



## Finally Free

By Soniya Kirpalani

As the Sharjah Court of Appeals turned over the pages of the well-worn file of the 17 Indians who were only recently spared the death penalty on September 11<sup>th</sup>, Judge Suwaidi felt the need to take a small recess before he signed their final sentence. Arrested on Jan 2009, for the alleged murder of 1 man during a bootlegging turf war – they paid a record Diya (Compromise / Blood Money) of Dh3.4 million to the victim's family last year. They have since then be awaiting their additional sentence for selling alcohol illegally.

Earlier the men had been given two years and deportation for the murder charges; but the plaintiff and Public prosecutor's office appealed against this verdict at the Federal Supreme Court. They sought further sentencing for three other victims who allegedly had sustained serious injuries during this brawl, as well as possession and sales of alcohol (which is strictly prohibited in Sharjah)

The apex court transferred only ordered only the review of the alcohol charges; February 8<sup>th</sup>, the Sharjah Court of Appeal gave them another six months sentence for bootlegging, the final verdict in this criminal case. As the men had already served over four years in prison, waiting for their trial to conclude, they are free men. Now they only have to tackle the separate civil case filed by Mustaq Ahmed and his brothers, who are also claiming Dh1.5 million compensation claim at the Sharjah Court of First Instance. The next hearing is Feb 15<sup>th</sup>. "This too shall pass" said Dharmendra Sandhu one of the accused, summing up the mood of the moment.

