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- [Living](#)
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- [Travel & Adventure](#)
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# Searching for the truth

**Akhbar Satar has turned humanity's quest for truth and justice into a million-ringgit business. P.S. He's a private investigator.**

By LOUISA LIM  
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I can tell when a person's lying," Akhbar Satar says, his gaze fixed squarely on me. "...It isn't easy, but if you've been in this industry as long as I have, it'll come naturally. The fidgeting of the body, the darting of the eyes, the tapping of the toes ... that's the trademark of someone with a really dark, dirty secret."

Running a hand over various contraptions that are haphazardly strewn across his desk, Akhbar lets out a hearty chortle. "These are my trusty aids. I've done over 1,500 cross-examinations with them," he says with a sparkle in his eye.



Private investigator Akhbar Satar says that a lie detector is 98% accurate in determining if a person is lying or not.

We are in his office on a lazy Wednesday afternoon, and I had been half-expecting a Sherlock Holmes look-a-like to be sitting across from me, smoking a pipe in a big, leather armchair.

Indeed, Akhbar is a cross between the cartoon version of Holmes and a more serious Philip Marlowe, minus the pipe. He is humble, good-natured and comical (if a little intimidating at first) for a 51-year-old criminologist with 26 years of experience, which included being a former director of the Anti Corruption Agency (ACA) Negri Sembilan, helping the Government sniff out rats from various quarters, as well as a director of ACA Training.

The man's razor-sharp intellect and commitment to work becomes evident as one gets to know him. The contraptions, I learn, are not



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instruments of medieval torture, but different parts of a lie detector. Put together, he says, these tools are almost 98% accurate in determining if a person is lying or not.

However, this is only one of the many fields that Akhbar specialises in. A Masters Degree holder in criminal justice from the University of Detroit, Michigan, Akhbar is part fraud examiner, part forensic polygraph examiner and part private detective.

Later, he decided that his qualifications were enough to take him private. With that in mind, he set up Akhbar & Associates seven years ago, and it became the one and only Polygraph Science Academy in Asia.

"It's a really fulfilling job," he tells me.

"You have this huge sense of accomplishment once you've successfully solved a case. But I would be bluffing if I said it wasn't also about the money. I've received big bonuses from happy clients, in addition to the thousands of ringgit I sometimes charge."

Akhbar is in a cheerful mood today because he is making good progress with his latest whodunit case. An employee had embezzled hundreds of thousands of ringgit in bank money, and he was hired to get to the bottom of things.

"I start out by observing everyone in the office. I'm there when they arrive, and I'm still there when they leave. It's the hard workers whom I keep an eye on," he says gravely.

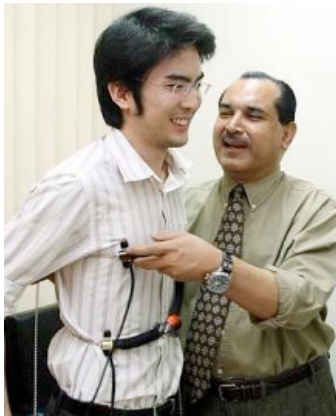
"Eh? Hard workers?" I ask, determined not to let my ignorance show.

"Investigative history has proved that the ones who stay back late are the ones whom you should be worried about. Sure enough, I've spotted the culprits. "Now I'm on to the second stage of investigations, where I'll be doing a thorough background check on each of them."

Akhbar confesses that the life of an investigator has little resemblance to glamorous TV portrayals. It's a life of legwork and public records searches, and rarely fistfights or hi-tech surveillance gadgets.

"We don't just trail people around. But when we do, it takes three or four cars in order to look inconspicuous. And don't expect your clients to cut you any flak. You always have to be two steps ahead of the law enforcement and deliver the results as quickly as possible because of the money they pay you. I usually get very little sleep on a big case," he says.

Still, Akhbar's claims his job never gets monotonous. Other than corporate frauds cases, he is also contracted for many other reasons, ranging from pre-employment screening to tracking cheating spouses. The most common, by far, involves locating missing people – friends, families, children and debtors.



Akhbar putting the lie detector on a volunteer. To become a polygraph examiner, one must first take a 320-hour basic training course.

Akhbar cites a recent case.

“This renowned actress poured a lot of money into a business venture, but it disappeared along with her partners. She wanted me to hunt them down, which I did. Unfortunately for her, all the money had been spent.”

And then there are flustered in-laws-to-be, who pay a visit because they want to do a little snooping of their own ... on their child’s future spouse.

“You would be surprised at how many of them need assurance. Like, if their future son-in-law is some high-flying CEO he claims to be instead of an unemployed troublemaker, like I discovered in four or five instances.”

There goes their relationship, or wedding plans of any sort.

When I ask Akhbar if he does a similar thing with his children’s significant others, he shakes his head. “It’s more of a question of showing how much I trust them, because, these days, you never know what goes on in the mind of kids. They don’t fear or obey us like we do our parents 30 years ago. My work has taught me that.”

He gives an example.

“There was this woman who suspected her daughter had been lying to her. The mother would fetch her to work every morning, only to have her change into different clothes so she could have a good time with her friends.



The various parts of a lie detector. The polygraph was invented in 1921 by a medical student named John Larson.

“But even when the truth was out, my client couldn’t do much except confront her daughter about it. She couldn’t possibly lock her up at home or scold her, for fear that her daughter might run away.”

Does this mean that parents have little control over their child?

“I believe they should be taught from day one. Even something that a parent deems to be insignificant like telling a little, white lie could have dire consequences in the future. A seven-year-old child needs to know the difference between right and wrong, and therefore it is up to parents to set a good example. And until they do, crime and corruption will always exist,” he smiles.

I smile in return, knowing full well that this means that Akhbar & Associates will be around for a long time to come.

### **Polygraph examiner’s course**

Located in Plaza Damas, Sri Hartamas, Akhbar & Associate’s Polygraph Science

Academy is among the 21 schools worldwide that is accredited by the American Polygraph Association. The Examiner's Basic Course consists of a 320-hour basic training phase that takes eight weeks, with two weeks off campus to provide the candidate with the skills, knowledge and ability to administer polygraph screening and examinations in Government and private sectors.

Candidates will get extensive hands on experience with analogue and computerised polygraph instruments as well as acquire a solid academic understanding on polygraph science. For more information, call 03-6201 5011/5012 or visit [www.akhbarassociates.com](http://www.akhbarassociates.com).

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