective agencies begin their work way before the polls.

A source said they mostly hire women and recruit them into a party as an ac-

tivist. They are told to earn confidence of a top leader or member of a high-level committee to gain information and access. Though these agencies are tight-lipped about their fees, sources said they charge Rs5 lakh per constituency.

Sanjay Singh, director of Indian Detective Agency, says the investigations and inquiries are conducted with utmost discretion and confidentiality. Refusing to divulge names of his political clientele, Singh says the candidates want

them to monitor movements of their rivals, find details of their poll strategy, election meetings and sometimes an advance copy of an election speech.

Delhi-based Sai Detective Agency promises to provide evidence against rivals to strengthen allegations. "We provide immensely useful proof- and evidence-obtaining services with the help of which we can help our clients," said an official from the agency.

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—A detective agency source

