



Rhino kingpin offered police a bribe

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Chief Inspector Barry de Klerk of the Namibian Police's Protective Resources Unit delivered explosive evidence in his testimony in the trail of four Chinese nationals accused in Namibia's biggest rhino-horn smuggling case. De Klerk described the hierarchy of an organised Chinese Triad. He revealed that Wang Hui was the kingpin in the group and said he was offered a bribe to ensure that Wang escaped justice. De Klerk said the bribery attempt is still being investigated. Li Xiaoliang, Li Zhibing, Pu Xuexin and Hui were arrested for trying to smuggle 14 rhino horns worth more than N\$2.3 million and a leopard skin of N\$50 000 out of Namibia last year. The items were found in two suitcases at Hosea Kutako International Airport on March 24 last year. Over the past two days, security video footage taken at the Windhoek Country Club and Resort on March 23 and



(<https://d3rp5jatom3eyn.cloudfront.net/asse>

24 last year was shown in court, showing how the four accused handled the bags in question between their hotel rooms, the entrance and as they left the hotel before they went to the airport. De Klerk yesterday said Li Xiaoliang and Li Zhibing were merely foot soldiers under the control of Pu and Wang. He said in these types of syndicates it is common for the "expendables" to take full blame when they get caught, in order to protect those higher up in the syndicate. In this case Li Zhibing pleaded guilty and said that the other accused did not know what was in the luggage. De Klerk yesterday said there would be devastating consequences for those lower in the hierarchy if they did not follow the orders of the higher-ups. Describing the relationship between the four accused, De Klerk said Wang was the main organiser and paid for the air tickets. The rooms at the Country Club were booked on his instruction by P. Geng. "It is clear that Pu and Wang were in control," he testified. He described Pu as a supervisor, also higher up in the hierarchy. De Klerk pointed out that Li Xiaoliang and Li Zhibing never left their rooms at the Country Club on their own, but only when they were instructed to do so by the other two. The two bags containing the rhino horns were left in the rooms of Li Xiaoliang and Li Zhibing after they were first taken to the room of Pu and Wang, where they stayed for a considerable time, De Klerk said. De Klerk said the conclusion he drew from the video footage was that Pu and Wang left the hotel for about an hour on March 23 last year and drove to collect the bags containing the wildlife products. He said although nothing prevented them from carrying the suitcases from the vehicle themselves, "they made use of the expendables to move the bags from the vehicle to the hotel". The bags were then taken to the rooms of Pu and Wang where it is suspected that the rhino horns and leopard skin were packed into the luggage in which they were later discovered at the airport. The bags were then taken to the rooms of Li Xiaoliang and Li Zhibing until the next day. "The manner and method how they behave in the footage is showing the hierarchy of this group. "Li Xiaoliang and Li Zhibing are mere foot soldiers in the hierarchy. They are dispensable. If they get caught they take the blame not to implicate those that are higher up," said De Klerk. De Klerk also noted the manner in which Li Xiaoliang, Li Zhibing and Pu travelled to Namibia and the fact that both Li Xiaoliang and Pu had visited the country before. He said it is common knowledge that syndicates explore routes to find the easiest and safest way to smuggle goods. De Klerk said that in his opinion Li Xiaoliang and Pu were on a scoping mission to Namibia when they previously visited the country. He pointed out that Li Zhibing was only issued with a passport in November 2013 and that it was at that stage that he was recruited by the syndicate. He said it was also suspicious that Li Xiaoliang, Li Zhibing and Pu applied for tourist visas for Zambia for a considerable period of time, but stayed only for one day. They could have applied for transit visas instead, he said. He said that was clearly the modus operandi of an organised crime syndicate which takes steps to remain undetected and to elude law enforcement. According to De Klerk, should Li Xiaoliang, Li Zhibing and Pu have applied for tourist visas for Namibia in Beijing, as they did for Zambia, it would have been suspicious to law enforcement that they applied for visas to two countries for such lengthy periods and they would have been flagged as persons of interest. Instead, they applied for the Namibian tourist visas in Zambia and they clearly did not want to draw attention as they knew their purpose of coming to Namibia was to smuggle rhino horns. ELLANIE SMIT