

For richer not for poorer

Emiratis feel the pressure of wedding costs

The rising cost of getting hitched means an increasing number of UAE men are turning to expat brides rather than having to pay up for a lavish ceremony with a fellow Emirati. The number of UAE nationals marrying expat women increased by 29 per cent, from 1,392 in 2005 to 1,798, in 2010. The number of Emirati men marrying Emirati women rose by just nine per cent, from 6,008 in 2005 to 6,555 in 2010, figures from the National Bureau of Statistics show. The stats, obtained by 7DAYS revealed the number of marriages across the UAE, which excluded Ras Al Khaimah for which a breakdown of statistics was not available, rose from 11,999 in 2005 to 13,811 by 2010. Emirati bachelor Hussain Al Balooshi, 30, said the expense of a wedding to a national woman was a big issue among his peers. He explained he would struggle to pay for a traditional big day, which is estimated to cost between Dh150,000 and Dh200,000 - more than the average yearly salary for UAE nationals, which is estimated at Dh133,000 by Dubai Statistics Centre. Al Balooshi said: "Paying for a national wedding is difficult for men who are wanting to avoid financial issues, so we might look to foreigners. Or, men are waiting until they reach 30-35 to afford a wedding." In addition to ceremony costs, tradition says a man also needs to set aside a dowry limit of Dh20,000 and a further Dh30,000 in the event that the marriage ends in divorce. However, it is commonly accepted that families set their own dowry amounts and comply with the limit on the marriage certificate only. Last year Dr Maitha al Shamsi, Minister of State and the chairwoman of the Marriage Fund - which provides marriage grants and sponsors group weddings for Emiratis - called on Emirati couples to set "reasonable budgets" for their special day. The topic of Emirati marriages is the focus of local

By Michelle Sutton

artist Nada Dada, who unveils her works entitled 'Looking for a Husband' today. It depicts an advert where a woman is looking for a business partnership in a marriage rather than love, and will go on display at Dubai's Traffic Gallery as part of a wider exhibition called 'Social Anti-Social'. Dada, 22, who is single, said: "They [Emiratis] search for a husband with more money. I want a husband who's going to care what I want, not just pay for it. "But girls are wanting more, they want more than the dowry they want a dress that costs more than Dh10,000... there's now no emotion in it. It's made the whole thing like a business deal." She said some men pay for their wedding by credit card or take out a bank loan and that the rising costs mean many Emirati men will consider marrying a foreigner who would be more likely to share the cost. This week, Dubai Customs has been holding a programme to teach staff about minimising excessive spending when looking to get married. Social workers lectured 50 employees on family budgeting, honeymoon etiquette, happy marriage guidelines, the seven secrets of love and how to avoid divorce, during the five-day course, which finishes today. Ahmed Butti Ahmed, the Executive Chairman of Ports, Customs and Free Zone Corporation and Dubai Customs Director General, said the programme aims to raise awareness about saving on the cost of wedding ceremonies. He added: "(The programme) fulfills the objectives of Dubai Government in maintaining a quality life for members of the community as this function helps find a solution for expensive living costs, especially for couples and the newly wedded." michelle.sutton@7days.ae

GET SAVING: An average Emirati wedding can cost up to Dh200,000



Bat's the way, boys

THE organisers of a cricket championship for labourers said they had been bowled over by its success. The final of the Sprite Cricket Stars Tournament - set up by the Ministry of Labour and Coca-Cola Middle East - was watched by more than 4,000 at Dubai Cricket Stadium. The final was between Al Jabber Blazers and Arabtech labour camps, with Al Jabber (pictured) winning by three wickets. The prize for the winning team was an all-expenses-paid trip to their home country.



Web used to canvas votes

SOCIAL networking sites have been increasingly used by candidates to lobby for votes in Saturday's Federal National Council (FNC) elections. Candidates told 7DAYS that they had used social networking sites such as facebook, twitter and blogs to reach voters this time round in addition to paying for campaign advertising. Candidate Hassan Talib Al Marri who is one of Dubai's candidates told 7DAYS it was a good way to reach out to young Emiratis. "This is my first campaign to be an FNC representative. Social network sites have a powerful impact on society, we can see that through what happened during the recent revolutions in other countries.

"Almost all homes in the UAE have internet access and using twitter and facebook helps me reach out to every house." He said social network sites increases communication with voters. "They can contact me and asked me about my campaign and news and I can relay things to them in moments. "I have also used newspapers and radio for my campaign but feel social networking is better as I want my voice to reach every house in the UAE, especially the youth." A user on a networking site commented that it was a positive step to see candidates campaign on the internet rather than having to go and listen to speeches to people in a tent.