Prosecutor General Martha Imalwa freezes Chinese businessman's account

Acting prosecutor general Martha Imalwa

Acting prosecutor general Martha Imalwa has applied to freeze N$3,2 million held in the bank account of Yan Qiang, a Chinese businessman. Imalwa alleges the funds are proceeds of unlawful activities linked to illegal abalone trading, money laundering and immigration fraud.

The preservation order application, brought under the Prevention of Organised Crime Act, targets funds accumulated between 1 January 2025 and 15 May this year.

According to court documents, the investigation stems from an operation on 13 May this year when officials from the Namibian Revenue Agency (Namra) discovered 512 frozen abalone in a deep freezer at Olide Supermarket in Windhoek's Chinatown.

Imalwa says the abalone weighed 14.10 kilograms and had an estimated value of N$65 000. The seafood was confiscated after Yan allegedly failed to produce the permits or documentation required for its possession.

"When questioned about the abalone, Mr Yan initially stated that it originated from China but was unable to produce any import permit or supporting documentation," Imalwa says in her affidavit.

She says Yan later changed his explanation, claiming the abalone had been sold to him by an unidentified black man who regularly supplies Chinese residents in Chinatown.

The conflicting accounts, coupled with his inability to produce the required documentation, led to his arrest. He was later granted bail of N$20 000.

Imalwa argued that possessing abalone without lawful authorisation contravenes the Aquaculture Act, 2002.

The application also details alleged immigration irregularities involving Yan.

According to Imalwa, records from the Ministry of Home Affairs, Immigration, Safety and Security show Yan was issued with an employment permit on 15 August 2023 authorising him to work for Riminii Investment (Pty) Ltd/China Energy International Group until 15 August 2025.

She further alleges that another work visa purportedly covering the period from 14 September 2025 to 21 September was fraudulent.

Imalwa says Yan's work permit had already been cancelled in March 2025 after authorities established that it had been obtained through misrepresentation. Despite its cancellation, she alleges he remained in Namibia and continued operating several businesses, including Olide Supermarket.

The application further notes that Yan was convicted in the Windhoek Magistrate's Court in September 2011 for contravening the Labour Act.

Financial investigations, Imalwa says, also reveal suspicious banking activity.

Analysis of Yan's Standard Bank account covering the period from 1 January 2025 to 15 May 2026 allegedly reveals notable peculiarities and similarities indicative of substantial and unusual financial transactions.

Among the concerns highlighted is what Imalwa described as a mismatch between the modest turnover expected from a supermarket in Chinatown and deposits amounting to N$3.2 million flowing through the account during the period under review.

Investigators also red flagged an international transfer of N$1 million received on 3 November 2025.

In addition, the account allegedly received frequent deposits from restaurants and food-related businesses, including Seoul Food Windhoek, Chez Cui Restaurant and Food Supply, Yang-Tze Restaurant CC, Red Restaurant and Food Services CC, and Calyx Investment CC. Other payments were received from entities including Olide Supermarket, Zala Construction CC and Taiheng Geological Survey CC, among others.

"In summary, the retail business operated by Mr Yan functions as a cloak for his criminal activities. The evidence of the seized abalone, the cancelled employment permit and lack of a legitimate source for the substantial international and third-party deposits collectively demonstrate that the business and its associated bank account are being used to circumvent the law," Imalwa says.

Supporting the application, Namibian Police sergeant Loide Trianus, attached to the anti-money laundering and combating the financing of terrorism and asset recovery subdivision, says there are reasonable grounds to believe Yan's bank account and the funds it contains constitute an instrumentality of unlawful activities.

"The evidence further demonstrates that the retail business operated by Mr Yan served as an instrumentality of the offences. The supermarket premises provided the physical location from which unlawful activities could be carried out and concealed," Trianus says in her supporting affidavit.

She further alleges that the deep freezer in which the abalone were discovered formed part of the business infrastructure and enabled their unlawful storage and possible distribution while creating the appearance that they formed part of the supermarket's ordinary stock.

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