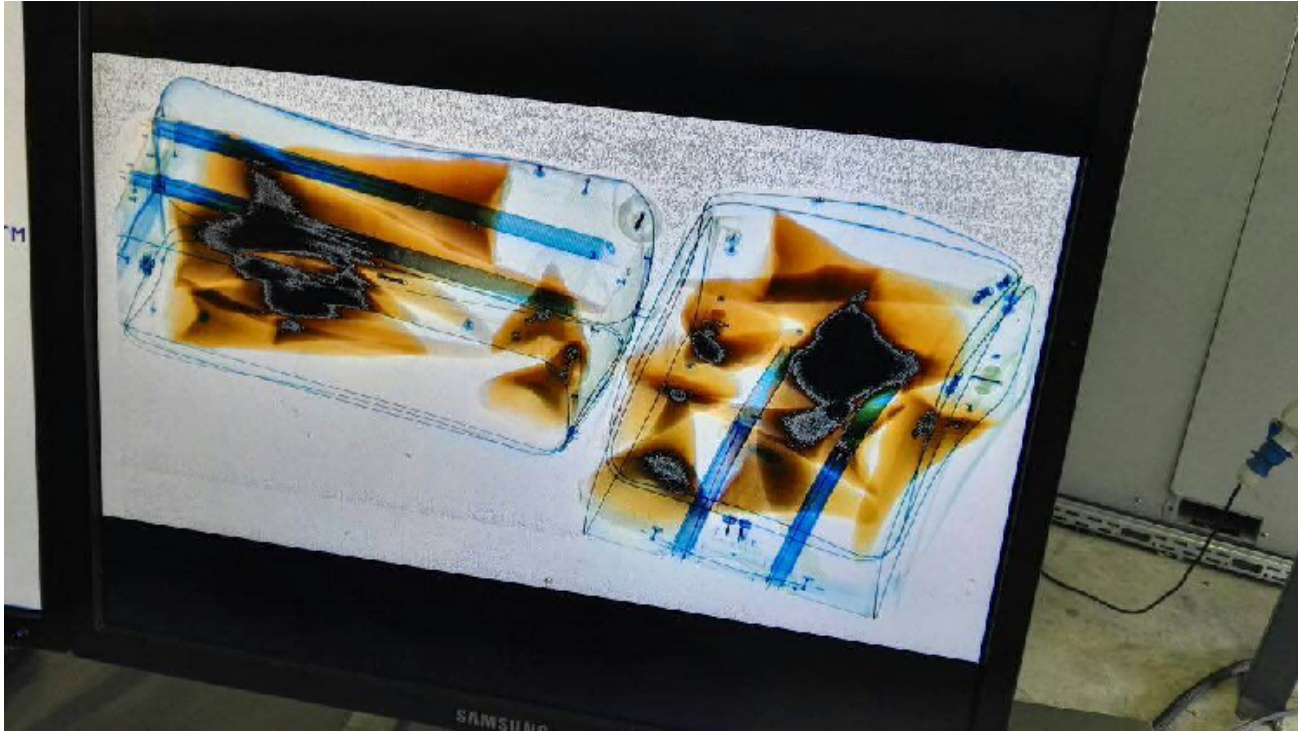


Airport cop charged over rhino horns

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by Werner Menges



THE arrest of a Chinese citizen who allegedly managed to smuggle 18 rhinoceros horns out of Namibia last week landed a member of the Namibian Police in the dock in the Windhoek Magistrate's Court in Katutura yesterday.

Police officer Pendapala Abraham litula (42) made a first court appearance before magistrate Victor Nyazo on a charge of defeating or obstructing the course of justice. litula's case was postponed to 3 February for further investigation to be done, and he was granted bail of N\$2 000.

In the charge faced by litula, it is alleged that he was responsible for screening baggage going through Hosea Kutako International Airport on Wednesday last week, and that he failed or omitted to detect or stop 18 rhino horns from passing through a screening point at the airport.

After going through the screening point, the luggage in which the horns had been packed was loaded on to an aircraft that flew to OR Tambo International Airport in Johannesburg, South Africa, where a Chinese citizen, Ye Zhiwei (28), was arrested after the rhino horns had been found in his luggage.

Defence lawyer Kadhila Amoomo told magistrate Nyazo during litula's court appearance that he had instructions to place it on record that police Inspector General Sebastian Ndeitunga had been quoted in the media as having said that there had been gross negligence on the part of the police officer on duty at the airport baggage scanners through which the luggage containing the rhino horns passed.

At the most, such alleged negligence should have been a reason to take disciplinary steps against the responsible police

officer, instead of dragging him to court on a criminal charge, Amoomo said.

The decision to charge litula was an instance of malicious prosecution, Amoomo claimed.

According to the South African Police Service, Ye was about to board a flight to Hong Kong when he was stopped and searched, and the rhino horns were discovered. Namibia Airports Company chief executive officer Tamer El-Kallawi has told The Namibian that closed-circuit television footage at the airport clearly showed the 18 horns going through the luggage scanners. Saying that the image of the horns in the CCTV recording was so clear that even an untrained eye could see it, El-Kallawi said it was "disturbing and disappointing" that the luggage containing the rhino horns had not been intercepted.

The luggage scanners at Hosea Kutako International Airport played a crucial role in the detection of 14 rhino horns and a leopard skin in two suitcases with which two Chinese citizens were about to fly out of Namibia on 24 March 2014. The two men in whose names the suitcases had been booked on to a flight to South Africa, as the first leg of a journey to China, and two compatriots were each sentenced to 14 years' imprisonment two months ago, after they had been found guilty on two counts of attempting to unlawfully export controlled wildlife products from Namibia.

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- This is the sort of corruption we're talking about. I'm glad he had been charge because surely this sort of thing is embarrassing. - ðIILÖW MÖNTANÄ | 2016-12-01 [20201]