

'Court needs to send a strong message that corruption will not be tolerated'

NST- 29/7/2020 Pg. 3

KUALA LUMPUR: Datuk V. Sithambaram, the lead prosecutor in Datuk Seri Najib Razak's SRC International case, did not mince his words when he called on the judge to impose a deterrent sentence against the former prime minister as the offences committed were the worst case imaginable.

He said any leniency shown would be misplaced sympathy and would have disastrous consequences on society.

"Maximum sentences are reserved for the worst cases and this is certainly one such case.

"The accused knew at all times that the RM42 million (of SRC International Sdn Bhd money) belonged to the company," he said. It came from the RM4 billion loan issued by the Retirement Fund Inc (KWAP).

"However, he did nothing to re-

turn the money."

Sithambaram said what happened had tarnished the country's image and Malaysia was referred to as a "kleptocracy".

He said a government with corrupt leaders had the power to exploit the people and a country's natural resources for personal wealth and political strength.

Sithambaram, a veteran criminal lawyer, said Najib had, during the period when the offences were committed, held the seat of the prime minister and office of the finance minister.

"He had absolute political power and control of the nation's purse. The highest trust was placed on him and he owed a fiduciary and moral duty as a trustee of the people. This conviction shows he failed."

He said any sentence imposed by the court on Najib should

serve as a precedent for all future holders of the august office, or for that matter any politician, that no one is above the law.

"He should receive a punishment which will not only fit this crime but which acts as a deterrent for other would-be offenders.

"Corruption is widespread in this country and must not be tolerated for Malaysia to emerge as a first world country," he said.

Sithambaram said there had been a serious abuse of the accused's position and a gross betrayal of the people's trust had been committed.

He submitted that the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission Act was intended to eradicate corruption by providing a deterrent punishment.

"It is the duty of this court to give effect to that purpose of the act."