

MUMBAI

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Now plan band, *baaja*, *baraat* online

ROHINI NAIR

THE ASIAN AGE

When you can meet Mr Right over the Internet and have a virtual date, then why not plan the wedding online as well? The new age wedding planner is a computer programme that promises to generate invites, track RSVPs, send timely reminders to vendors and even give out directions to the wedding venue to guests. And even though young Indian couples are embracing the virtual *shaadi* with gusto, experts refuse to rule out the death of the human wedding planner just yet.

"The good part about online portals is that weddings are just a click away, convenient to use and in some cases, free to download," says wedding consultant Sonia Bhambhani. The latest website to join the bandwagon is *shaadi-e-khas.com*, and it promises to specialise in all wedding management services. Its CEO, Bharat Kanodia, says, "Young couples today are used to living life on the go. They want what's easily accessible. And the big task with planning a wedding isn't the organising — it's the constant reminders. Here, the system does it for you."

Not everyone, however, is gung-ho about the digital possibilities. "Whether it's the flowers, invites or the caterers, a lot depends on going to people you can trust and have a personal connection with," says Aditi Pewekar, an HR manager with a bank, who recently got hitched. "That's how you get the best deals on services."

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A year ago, the state government announced the decision to scrap the merit list. Has it had the desired effect?

AGE CORRESPONDENT

The announcement of the Class 10 results on Friday was accompanied by both euphoria and melancholy on the part of students. But one thing that was missing was the announcement of the "merit list". In a move that was lauded — and reviled, the state government had scrapped the system of felicitating board toppers since last year, in a bid to reduce the competitive pressure on students. But a year later, has the move had the desired impact?

Rekha Shahani, principal of Kamla High School, Khar, says scrapping the merit list

has proved to be a positive move. She says, "Students feel that not having an official merit list makes them all equals, which wasn't the case until last year. For example, a few years ago, the second ranker from my school came from a disadvantaged background and the newspapers all covered him more than the first ranker. The first ranker felt so aggrieved that he created a big ruckus. All this will now be avoided. Of course, there is some discontentment among the toppers."

Students say not having a merit list that's held up as the standard to aspire to has reduced pressure. A student of St. Xavier's School, Dhobi Talao, Steven Borges says that, and the fact that his parents and teachers were very supportive, helped him survive the madness of the academic year. "No merit list means no comparisons, which helps us. Also my family was very supportive of me, they told me to be calm and just appear for the papers without bothering about how I would perform. Even when the results

came in, they were all excited, despite the fact that I did not get a distinction," says Steven.

Psychologists have also seen the difference not having a merit list has made. Well-known psychiatrist Harish Shetty says, "Scrapping the merit list has broken the myth that the marks you get in the SSC make you a hero or zero. We have to realise that the SSC is not a milestone in itself; rather it's the start of milestones to be achieved in the future."

Some parents however, seem unhappy. Dinesh Pathak, whose daughter scored 90 per cent in Class 10 this year, says that a merit list simply motivates students to do well. He says, "We wouldn't want to pressurise our child, but there should be some system to honour her hard work."

