

Court orders to appoint translators for 17 Indians

Judge says panel will examine how lower court dealt with translator issue

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DUBAI — The Sharjah Court of Appeal on Wednesday adjourned hearing in the appeal of 17 Indians who were sentenced to death penalty for killing a Pakistani man to July 14 after the defence requested the court to provide translators.

Judge Abdulla Yousuf Al Shamsi who chaired the hearing in place of Judge Younus Al Alsi, who presided the last hearing but could not be present on Wednesday, said it was not practical for the court to use three languages. Hence, the public prosecutors would hire experts to translate from Punjabi to English and also from English to Arabic.

"The court will settle the translator issue. It will also examine how the Court of First Instance dealt with the issue — whether it appointed translators for the defendants," Judge Al Shamsi said.

He added that one of the defendants, Harvinder Singh, did not appear in the court on Wednesday because he was admitted to a hospital.

Advocate Mohammed Salman, who has been assigned by the Indian Con-

sulate to defend the 17, told *Khaleej Times* that it was important for the court to provide translators who could speak the languages of the defendants when they cannot understand any other language.

He said Judge Younus Al Alsi, who chaired the last session, would be present during the next hearing.

Torture report wrong

He also denied that the hospitalised defendant was tortured, as reported by some media.

Bindu Suresh Chettur, a lawyer handling the case, also denied a report to this effect. She said he has been admitted to a hospital with breathing difficulties. She added that the defence team is visiting the defendants every week.

Business council to support kin

Sudhesh Aggarwal, chairman of the Indian Business Council in Sharjah, said he had visited the families of all defendants in India who are very poor and awaiting the return of their sons.

He said the Business Council has decided to provide each the next of kin of each defendant Dh2,500 every month till the case ends. The first instalment was distributed to the families earlier this month.

He said, "The defendants have no criminal records in India, so we will provide them with all support. The Indian government is also giving them legal assistance."

Baljeet Singh, general manager of Khalsa Star General Land Transport, said some businessmen have come together and are mobilising funds to pay the blood money to the family of the Pakistani victim.

He said, "We have two options — legal or an out-of-court settlement by paying the blood money. We have already contacted the family of the victim offering them the blood money and we have learnt that they are in favour of accepting the blood money. The negotiation is still on."

"If the family agrees, we will pay them the blood money. After that, we will submit an application to the court to allow them to pay the money."

He said they had approached the Indian Consulate in this regard but consulate officials did not respond.

Navkiran Singh, human rights advocate, confirmed that no defendant was tortured by the police.

However, he commented that the offer of paying the blood money will negatively affect the case.

On March 29, the Sharjah Court of First Instance had found the 17 Indians, 16 from Punjab and one from Haryana states, guilty of beating the Pakistani to death and wounding three others during a fight involving dozens of bootleggers in the Al Sajja industrial area in January last year.

An appeal was filed on April 7 on behalf of the convicts.

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