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I-Spy is the name of parents' game

Private detectives make a killing as they trail students walking on the wild side

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IT would be his usual night of private fun, he thought. The plan was the same: tell the unsuspecting parents he was going to Satara to meet a friend, but then go and taste some of life's forbidden pleasures.

So Nilesh, one of the many 20-some-things at a top-notch Pune college, hired a Cool Cab to Mumbai for Rs 1,300. His first stop was at a Parvel dance bar. A few hours of jiving, and he was in one of Colaba's notorious streets where he spent another Rs 2,000.

Early next morning he was back home. Only the reaction of his parents after the usual "Satara trip went off well" wasn't usual. They knew everything. The detective agency they had hired to trail him told them.

Today, Pune mirrors what is close to becoming a national trend. With 90 per cent of its 1.5 lakh students from other cities, private detective agencies are on a roll as more and more parents find it the best way to keep tabs on their kids.

"When I joined four years ago, there wasn't a single case like this. Today, every month we get about six to seven requests from parents," says Col (ret'd) Vijay Kumar Bhalla of Globe Detective Agency, currently spying on three youngsters.

Kiran Raj, branch manager Sharp

Detectives, got his first case a month ago and has since handled three more. "There was this BCom student who did very well in the first year. But the next year, his grades began to drop. Unable to pin down the reason, his parents contacted us. We trailed him and found he had taken to drugs. His friends would hire an apartment in Koregaon Park, and sometimes, call girls would also join in."

"Our clients are mainly upper middle class parents, some of whom may not have time for their kids. Also, it's not just outstation students we are trailing. We have been approached by Puneites too," adds Narendra Kulkarni of Focus Detective Agency.

"Recently, there was this boy who got friendly with some antisocials who broke car windows at night and stole music systems. He started off for kicks, but the gang blackmailed him into joining it. We've even trailed class 11 and 12 kids."

The high cost of surveillance (see chart) isn't a deterrent for parents. After all, it's about their own children. And no one said these pitfalls of modernity came cheap.

PRICE TAG

■ Globe Detective Agency charges about Rs 3,000 a day, more if there's outstation travel.

■ Sharp Detectives' bill may even set back parents by Rs 20,000 if the duration is long.

