



## No bail for Chinese rhino horn suspects

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The three Chinese nationals who were arrested at the Hosea Kutako National Airport for trying to smuggle 14 rhino horns out of the country have been refused bail. The Chinese men appeared in the Windhoek Magistrate's Court just before 17:00 on Tuesday. One of the men claimed that he had nothing to do with the crime and should be allowed out on bail. Li Xiaoliang, Li Zhibing and Pu Xuexin are charged with the possession and export of controlled wildlife products. The three were caught at the Hosea Kutako Airport on Monday morning with 14 rhino horns and a leopard skin in their luggage. They were on their way to Hong Kong via Johannesburg. They had left China on March 9 and arrived in Zambia the following day. They then entered Namibia through the Wenela border post on March 12 on tourist visas. When their bags were scanned at

the airport the Namibian aviation police detected that two of the suitcases contained prohibited items. State prosecutor Verinao Kamahene opposed bail due to the seriousness of the offence, adding that the value of the items involved is close to N\$2 million. He said that the three men are foreign nationals and that the possibility of absconding is therefore high. According to Kamahene it would not be in the interests of justice for the three accused to be granted bail. He said that the incident has drawn a lot of media and public attention. Magistrate Jermaine Muchali transferred the case to the Hosea Kutako periodical court and postponed it until April 2 this year. He refused bail, but reminded the accused that they can formally apply for a bail hearing. All three men opted to get private lawyers and will remain in custody until that time. Pu denied that he was involved in the crime. "I did not carry any of the stuff," he said when bail was denied. The magistrate told him that it is still the early stages of the investigation. "We cannot make any decision now and investigations have not been completed. You are an accused and you need to appear in court." The interpreter in the case was Nghiyolwa Jackson. A list of questions sent to the Ministry of Environment and Tourism by Namibian Sun about the smuggling of the rhino horns, if there were any recent poaching incidents in Namibia, where the rhino horns may originate from, what the value is, the poaching crisis in Africa, Namibia being used as a point of smuggling and improvement of policing activities in the country were rejected.



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