

Counsel, parents of 2 on death row voice optimism

BY IMRAN MOJIB

NOTED lawyer Mohammed Salman, who has been advocating the case of 17 Indians on death row, has expressed confidence that the judgement given by the Sharjah Sharia Court will be overruled by the Court of Appeal.

He made the observation while discussing the developments of the case with the father of Subhan and aunt of Harjinder Singh, two of the 17 Indian workers who were handed out death sentences by the Sharia Court in March for allegedly murdering a Pakistani national.

Later, talking to the media in Sharjah on Wednesday, Salman reiterated his stand and said that there is enough ground to challenge the verdict delivered by the Sharia Court.

"We have many lines of defence in this case — at least six to seven good ones — and I am confident they will change the verdict," he said.

"I can say it was not a fair trial as there was no good interpreter available while executing the proceedings. Even the religion of one of the accused, Subhan, is mentioned as Muslim, while he actually is a Sikh," added Salman.

Bindu Chettur, an advocate of Mohammad Salman's team, said that the 17 accused were arrested in January 2009 and the verdict was delivered by the Sharia Court in March 2010 after 16 hearings. But the defence team has successfully proved that those hearings were null and void as



Lawyer Mohammad Salman listens to Mukhwinder Kaur and Piarelal as they address the media in Sharjah on Wednesday.

it was carried out in a language which none of the 17 accused could understand.

When the case was reopened in the Appeal Court, all the accused had said that they cannot speak or understand any language other than Punjabi, their mother tongue. Realising the language barrier, the judge ordered the prosecution to appoint an interpreter who could speak Arabic and Punjabi, language of the court and the mother tongue of the accused, respectively.

"We have also proved that at least three of the 17 accused are not involved as they were on duty at the time of the incident," she added.

Since the reopening of the case in the Appeal Court, the hearing has been postponed thrice as the Arabic-Punjabi inter-

preter was not available. The next hearing is scheduled for Sept.1.

Piarelal, father of accused Subhan, and Mukhwinder Kaur, aunt of accused Harjinder Singh, met all the 17 accused in Sharjah jail on Wednesday and expressed satisfaction over the treatment being meted out to them in jail.

"We found them in good physical and mental state. They were confident of being freed on completion of the judicial process," said Piarelal, while expressing his desire to see the case move faster.

They were critical of the false alarm raised by "Human Rights International" about the accused being tortured in the jail.

"I would also state that the case should not be politicised. We have noted

that there has been lot of talks on payment of blood money."

"We do not see the necessity of talking about blood money at this moment when the case is being heard," he said, adding that once they return to India, they will meet the parents of the other accused and issue a joint statement on the subject.

He said that they have been informed about an ongoing campaign in the UK and the UAE to raise funds to help the affected families in India, but none of them have contacted the families so far, except Sudesh Aggarwal, president of the Indian Business and Professional Council and its Humanitarian Fund, who has offered a monthly aid of Rs2,500 (Dhs200) to each family.

Kamal Kassim / The Gulf Today