

## Fire attack: man ‘not mentally ill’

SHARIKA REGCHAND

THE MAN who allegedly poured petrol over his girlfriend and set her alight appears to be mentally stable, the Pietermaritzburg Magistrate's Court heard yesterday.

Nathen Rampersad (30) was sent this week to a district surgeon for him to be assessed. The surgeon then had to provide the court with an opinion on whether Rampersad needed to be admitted to Fort Napier hospital for observation.

The prosecutor, Rene Padayachee, told the court that the “doctor said he [Rampersad] is not a person who should be sent for mental observation”.

Rampersad has been remanded in custody until May 28 for a bail application. It is being opposed by the state.

He is charged with arson and the attempted murder of his 17-year-old girlfriend, who is still recovering from the burn injuries in hospital.

It is alleged that he had a fight with her because she did not want to clean his room. He allegedly became enraged and beat her with an iron pipe.

Rampersad then allegedly took the petrol from his brush cutter and tipped it over her. He then allegedly lit a match and threw it on her.

She caught alight and ran outside, screaming for help. Her injuries were so serious that doctors feared she might not survive.

The couple lived in a double storey house which was also occupied by 54 other tenants.

The fire tore through it leaving them destitute.

The community rallied together and provided them with tents.

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### NOTICES

• **67 BLANKETS FOR NELSON MANDELA DAY:** Will be holding a knitathon on Saturday on the Piazza at the Cascades Lifestyle Centre, from 8.30 am to noon. They will be knitting and crocheting 20x20 cm squares to join into blankets for the needy. If you cannot knit or crochet, wool donations will be greatly appreciated. Inquiries Sharen on 084 705 0342.

• **KHARINA SECONDARY SCHOOL:** Will be hosting its annual open day on June 2 from 9 am to 1 pm for admissions for pupils who will be in Grade 8 in 2019. For more information contact the school on 033 391 4551 or e-mail to kharinas-secondary@telkomsa.net

• **SRI THANDU MARIAMMAN THIRU KOVIL:** Presents a programme of songs and dance with San Production, a Hindi band, on June 9 at Truro Hall at 6 pm. Admission fee is R100. Contact Guru Reshan Pillay on 082 822 5386, Barry Pillay on 076 956 0958 and Steven Naik on 082 379 6244.

• E-mail notices to mandisa.jacobs@witness.co.za. Placing is subject to space.



Head of the Zululand Anti-Poaching (Zap-Wing) K9 Unit in Hluhluwe, Eric Dickson, with his dog Mali during a demonstration yesterday as part of the Project Rhino anti-poaching campaign. PHOTOS: IAN CARBUTT

## Project Rhino takes more drastic measures to apprehend criminals

NOKUTHULA KHANYILE

PROJECT Rhino is waging war on the multi-million rand poaching trade and is employing a new breed of operatives to help catch criminals.

The association, which facilitates vital rhino conservation in the province, is fighting back and taking increasingly drastic measures to counter illegal poaching and to snare poachers slaughtering rhinos. Equipped with a “Zap-Wing” for aerial surveillance and rescue, the association now boasts a newly formed K9 Unit and is all set to get into danger zones to snare poachers.

During a site inspection visit to the Zululand Anti-Poaching (Zap) Wing yesterday, *The Witness* was introduced to Mali the Belgian Shepherd who has become the first detection dog used by the K9 Unit as an essential tool in detection.

Project Rhino co-ordinator Chris Galliers said the K9 unit was introduced following staggering numbers of rhino poached in the province.

Rhino poaching has reached epidemic proportions with around 1 200 rhino being killed in 2014 and 2015 in South Africa alone. KwaZulu-Natal lost over 200 rhinos in 2017, compared to 162 in 2016.

“Rhino poaching hasn’t disappeared. Last year was the worst year the province has ever had. Poaching has been greatly increasing since 2009 in the province. We are still at the sharp



Zap-wing pilot Ian Waghorn checking his aircraft, which is a tool in the anti-poaching campaign in Hluhluwe.

end of this issue, and there are many challenges,” said Galliers.

The anti-poaching campaign K9 Unit was initiated in November last

year. “We’ve started off with a detection dog and we are looking at running

a centralised unit that will be able to service all the reserves. That means that we are able to manage the dogs well and give recognition to that.”

He said setting up the initial project cost the organisation about R600 000 to initiate but a further R1,4 million is needed to ensure that it runs efficiently going forward.

Project Rhino is looking at having at least six more detection dogs and three handlers operating full time in the 25 member reserves it operates in.

“We are gearing up to expand the dog unit in order to patrol and track in the reserves. The next step will be to find qualified handlers,” added Galliers.

Head of K9 Unit Eric Dickson said the formation of the unit has been well received.

“Up to now it has been very good; unfortunately you can’t achieve a lot with one handler and one dog because the area is so vast. The work that has been done has been well received and we will see if it’s going to work.”

Dickson said three-year-old Mali is certified in the detection of rhino horns.

The K9 Unit forms part of the ZAP-Wing which is staffed by five pilots and equipped with two Robinson R44 Raven Helicopters, a WW Netherlands donated Rainbow Skyreach Cheetah and a MicroAviation Bathawk light sport aircraft (LSA) owned by Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife.

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## Call to heed weather warnings

THE KZN Department of Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs (Cogta) is urging residents of northern KZN to heed weather warnings about localised flooding due to incessant rain currently affecting King Cetshwayo, uMkhanyakude, and Zululand districts.

The downpours have already claimed three victims.

“The heavy rain has already claimed the lives of three teenagers who drowned while trying to cross the Matimofu River from Ndlongoleane school in uMlalazi.

“This is a tragedy, the likes of which we must all strive to prevent by heeding weather warnings,” said Kwa-Zulu-Natal Cogta MEC Nomusa Dube-Ncube.

The teenagers were Nontethelo Mcanyana (18), Sinikiwe Mpanza (17) and Zenande Gumede (14). All their bodies have since been recovered.

The department extended its heartfelt condolences to the families and communities of the three children. The families are also receiving support.

“In light of this tragedy, we are urging residents of the affected regions to stay away from all rivers and streams in their vicinity where localised flooding could occur.

“We are also warning motorists to drive carefully and avoid low-lying bridges in areas that are susceptible to flooding,” said Dube-Ncube.

— Witness Reporter.  
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Musa Mthombeni, Akhumzi Jezile's best friend. PHOTO: INSTAGRAM

## FRIENDS STILL STRUGGLING WITH TV STAR'S DEATH

IT has been over a week since family and friends buried TV presenter and producer Akhumzi Jezile.

With many still trying to come to terms with the reality of his death, Jezile's best friend, Musa Mthombeni, says he is still in disbelief over what has happened.

Mthombeni recently wrote on Twitter: “Every day I see something hilarious and start the process of wanting to send you a screenshot or call you, then I remember that you aren't here anymore. I still can't believe this.”

Mthombeni, as well as a few of Jezile's other friends, decided to spend Mother's Day with Akhumzi's mother.

— Witness Reporter.

## Appeal court rules City must pay for Parker Road repairs

SHARIKA REGCHAND

IT'S the end of the road for the Msunduzi Municipality, which now has to fork out “millions” for the repair of a road in Chase Valley.

This follows a ruling by the Supreme Court of Appeals this week that dismissed the municipality's application for leave to appeal a judgment against it.

In December, Judge Rishi Seegobin found that Parker Road, which connects Chase Valley and Otto's Bluff roads to each other, is a public road.

A contractor instructed by the municipality to grade the road, had damaged it during March 2012.

The judge also saw no reason Andre Anton Venter, who brought the application, should not be entitled to recover his legal costs from the municipality.

The appeal court has now said “there is no reasonable prospect of success in an appeal and there is no other compelling reason why an appeal should be heard”.

Venter said yesterday that he was “ecstatic” over the latest ruling.

### MAN GETS SUSPENDED SENTENCE IN BOILING WATER ATTACK

SHARIKA REGCHAND

A MAN who threw boiling water on his niece “by mistake” whilst aiming at his sister was yesterday given a four-year suspended sentence.

Phumlani Mbeje pleaded guilty to an assault charge before Pietermaritzburg regional court magistrate Muntu Khumalo.

He said that on December 10 last year in the Kwanyamazane area, Slangspruit, he and his sister had an argument.

“During the argument I took a kettle that contained hot water and threw it at my sister. At the time I had thrown the water, the complainant, who is my niece, had been standing next to my sister.”

His sister ducked and the water landed on the child's back, he said.

Mbeje admitted that he over-reacted

“... on the overall evidence adduced by [Andre Anton] Venter ... the [Parker] road has been in existence since about 1941 and it was the municipality that had designated a name to the said road.”

He added that his son was a property developer and had plans to build a wedding venue on the road, but his plans were being delayed because of the road's condition.

Before turning to the SCA, the municipality applied for leave to appeal before Seegobin. He dismissed the application in February.

In doing so, he said the grounds on which the municipality pursued the action included that the court did not consider the fact that it is common cause between the parties that the road was a forestry track; that cognisance was not taken of the fact that Venter showed that the road has

been used by the general public since 1990 and failing to find that he had an onus to show that the public have used the road since “time immemorial”.

Also, the court failed to consider that one of Venter's witnesses confirmed the municipality's version that the road was in good condition immediately after it was graded.

Another ground was that the court accepted evidence that the road was damaged after it was graded and failed to consider the municipality's evidence on the condition after it was graded.

The judge said the main dispute between the parties was around the road.

the possibility that the child could get injured and I nevertheless went ahead with my actions,” he said.

Sentencing him, Khumalo said that given the level of serious crimes being committed in the country, the emphasis should be on retribution and deterrence. The court had the duty to consider Mbeje's personal circumstances, which was that he was 39 years old, unmarried and had two children.

He is a taxi conductor and ran a car wash business which he had to close down.

He added that the injuries sustained by the child were serious but not “very, very serious”.

There was also no evidence that Mbeje could not be rehabilitated. Khumalo felt that the suspended sentence was suitable punishment.

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