



QUEEN'S COUNSEL FOR HER DEFENCE?

By EDDIE CHUA

KUALA LUMPUR: A top Malaysian criminal lawyer has offered to engage a Queen's Counsel or a senior counsel to defend Rozana Zubir who has been charged with smuggling 5kg of opium into Australia.

Datuk Muhammad Shafee Abdullah, who is familiar with Australian criminal law, extended the offer to Rozana's solicitor Raj Palany yesterday after reading of her plight in *The Sunday Mail*.

"Her solicitor has agreed to the offer. However, it is subject to the choice of counsel and Rozana's approval before we put up a defence team for her," he told *The Malay Mail* yesterday.

Shafee said he would raise the money for the legal fees through his friends.

"My offer is purely on humanitarian ground as she has no money to finance her own defence."

Shafee said he would also act for Rozana, as her instructing solicitor and counsel in Kuala Lumpur, for free.

Rozana is scheduled to appear in a Sydney court again on Friday.

It is learnt that the Australian-based and Malaysian-born Palany will arrive in Kuala Lumpur today, and is likely to meet Shafee.

Rozana had pleaded to fellow Malaysians to get her out of prison. The plea, in a two-page letter, was highlighted in *The Sunday Mail*.

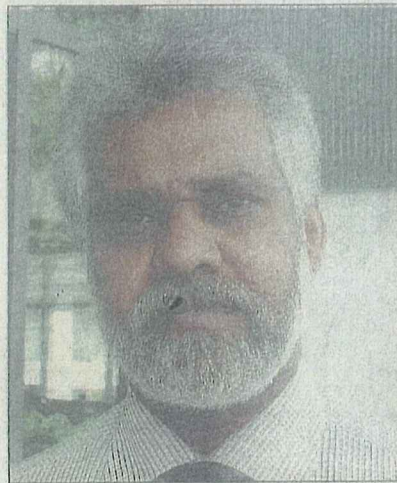
In the letter, Rozana insisted she was innocent and that she unknowingly carried the opium into Australia.

She said her family could not afford the cost of engaging Australian lawyers to represent her in court, and appealed to Malaysians to help her.

Rozana, who is being held at the Windsor Correctional Centre for Women in Sydney, gave the letter to Palany when he visited her on Saturday.

Palany then faxed the letter to *The Sunday Mail*.

Rozana also pleaded with the Malaysian Government to help her and her lawyers by



Palany: A copy of similar letter of appeal sent to Prime Minister



Shafee: Offer purely on humanitarian ground

obtaining evidence from the Malaysian police to prove her innocence.

Palany said a copy of a similar letter of appeal was sent to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

The Malay Mail reported that although one of her relatives had gone to Australia and engaged the lawyers, neither her barrister Neil Mayell nor Palany has been paid.

Mayell, who twice represented her in court and visited her thrice in prison to prepare her for trial, has notified Palany of his intention to discharge himself.

Mayell had told Palany that he would discharge himself and return the brief of the case to him before the next court appearance if his fees were not paid.

Two weeks ago, Mayell and Palany came to Kuala Lumpur to gather information for Rozana's defence.

Rozana, 31, faces a life sentence and may also be fined A\$750,000 (RM2.14 million).

Australian Customs officers had found a

tar-like block wrapped in tape in Rozana's luggage when she arrived in Sydney on March 27. She was unable to explain what it was.

Although the block was seized, she was not detained and was allowed into the country.

On April 1, she was arrested at Brisbane Airport while on her way back to Kuala Lumpur when police told her the block contained opium resin which could be used to make heroin.

Rozana, a car saleswoman, alleged that her Iranian friend had planted the opium in her luggage.

Following her arrest, she revealed the man's identity and whereabouts.

Australian police then tipped off their Malaysian counterparts and the Iranian was arrested at his apartment in Ampang on April 6.

Police found 2kg of opium in his possession.

The Iranian has since been charged in a Kuala Lumpur court.