

'Protected' alleged rhino kingpin goes on trial

The trial of an alleged kingpin of a syndicate that pocketed millions through rhino poaching, is to go ahead this week after 20 adjournments, notes a **Sunday Tribune** report. Details of how police, prosecutors and magistrates allegedly benefited from protecting alleged syndicate head Dumisani Gwala (56) could emerge. Gwala is to appear in the Ngwelezana Regional Magistrate's Court in Empangeni alongside his two co-accused, Wiseman Mageba (47) and Aubrey Dlamini (31). The three were arrested during a police sting operation following undercover work by the Hawks in December 2014. The trial follows numerous adjournments arising from changes in the accused's legal team, magistrates being replaced and senior state prosecutor Yuri Gangai being removed from the matter. Gangai was due to bring an application for the recusal of Magistrate K Shandu. He was replaced as prosecutor on the eve of bringing the application. It has not yet been disclosed who will preside over Gwala's trial. In October, notes the report, wildlife activist Jamie Joseph, of Saving the Wild, published the 'Blood Rhino Blacklist' which lifted the lid on an alleged rhino poaching syndicate that included magistrates, prosecutors and police. Joseph has claimed that delays in the trial and the removal of Gangai as a prosecutor had formed part of a political cover-up. Last month, she wrote an open letter, endorsed by people such as Sir Richard Branson and local musician Vusi Mahlasela, to the SA Government, calling for action against the syndicate. **Earlier this month, the Magistrates' Commission confirmed it was investigating allegations that a crooked cabal of magistrates, prosecutors and police had been paid to defeat the ends of justice in key rhino poaching cases.** Joseph has welcomed the commission's investigation and believes the state has a strong against Gwala.