

# Family visits to convicted killers begin

17 Indian men remain on death row while their appeal is heard

Praveen Menon

DUBAI // Relatives of 17 Indians on death row for the murder of a Pakistani man visited the accused in prison yesterday with the help of defence lawyers and consular officials.

Pyarelal, a 70-year-old retired English tutor from Punjab, visited his son Subhan, 26, while Mukhvinder Kaur, 45, came to see her 28-year-old nephew, Harjinder Singh. More relatives are expected to see the men in coming weeks through visits facilitated by Indian welfare groups to give some relief to families distressed by media reports on the case.

The Sharjah court found the men guilty of beating a Pakistani man to death and wounding three others when a fight involving dozens of alleged bootleggers broke out in the emirate's Sajja industrial area in January last year. An appeal was filed on April 8 following the verdict and the Indian consulate appointed a new team of lawyers for the men.



Mukhvinder Kaur, centre, and Pyarelal, right, speak on behalf of their relatives, who are among 17 convicted killers, at the law office of Mohamed Salman, left, in Sharjah. Amy Leang / The National

Most of those convicted had not told their parents about the case.

"I got a call from my son a week after the death verdict saying that he was one of the men who had been given the death sentence," said Pyarelal. "I never knew he was in trouble."

"I come on behalf of the parents of all the 17 men. We are anxious to know what is happening here. There are so many media reports

and false stories that we can't be sure if our children are safe."

Speaking at a media gathering in Sharjah, Pyarelal insisted his son had nothing to do with the murder.

"My son came to the UAE over two years ago looking to earn some money," he said. "He was arrested from his room at midnight almost 15 days after the incident had happened. He is innocent."

The relatives dismissed specula-

tion the inmates were facing human rights abuses in prison.

"All of them were in good health and nobody complained of any abuses. The reports are not true," said Pyarelal.

Ms Kaur said her nephew was picked up on his way to buy groceries. She was representing the family because Singh's mother was in shock and refused to come, she said.

"Harjinder had come here to rid the family of financial burdens and protect his mother and sister back home," she said. "I do not know how he ended up in jail." Ms Kaur said her nephew was legally employed at the time he was arrested and had no idea about the murder.

While they were stunned to find their relatives implicated in a killing, Ms Kaur and Pyarelal said they had confidence in the Sharjah justice system. They also said they did not approve of blood money being paid, as they wanted the legal procedures to be followed.

"I am here just to see my son and talk to him," Pyarelal said. "I do not want to do anything more. We believe in the defence lawyers and are confident we will get a good verdict."

► pmenon@thenational.ae