

State allowed to appeal rhino sentences

News - National | 2017-07-27

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THE High Court here on Tuesday allowed the State to appeal the prison sentences imposed in the case of four Chinese nationals convicted of attempting to smuggle rhino horns out of Namibia in 2014.

The four Chinese nationals were arrested between March and May 2014, and were each sentenced to 14 years' imprisonment in the Windhoek Regional Court on 30 September 2016.

Not happy with the sentences, senior state advocate Simba Nduna then approached the High Court with an urgent application for the prosecution to be allowed leave to appeal against the sentences, saying the sentences imposed in the regional court were too lenient when compared to punishment handed down in similar criminal cases.

The State was allowed leave to appeal in a ruling delivered by High Court judge Christie Liebenberg on Tuesday morning.

Li Zhibing (53), Li Xiaoliang (30) and the 49-year-old Pu Xuexin were arrested at Hosea Kutako International Airport on 24 March 2014 with 14 rhino horns worth more than N\$2,3 million and a leopard skin valued at N\$50 000 stashed in their luggage.

The fourth was Wang Hui (40), believed to be the kingpin in the rhino horn smuggling operation in Namibia.

He was arrested in May 2014 at the Windhoek Country Club Resort, where the other three convicts stayed before their

failed attempt to leave Namibia on 24 March 2014.

The four men were each sentenced to an effective 14 years' imprisonment by regional court magistrate Alexis Diergaardt after they were found guilty on charges of unlawful dealing in controlled wildlife products; unlawful possession of wildlife products; and unlawful export of wildlife products from Namibia without having valid permits to do so.

They were arrested by members of the Namibian Police's Protected Wildlife Resources Unit.

Orben Sibeya defended the four Chinese nationals, while Nduna appeared for the prosecution. The four men are serving their prison sentences at the Windhoek Central Correctional Facility.

– Nampa