

For their eyes only

The world's finest sleuths meet to confer in the capital

They came sans the dark glasses, deerstalkers and overcoats with turned-up collars, looking more like tourists than what they really were: private eyes from the world over, here to attend the 39th convention of the Council of International Investigators (CII) held in New Delhi.

This is the first time the 37-year-old council is meeting in India. It is also the first time that an Indian is its head. Ramesh C. Madan, managing director of Goliath Detectives, has the honour of being president-elect to an organisation comprising 250 of the world's most brilliant sleuths, including men from the famous Scotland Yard.

It is important that such men get together, since investigations, like the law, require a very long arm indeed, often involving the meeting of minds right across the globe. As Madan says, "In most cases, the investigations cross international borders, so it helps if you have a professional counterpart you can rely on to guide you through an unknown territory."

Take, for example, the case that Canadian CII member Mark Creed was once involved in. On the face of it, it was an ordinary one, with none of the drama associated with espionage, but it led the director of King-Reed and Associates on a chase across a continent. He

had been asked by an insurance company to keep under surveillance a woman who had sued her employers for a back injury incurred at work. To check out the validity of her claim, Creed followed her around Ontario in his car equipped with a cellular telephone, radio-despatch and a video camera among other things. So

far so good.

But the investigator got a shock when one day the lady drove straight to the airport and boarded a flight to Las Vegas, giving Creed just enough time to buy a ticket with his American Express card and grab a gym bag which happened to be lying in his car.

"It was the CII network in Vegas which helped me get organised in Vegas," he says. And the trip proved worth it, since Creed was able to videotape the woman playing a vigorous game of tennis. "So much for the bad back," says the 36-year-old private eye wryly.

Creed specialises in insurance fraud cases. "There is a 300 per cent growth rate in the insurance industry in the US and Canada—almost everything is insured over there," he tells you.

In India, rather typically, it is matrimonial enquiries or family disputes that form the bulk of investigative work. Madan—who has had three attempts on his life for putting his nose where others thought it didn't belong—relates an incident about when he was hired by a spinster princess to find out why her brother was cutting her out of his will in favour of a hotel dancer.

It is important for the investigators to interact and familiarise themselves with the culture and habits of other nationalities. John Swaine, a Briton, was once involved in the murder enquiry of an Indian Muslim living in London in 1971 (Swaine was then the deputy superintendent, New Scotland Yard). The victim, Rakaiya Bibi Azari,

was murdered by her husband and brother since she used to drink in public and go out with 'white men'. Swaine admits that the motive baffled him for a long time and it was a difficult case to solve since "I knew what made a white villain tick but not an Asian." In fact, Swaine's experience and a few such others led the British authorities to issue a booklet on the Asian community in England.

Information on technological advances are a vital part of the conference's agenda. And while that is an area in which India rates poorly, knowledge of equipment in use in advanced countries like the USA serves as an important guideline. Besides, as Steven Kirby, an American licensed polygraph examiner, says, "In the long run it is not your equipment but the intelligence and inquisitiveness that counts, and I find that India has some of the finest detective minds."

It was not an Indian, however, that won the award for the International Investigator Of The Year this time, but Californian Nancy Poss Hatchl. Hatchl, a licensed detective, specialises in cases dealing with fraudulent claims and sexual harassment. And behind her grandmotherly charm is an Agatha Christie-like mind. "Women make better detectives since they are more observant and definitely more curious than men," she says, brushing aside questions relating to the danger inherent to her profession.

Along the difficult, sometimes dangerous road to clues, detectives pick up a stock of business tricks. Says Daniel E. Brooker who worked with the Philadelphia police as a detective and plainclothesman, "Body language is a good way to determine whether a person is telling the truth or not. Once you start talking to a suspect, you have five minutes to determine how to approach them—as a father-figure, co-conspirator, priest or a Simon Legree."

The profession is not without its attractions. A private investigator does inspire admiration and interest in public—even if he risks unpleasant attention in private. But what do these off-the-reel James Bonds use, on the latter occasions, for self-defence?

Madan carries a gun and Hatchl, chemical spray. For Kirby, "Brains are the best self-defence," whereas Creed admits with disarming frankness, "I run."

Priya Sahgal/New Delhi

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Ramesh C. Madan, president-elect to the Council of International Investigators, says he has his work cut out for him and that he often goes in fear of his life

The eyes have it: some clues to the business of investigation

"India is not as technologically advanced as the USA," says Kirby, "but it has some of the finest detective minds"

Steven Kirby
Polygraph examiner



Daniel Brooker
Fraud investigator

Once a police detective, Brooker says body language is a valuable indication of a person's guilt or innocence

From his own experience of investigating the murder of an Asian woman in Britain, he realised the importance to a detective of knowledge of alien cultures

John Swaine
Security consultant



Nancy Poss Hatchl
International Investigator of the Year

"Women make better detectives than men," says Hatchl, "because they are more observant, and certainly more curious"