



State hammers Chinese accused

The state prosecutor was relentless in his questioning of Wang Hui, alleged ringleader in the...

25 April 2016 | Justice

More than two years after the biggest rhino horn smuggling case in Namibia was uncovered, the defence rested on Tuesday after the alleged kingpin that was pulling the strings in Namibia took the stand. The case, which involves four Chinese nationals Li Xiaoliang, Li Zhibing, Pu Xuexin and Wang Hui, was postponed in the Windhoek Regional Court for closing arguments on 20 May.

The four men were arrested for trying to smuggle 14 rhino horns worth more than N\$2.3 million and a leopard skin valued at N\$50 000 out of Namibia. The items were found in two luggage bags at Hosea Kutako International Airport on 24 March last year.

Wang was cross-examined by state prosecutor Simba Nduna, who told Wang that he had been operating as the ringleader of a syndicate of rhino-horn smugglers in Namibia.

Nduna also said that Wang prevailed on Li Zhibing to be the fall guy. He had pleaded guilty in the case.

Wang testified that he has been a permanent resident of Namibia since 2009 and that he has known Pu since 2000, but only met Li Xiaoliang and Li Zhibing when they came to Namibia in March 2014.

According to Wang on 19 March Pu, Li Xiaoliang and Li Zhibing came to his shop in Otjiwarongo and asked for assistance to book flights to China and accommodation in Windhoek before the flight. Wang paid N\$25 000 for the tickets on 22 March before leaving for Windhoek. He claims that he was paid back in Chinese currency by the three accused.

At first when questioned Wang did not mention the payment saying that he had forgotten.

"You forgot the payment because you are part of this large scheme of eliciting of rhino horns. You forgot to mention the payment of the tickets because this amount of money is nothing to you," said Nduna.

When arriving in Windhoek in the afternoon of 22 March, Wang went to pick up the tickets from a friend and the following afternoon the four men booked into the Windhoek Country Club and Resort.

When Nduna questioned Wang on why he was booked into the hotel together with the other three accused Wang said that they had requested him to stay.

"It was not my intention to stay over at the hotel, but I like to gamble."

Nduna argued that he stayed at the hotel with the three accused because it is there that the packing and unpacking of the illegal contraband- rhino horns and leopard skin- took place and it was therefore not a mere coincidence.

However Wang said if this was his intention why would he choose to sleep in a hotel that has surveillance cameras.

Nduna questioned Wang about the handling of the different luggage including the blue and brown suitcase which was later found at the airport containing the rhino horn and the leopard skin.

He pointed out that Wang always asks others to collect his bags and that his own two bags were always transported together with the two suitcases that contained the contraband.

Surveillance footage showed that at about 15:42 on 23 March Wang entered the room of Li Xiaoliang and Li Zhibing, asking Li Xiaoliang to collect his multi-coloured bag from the car.

In court Wang claimed he was too tired from driving back from China Town and buying goods for his shop to carry his own bag.

Nduna countered saying Wang barely knows Li Xiaoliang but Wang answered he is the youngest and most energetic of the group.

At about 15:49 Li Xiaoliang brought the brown bag which contained the illegal contraband and the multi-coloured bag and took both to his room. According to Nduna at about 16:00 Wang entered the room again but left his bag there. Wang said it was not a matter of urgency as long as he knew his bag has been collected.

Just after 16:00, Pu and Wang then left for China Town to buy another bag, but when they returned they left it in the car, allegedly because they wanted to gamble. Li Xiaoliang and Li Zhibing were asked to collect it.



(<https://d3rp5jat0m3eyn.cloudfront.net/assets/state-hammers-chinese-accused2016-04-250.jpg>)
ACCUSED: Wang Hui during a court appearance.
Photo: ELLANIE SMIT

"This is the second time that you ask people to collect bags for you. This shows you are the boss. You are the ringleader," said Nduna.

"In the hierarchy of the operation this is how it operates. You instruct Pu and he instructs the others."

According to Nduna the movement of Wang's bags is closely bound with the movement of the two suitcases containing the contraband.

Whenever Wang's bag was being moved the suitcases that were later found containing the rhino horns and leopard skin were moved together.

"These bags were your bags, all of them, and they were under your control and that is why they were taken in together," said Nduna.

Just before 18:00 video footage shows Wang standing at the door of Li Xiaoliang's room and he says he wanted to find out whether they were hungry.

Nduna claims that he was actually eavesdropping and checking in on his "underlings" because he did not trust them.

About thirty minutes later Pu pushed the brown suitcase from their room while Li Xiaoliang took the blue bag back to their room.

When Wang, who followed them into the room comes out, Nduna claims he is holding something in his hand that looks like the sticky tape that was used to wrap the rhino horn which was found in the suitcase.

Wang said he does not know what he is holding.

The following morning at about 04:00 Nduna pointed out that Wang entered the room of Li Xiaoliang. He says that he wanted to make sure that they do not forget anything in the room.

"They are not children why should you remind them?" Nduna wanted to know.

Wang said that they are in a foreign country and therefore wanted to make sure.

Nduna said that the sole reason why Wang went into the room is to ensure that the rhino horns and leopard skin were packed. "You wanted personal security that your contraband is safe."

Nduna further pointed out that Wang's personal items were interchangeably kept between the two rooms because he had complete access to both rooms and was in control of both.

When leaving the hotel, Wang said he did not know how the three accused got to the airport.

Nduna said that as a friend Wang helped them to get tickets and accommodation and now he does not care how they get to the airport. "They are not kids they can get to the airport," Wang responded.

"Let's not sugar coat it, you did not care. This is a cock and bull story you put before court because you were the one that took them to the airport," Nduna said.

Wang also said that when he found out about the arrest of his three co-accused he did not take immediate action.

"You were distancing yourself from con-conspirators; that is why you did not take immediate action. There is no honour among thieves," said Nduna.

ELLANIE SMIT