

Indians on Death Row in UAE
17 youths urge media, organisations to exercise restraint
Say 'misinformation' prolonging their agony and complicating case
Prabhjot Singh/TNS

Chandigarh, January 11

Seventeen Indian boys facing death sentence and languishing in a Sharjah jail for over two years now have appealed to various organisations, including newspapers, to exercise restraint and refrain from spreading "misinformation" about their trial.

"Some of the misinformation is not only prolonging our agony but also complicating the case," they said in a letter sent to The Tribune. "We want that information conveyed through official channels, including the Indian Consulate in Dubai or through SP Singh Oberoi, should be relied upon," they said in the two-page letter written in Punjabi. All 17 Indian boys, 16 from Punjab and one from Haryana, have signed it.

Yesterday, one of these boys, Dharampaul Singh, talked to this correspondent over the phone and said all his fellow colleagues had faith in the defence team arranged by the Indian Consulate in Dubai and support extended to them and their families back home by Oberoi.

"We are miffed at news items that are baseless. We do not know who is collecting money in our name. No one other than officials of the Indian Consulate or Oberoi visits us. No human rights organisation or any other body has ever approached us or given us any money. We request that no one should pay money to any organisation in our name," he said.

"In spite of our innocence, we have suffered enough. We do not want that our agony should be extended any more. We do not doubt good intentions of genuine people who want to help us. But incorrect news items and misinformation about money being collected in our name were some of our worries that had been complicating matters for us. It is why we thought of approaching the media on our own. I am calling you to make sure that you have received our letter," said Dharampaul Singh.

When asked about the "settlement" with the family of the deceased - Mishri Khan of Pakistan - Dharampaul said: "We have suffered a lot for over two years. Many of us have small kids and old parents to look after. If a settlement can expedite our virtual release from the jail, we won't mind any such settlement even if it is reached outside the court."

The boys wrote that only Oberoi visited them every week and gave them some financial help. Because of him, they said, their parents could come and visit them in the jail. "Now we are in touch with our families back home as we are allowed to call them once a week," they wrote.

They also mentioned that Akali MP Sukhdev Singh Dhindsa, Capt Amarinder Singh and Congress MLA Rana Gurmit Singh Sodhi visited them in the jail and assured them of all possible help in getting them released.

They also held that Chandigarh-based lawyer Navkiran Singh, Lok Bhalai leaders Balwant Singh Ramoowalia and Avtar Singh Mullanpuri, also visited them once each. Officials from the Indian Consulate visited them regularly, they added.

LBP seeks return of 700 Punjabis detained in Saudi Arabia
Kanchan Vasdev/TNS

Ludhiana, January 11

Lok Bhalai Party chief Balwant Singh Ramoowalia has urged the Chief Minister, Punjab, Parkash Singh Badal, to take up the case of alleged illegal detention of as many as 700 Punjabi youth in Saudi Arabia with the

Protector General of Emigrants, Chandigarh, to ensure their safe return. Ramoowalia has also taken up the matter with the Indian Ambassador in Riyadh.

Quoting a fax message received from these youth at the party office Ramoowalia said, "An Indian firm had employed the youth at its branch near Dhahran airport in Kocbar city of Saudi Arabia two years back.

They were hired through travel agents based at Mumbai and Punjab after paying Rs 80,000 each." As many as six of the youth are lodged in jail for illegal immigration, Ramoowalia said. "At times we are made to work without food or water by the Keralite owner of the company and we can not return on our own as we are not paid salaries," the fax message states.

Cell for non-resident Indians **Tribune News Service**

Chandigarh, January 11

Conscious of the problems being faced by non-resident Indians (NRIs) and for addressing their issues on priority, Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal today set up an NRI cell in his office under the chairmanship of Principal Secretary to the Chief Minister Darbara Singh Guru.

The other members include the Financial Commissioner, Revenue, or his secretary-level representative, and the Director-General Police, or his representative. DS Mangat, OSD to the Chief Minister, will be the Member Secretary of this cell.



300 Punjabis 'illegally detained' in UAE **Perneet Singh** **Tribune News Service**

Amritsar, January 11

Even as the case of 17 Punjabi youths being awarded death sentence in the UAE is fresh in the minds of the people, another case of alleged harassment and illegal detention of nearly 300 Punjabi workers has come to light at a hosiery unit located at Zubail in UAE.

Darshan Mattoo, a resident of Gurdaspur district whose maternal cousin is employed at Nasser S Hosiery, Zubail, said, "We received his call last night. He sounded very panicky and told that he along with around 300 other Punjabi workers have been illegally detained in some vehicles there. They are neither being given proper meals nor being allowed to answer nature's call for the last two-three days." He, however, pleaded for concealing the identity of his cousin as he felt that the latter may land in the soup in the UAE if his identity was made public.

Later, talking to this correspondent on phone from UAE, his cousin told that the Nepali workforce dominate the hosiery unit where he is employed. He said following a tiff between Nepali and Punjabi workers three-four days ago after a Punjabi youth

approached a Nepali worker, who was also a lottery agent, to claim some amount which he had won in a lucky draw. "The Nepali worker instead of paying him his due thrashed him which led to a violent clash between the two sides. However, the Nepali workers not only beat us but also ransacked the factory. They also set ablaze some factory vehicles and put the entire blame on the Punjabi workers," he said. According to him, nine Punjabi workers sustained injuries in the clash and were admitted to a hospital there. However, on the basis of allegations levelled by the Nepali workers, they were later shifted to jail.

Mattoo said the hosiery unit management is also siding with the Nepali workforce which outnumbers Punjabi youth working there. He claimed that even their cell phones have been snatched away by the Nepali workers and anybody found seeking help from any quarter is being subjected to more harassment. However, his cousin managed to hide his mobile phone and called him up.

Meanwhile, Jagtar Singh Karampura, CPM Secretary, Amritsar (Urban), has appealed to Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh to intervene and resolve the issue