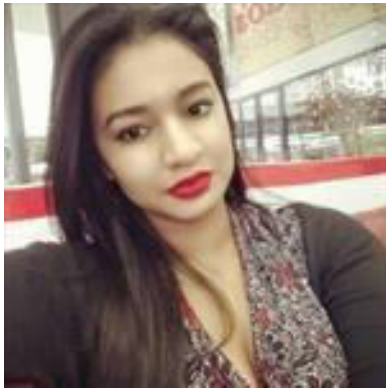


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16 suspects appear in court after being bust for illicit rhino horns trade

Earlier in the week, a man believed to be a rhino poaching kingpin provinces was apprehended.



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Sixteen suspects appeared before the Nelspruit Commercial Crimes Court on 31 May 2023 to face charges related to money laundering and corruption connected to the illicit trade of [rhino horns](#).

The accused were apprehended during the course of “Project Blood Orange”, which saw an investigation conducted by the Serious Corruption Investigation unit of the Hawks in [Mpumalanga](#).

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Accused included two field rangers

“Among the 16 suspects are two former field rangers, Daniel Maluleke and Solly Ubisi, as well as their family members.

“The investigation was a collaborative effort involving a multidisciplinary team comprising experts from [KPMG](#), the South African Revenue Service (Sars), and the Financial Intelligence Centre (FIC),” said police spokesperson Colonel Katlego Mogale.

The case against the accused has been adjourned until 25 October 2023, pending the final auditors’ report and a pre-trial conference.

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Major-General Nico Gerber, the Provincial Head of the Hawks in Mpumalanga, commended the team for the breakthrough.

Rhino poaching kingpin arrested

Meanwhile, earlier this week, a 59-year-old male suspect believed to be a kingpin of a rhino poaching syndicate between Mpumalanga and Limpopo was apprehended during a joint operation conducted by the Provincial Stock Theft Unit, Hoedspruit police and the local Farm Watch and Policing Forum.

The law enforcement units received information about two suspects driving a grey Toyota bakkie that was suspected to be involved in rhino poaching in Lydenburg, Mpumalanga.

ALSO READ: [Rhino poachers sentenced to 34 years in prison](#)

“The motor vehicle was spotted driving along the R531 public road at Klaserie One Stop Station in Kampersrus. A stop and search operation was set up in the vicinity in the attempt to block the suspect’s motor vehicle,” said police spokesperson Colonel Malesela Ledwaba.

However, upon seeing the roadblock, the suspects, made a sudden U-turn.

Ledwaba said that a car chase then ensued for approximately six kilometres until the vehicle came to a stop in the middle of the road.

“One suspect fled into the nearby bushes, dropping a black bag. The remaining occupants continued to drive but were apprehended after colliding with another vehicle. A search of the car revealed cash hidden in the backseat, leading to the immediate arrest of the driver,” he said.