

Police seize drugs, rhino horns at OR Tambo Airport

Two suspects were arrested and drugs and rhino horns worth over R6 million were intercepted in separate incidents at OR Tambo International over the weekend.



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The interception was conducted by a multi-disciplinary team from the South African Police Service (SAPS), South African Revenue Service (SARS), the Department of Home Affairs, Airports Company South Africa (ACSA) and other stakeholders.

SARS Customs officials and the K-9 unit conducted a full rummage on-board a flight from Sao Paulo and interviewed passengers on Saturday.

A Brazilian passenger was stopped after it was discovered that he had no tags on his luggage.

“He was taken to the common search area, where it was discovered that the bag contained black blocks. Preliminary testing indicated that the drug is most likely cocaine. If further tests confirm this, the consignment could be valued at R5 million,” police spokesperson Brigadier Vishnu Naidoo said on Monday.

A further search of the same aircraft was conducted and two socks containing "cocaine bullets" were found in different toilets. Preliminary tests also indicated that the substance is cocaine. No arrests have been made with regards to these drugs.

In another incident on Friday, a man was arrested after he was found to be in possession of five rhino horns in his luggage.

Naidoo said customs officers followed up on information around a suspicious bag that was bound for Hong Kong. The identified bag and the owner were intercepted at the boarding gate. A physical search of the bag was conducted and five rhino horns were found wrapped in foil. The suspect was arrested.

The horns were handed over to the Directorate for Priority Crime Investigations (HAWKS) for further investigation.

"The team's integrated effort and commitment is yielding great successes, both in the prevention as well as the combatting of crime in and around the airport," Naidoo said.

Meanwhile, 30-year-old Mapoyisa Mahlauli was sentenced to an effective 20 years imprisonment after he was found guilty in the Skukuza Regional court for various rhino-poaching related crimes.

The sentence comes after intensive and thorough investigations by the members of the Endangered Species Unit as well as the Skukuza Stock Theft Unit.

The accused was arrested in March 2016 in the Satara Section of the Kruger National Park. Field rangers were on routine patrol when they were alerted to gunshots. They followed up on the gunshots and they discovered a white rhinoceros cow had been shot dead and her horns sawn off.

"The field rangers followed the tracks of the suspects. When they found the poachers, a shootout ensued resulting in Mapoyisa being arrested while his accomplice managed to evade arrest. A large calibre hunting rifle, ammunition, an axe and a fresh set of rhinoceros horns were recovered from the scene," police said.

The accused was subsequently charged, convicted and sentenced. His sentences are two years for trespassing in the Kruger National Park, 10 years imprisonment for Illegal hunting of rhino, eight years imprisonment for the possession of a firearm with intent to commit a crime, and three years imprisonment for possession of an unlicensed firearm.

The accused will serve an effective 20 years in prison as some sentences will run concurrently with others.

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