

Begin veterinary stud



Rhino horns in preacher's fridge – police

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Jackson Babi

THE police suspect that two rhino horns, allegedly found at the Windhoek house of religious preacher Jackson Babi, had been kept in a refrigerator before Babi handed the horns and a firearm over to a police officer two weeks ago.

Babi at first refused to allow the police to enter the premises where he lives in Kleine Kuppe in Windhoek, but after a stand-off of several hours he let two officers and two other people in and brought a plastic bag containing two rhino horns and a dismantled firearm to the policemen, one of the officers says in an affidavit filed at the Windhoek High Court.

According to the officer, Special Reserve Force inspector Palasdus Nepembe, Babi said he received the firearm and “products” from Frizans Naululu Dumeni, who was one of the people he allowed to enter his house, and that Dumeni had brought the “parcels” there in his absence.

The rhino horns looked fresh and felt cold, and from their temperature his colleague concluded the horns had been kept in a refrigerator, Nepembe says in his affidavit.

The sworn statement was filed at the court in response to an urgent application Babi lodged on Friday last week.

Babi wanted the urgent application to be heard on Monday, but withdrew his case after answering affidavits had been filed at the court. Allowing the withdrawal of the application on Monday, judge Harald Geier ordered that Babi should pay the legal costs of the prosecutor general, the inspector general of the Namibian Police, and Gobabis magistrate Eden Iyambo, who were cited as respondents in the case.

Babi was asking the court to declare an alleged police search of his house invalid and unlawful; review and set aside a warrant that authorised his arrest on Tuesday last week in connection with a rhino poaching case registered at Gobabis; declare his arrest as unlawful and unconstitutional; and order his release from detention in respect of the Gobabis case.

Babi (30), who is a self-appointed prophet and founder of the House of Joy Ministries evangelical religious group in Windhoek, and Dumeni (25) are facing charges of dealing in or possessing two rhino horns and possessing a hunting rifle and ammunition without a licence in the Windhoek Magistrate's Court, following their arrest two weeks ago.

After his second arrest last week, Babi appeared in the Gobabis Magistrate's Court on a charge of hunting specially protected game on Monday. The charge is linked to the poaching of two rhinos found killed on a farm in the Gobabis area on 26 May.

The Gobabis case was postponed to 15 September, and Babi was ordered to remain in custody in the meantime.

In his withdrawn urgent application, Babi claimed the police searched his home without a warrant and without him being present.

However, according to Nepembe, Babi went to fetch the "parcel" he said he had received from Dumeni from an upstairs room in his house, and the rhino horns he brought the officers were not discovered during a search of the premises.

Another police officer, John Haoseb, says in an affidavit also filed at the court that Babi refused to let the police enter the premises, resulting in a stand-off of several hours between him and police officers outside.

Haoseb says he eventually went to apply for a search warrant from a magistrate, but when he was on his way back to Babi's house he was informed the police had in the meantime gained entry to the premises and Babi had been arrested.

An affidavit by prosecutor general Martha Imalwa has also been filed at the court.

In it Imalwa says it is improper for Babi to try to be released through a civil case filed at the High Court, rather than through a bail application under the criminal justice system.

"If [Babi] wants to be released from custody and requires his liberty, he must seek bail in the ordinary course and not abuse the civil process to redress a criminal matter," Imalwa says.

The poaching of endangered wildlife and possession of and dealing in rhino horns are serious crimes in Namibia, and due to the seriousness of the charges against him the state is opposing Babi's release on bail, Imalwa says.

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