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Hyundai boss claims not to ruin his business

PETER DE IONNO

Beleaguered Hyundai tycoon Billy Rautenbach said on Friday that claims by South African law officials that he was involved in the murder of Yong Koo Kwon of Ford Daewoo and that he was one of the country's 20 top criminals were part of an attempt to shut down his business empire.

Rautenbach, the Zimbabwean entrepreneur who owns 50 percent of the Hyundai motor company, also runs the Wheels of Africa transport company and has mining interests in the Democratic Republic of Congo, said he was hating a campaign by "global interests" to destroy his reputation.

Rautenbach, who is believed to be on holiday with his wife Jenny and their two children at a remote lodge on the Zambezi river, refused to speak with BR on Sunday, but he replied to a handful of questions by fax after extensive consultation with his advisors.

This week, the National Directorate of Public Prosecutions (NDPP) notched up the pressure on Rautenbach by telling the Pretoria High Court this week that "intelligence sources" had linked Rautenbach with the murder of Kwon, the southern African president of the Daewoo Motor Company, a rival company to Hyundai. Kwon was shot dead in his car in the driveway of his Morningdale Manor guest house in February. Nothing was stolen and police have treated the case as a hijacking gone wrong.

This week, the Scorpions, the unit commanded by Bulelani Ngwenya, the national director of Public Prosecutions, are expected to take over the Kwon murder investigation from the Brixton Murder and Robbery Unit.

The murder allegation surfaced when Rautenbach took action to recover three truckloads

of documents seized by the Investigating Directorate of the Office of Serious Economic Offences from his offices in Germiston and his home in Sandhurst last month. Rautenbach was challenging the validity of the search warrant and questioned the legality of the copying of his companies' records.

On Friday Rautenbach said: "It may be the crimes that I have committed are that I established the first new motor assembly company in South Africa in the past 30 years and took it excess of 10 percent of the market from vested interests. It made me the pariah of the industry.

"My second crime may be the move that I made to expand my business interests into the Democratic Republic of the Congo and further my ambitions to form a network that would challenge global interests.

"My other crime may be that I have challenged monopolies in an unconventional way with a great degree of success.

"I know there are suitors waiting in the wings to pick up my businesses in South Africa. On many occasions in the past five years I have rebuffed their approach."

Rautenbach said that a statement by President Thabo Mbeki's spokesman Paris Mankahlana that the riots were "a major development that will affect the security situation in the region" indicated that the government was trying to "curtail all of my activities, none of which are illegal or indeed proven to be."

Sigbo Ngwenya, spokesman for the Scorpions, said the link had been given information linking Rautenbach with the Kwon murder more than a month ago.

"We would not have divulged it open court unless we were forced to divulge it and we were convinced that the evidence was strong," he said. *Johannesburg*

PETER DE IONNO

Investigations into the mutilation of Johannesburg's "reindeer", the graceful sculpture of leaping impala which once graced Ernest Oppenheimer park, have yielded fruit in a log, a hand and a very sorry Christmas tale.

It includes policemen who arrested one of the thieves with two of the heads in his possession; it tells how they deported the suspect as an illegal alien without charging him for chopping up the sculpture; it recounts how the two heads then "disappeared"; and how the security company charged with guarding the park allegedly allowed part of the sculpture to be stolen as its guards stood by.

Now, waiting in the wings is the Greater Johannesburg Metropolitan Council, which wants to sue the security company for damages; and waiting to be ushered in are the police, who are having a hard time following up leads because their only identified suspect has been thrown out of the country.

Police recovered one of the 10 heads removed on November 17 from a Boksburg scrap metal dealer before it could be melted down. And a leg from the sculpture has been found in a Joburg CBD pawn shop.

Now council and police investigators are convinced that the other severed heads have been melted for scrap.

The mass decapitation of the sculpture, which was given to the city in 1960 by Harry Oppenheimer in memory of his father, Sir Ernest, who founded Anglo American, ruined plans by the corporation to rescue the sculpture from the run-down park and install it in a proposed pedestrian precinct outside its Main street headquarters.

This week, the sculpture, reduced from a light-bearded fantasy into something resembling a butcher shop's window display, was removed to be rejigged.

The next move in the saga, which has left Greater Johannesburg Metropolitan Council officials red faced and fuming, is expected to be the launching by the council of a massive claim for damages against Wopart, the security company tasked in September with guarding the park around the clock.

The cost of the damage is not yet known, but the claim set R11 million when it was cast by Hermon Wald in 1960 and is estimated to be worth R17 million at current values.

A court official said an investigation into the blowtorch

Christmas tale of the missing heads



ARTLESS IN THE PARK Ernest Oppenheimer Park in Johannesburg in the 1970s: now the council wants to sue security who allegedly witnessed the hacking up of its famous bronze sculpture

and hacksaw assault on the sculpture had revealed that thieves had been chopping away the impala's extremities for several months while the park was used as an overnight storage area for hooligans' wares.

The officials said a hawkler had called police when she arrived early one morning at the end of October to find a man putting several of the impala's heads in a bag.

The man was taken away by police and the woman was later given a case number by a policeman. However, when the woman and council officials followed up the case at the Central Johannesburg police station, they were told that the case number related to

the arrest of an illegal alien and there was no record or trace of the impala's heads.

The council investigator said one of the impalas was apparently taken from the park on November 11 while Wozani guards watched. A report from the security company said four men, one wearing a council security officer's uniform, had told the guards that they were taking the impala to another park.

"Our suspicions were aroused when we found that the registration number of what was said to be a council vehicle did not exist. Then, when the other heads were removed, it was the last straw.

"How could you go with a blowtorch and a hacksaw and cut

heads off of a sculpture without the guards seeing it. That is just too much," the official said.

The official said an investigation by the Security Officers Board has shown that Wozani's guards had not been registered with the board as required by law.

Allegations that the company had been employing illegal aliens and turning them in to the authorities to avoid paying them was also under investigation.

Johan Bosch, the chairman and managing director of Wozani and its sister company, ABS Security, dismissed the allegations as "nonsense and hogwash". He said Wozani had been made a scapegoat for the incident. — *Johannesburg*