



## Chinese rhino horn suspects in bail bid

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The 14 rhino horns, valued at N\$2.3 million and which were confiscated from three Chinese nationals recently, were poached in Namibia. This was confirmed at the bail hearing Li Xiaoliang, Li Zhibing and Pu Xuexin last week, when they appeared on charges of possessing and attempting to export controlled wildlife products. They were allegedly caught with the rhino horns, as well as a leopard skin valued at N\$50 000, in their luggage on 23 March at Hosea Kutako International Airport. They were about to fly to Hong Kong via Johannesburg. State prosecutor Anthony Wilson opposed bail for all three accused. He said the State fears they will flee the country and added that it will not be in the public interest to grant them bail. Wilson said the rhino horns have been sent for analysis and they were in fact poached in Namibia. Xiaoliang was the first to testify during the bail

hearing last week and maintained that he was not aware of the contents of the suitcase that was found in his possession. According to him his friend Li Zhibing gave him one of the suitcases to carry when they entered the airport, because it was too heavy. He said the police broke open the suitcase after informing them that they found something illegal in the other two suitcases in possession of his friends. It was only then that he saw what was inside the suitcase, Xiaoliang said. Xiaoliang said the suitcase that the police officers found in his possession belonged to Zhibing. "I felt guilty for helping my friend carry the luggage, but now I realise that it was illegal. When the police opened the suitcase I saw the stuff inside. I did not know what was inside, but saw that it was something that belongs to the animal." Wilson, however, argued that Xiaoliang was aware of the contents of the suitcase, because when the police asked him for a key to open it he refused to give it to them and tried to hide it. He put it to Xiaoliang: "You did not want to give the key of the suitcase and the State witness will testify to that." Xiaoliang told the court that he can afford to pay N\$20 000 bail and said that life inside prison is awful. "I want to be granted bail because life in jail is different, the language is different and the insects are too terrible for my eyes." He added that his shoes and clothing has been stolen by other prisoners, but he has not been able to tell the police because he cannot speak English. Xiaoliang indicated that if he is granted bail, he will stay with another Chinese national in Otjiwarongo. He said that he will report to a police station every day, even twice a day if need be. Wilson, however, argued that Xiaoliang is unable to provide a fixed address in Namibia and that he has a family in China, while he does not have roots or assets in Namibia. "You will run away and never come back." The three has been remanded in custody and the bail hearing continues tomorrow. WINDHOEK ELLANIE SMIT



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