



Picture/ MOHD ISHAK

She has a Masters from a UK university & a good job. Yet she's throwing it all away to study matchmaking in New York

# Miss



## THE NEW CUPID

By CELINE LIM  
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SHE is bright, spunky and has a Masters in human resources from a London university.

She used to have a stable \$3,000-a-month job as an assistant manager in a finance company.

But 24-year-old Violet Lim put her bright prospects aside to pursue the least expected thing: Matchmaking.

What's more, she is forking out \$3,500 so that she can be better qualified for her new line of work.

This Thursday, Miss Lim will leave for New York to enroll in a three-day intensive course at The Matchmaking Institute in downtown Manhattan. (See report on facing page.)

So far, Miss Lim is the only Singaporean to sign up for the course with the recently-opened institute.

Why the career switch?

Miss Lim said that after a few months at her job, she realised she didn't find it personally satisfying.

"I've always been interested in the human element and dealing with people," she said, adding that her work was more on the administrative side of the business.

### MANY SINGLE COUSINS

But while she was working, she noticed that many of her cousins and at least half her colleagues were still single in their early 30s.

In contrast, most of her university friends in their mid-20s were married or in relationships. "That got me thinking — because my

colleagues and cousins are all eligible singles.

**"There's nothing wrong with remaining single if it's a choice they've made, but after speaking to many people, it seems many singles just don't have time to meet new people. Their social circles are limited to people they already know."**

An advertisement for a New York-based matchmaking agency caught Ms Lim's eye while she was flipping through an in-flight magazine last November.

She did some research online and found an advertisement for The Matchmaking Institute.

It struck a chord.

Even when she was in secondary school, Ms Lim was everyone's favourite Agony Aunt.

Stepping into the role of matchmaker, she



## THE TRADITIONAL CUPID

# Madam Matchmaker



MADAM Patimahghani (inset) has more than 20 years of matchmaking experience. But the petite 53-year-old does not accept any payment, in cash or in kind, for what she does. It's purely a hobby.

It began when she wanted to help a friend's daughter find a husband. Though the match did not make it to the dais (a platform where marriage vows are customarily exchanged) she was hooked on matchmaking.

Since then, she has matched more than 400 couples.

But the Tamil-speaking woman could not put a figure to the number of introductions that have led to marriage, and could only say it was more than she could remember.

She estimates that six out of every 10 couples she pairs up will get hitched.

"I feel happy when a couple I have introduced get married and have a family of their own," she said.

When she matchmakes, it's no secret art that she employs. She just acts on her well-honed instincts of reading people's characters.

Her expertise has spread by word-of-mouth and she is now one of the better-known matchmakers in the Indian-Muslim community in Singapore.

When parents ask around for a matchmaker to find partners for their children, Madam Patimahghani's name inevitably

pops up.

And one of those whom she has successfully matched is Mr Ahmad Syed, 36, who has been married for 12 years and has three children.

Mr Ahmad, who is self-employed, said that Madam Patimahghani maintains her clients' privacy, adding that with her "it was okay to say 'no' to the bride's family if you weren't comfortable with the alliance.

"She would then try to find someone else more suitable".

But, while there are many happily-ever-afters, Madam Patimahghani's work is not always a bed of roses.

"Regretfully, there are cases when the marriage ends in a divorce," she said.

And these families who are affected confront her and in some cases even shun her at social gatherings.

While she gets upset by such behaviour, it has not stopped her from helping more families.

"I will not brood over it. I am just too happy to help people who approach me. Bad experiences do not happen all the time, so it's okay."

— Additional reporting by Hajerah Kutus

## Arranged dating options

- Online Dating: Singles post ads on websites, and if interested you contact them by e-mail.
- Speed Dating: Singles are paired up for 10 minutes, then move on to the next person.
- Matchmaking agencies: Matchmakers will interview the singles, run personality analyses and pair up the best matches.
- Astrologers: Details go into a computerised astrological chart.

Astrologer Dr K P Raamachandran said: "The stars can tell me about a person's character, so I can see if two people are compatible."

## INTENSIVE COURSE FOR MATCHMAKERS

RIDING on the popularity of the new American television series, Miss Match, The Matchmaking Institute opened its doors in October last year.

Located on Fifth Avenue between 14th and 15th Street in the trendy Union Square area in Manhattan, the headquarters of the school is a plushly-furnished loft.

The founder and executive director of the institute, Ms Lisa Clampitt, runs her own matchmaking agency — VIP Life.

She has been featured on television programmes, like The O'Reilly Factor.

The institute claims that anyone can learn to be a matchmaker.

Prospective students do not have to fulfil any requirements to qualify for the US\$750 certificate course offered by the institute.

The intensive, 22-hour course, is conducted in 11 classes, which run over a long weekend.

Topics covered include screening techniques, interviewing skills, public relations and advertising and client management.

# Matchmaker

concluded, would be a logical move, given her natural interest in handling inter-personal relationships.

So she decided to quit her job, enroll in the institute's certificate course and start her own matchmaking business with her boyfriend of four years, Mr Jamie Lee, 28.

The couple has recruited another investor and named their business Lunch Actually. It's due to launch in two months' time.

Ms Lim said: "My friends were surprised because they saw me as someone who would stick to the same career path."

Her father, who has a car dealership, and her mother, who has a tailoring business, were also taken aback.

But they have since encouraged her to follow her heart.

Before taking the plunge, she and her boyfriend spent three months researching online and commissioned a market research survey.

They found many working women were hesitant to post their profiles online because it might look unprofessional.

Many people also lied about their particulars in online postings and there was no way

to verify the information until both parties met. Ms Lim thinks matchmaking is a safer, more reliable way to meet and thinks there is a demand for her services.

"From our survey, busy, young professionals do want someone to be with, but they lack the time to find that special someone," she said.

She already has her law degree from the University of Manchester and a Masters degree from the London School of Economics; does she think a certificate will give her an edge?

### OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN

"It's not about the certification, but the opportunity to learn from industry experts," insisted Ms Lim. "Lisa (Clampitt), the director of The Matchmaking Institute, is a successful matchmaker and I want to be able to see for myself how her business is run.

"It's worth paying a premium to get the exposure. After getting such insights, I can bring these ideas back."

Apart from spending US\$750 (\$1,271) for the course and US\$250 for the optional start-

er kit, Ms Lim will be paying \$1,800 for her air ticket and accommodation, all from her savings. Mr Lee feels that it will be money well spent, as the course promises to teach sophisticated methods.

But why fly halfway round the world to New York?

She said: "I was impressed by the fun and trendy websites of US matchmaking agencies. If I were single, I would sign up with the US agencies."

She wants to model Lunch Actually after the US agencies.

Casual yet professional lunch dates will be the main method of introducing singles to each other.

"Lunch is perfect as even busy professionals have to eat. Since lunch usually lasts for an hour, both parties will have enough time to get to know each other and decide if they want a second date."

But she is realistic and doesn't see all her matches leading to wedding bells.

"It would be ideal if each match ended in marriage, but it doesn't have to be so. We just want to help people start dating."