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Zondo Commission: Mcebisi Jonas tells of Guptas boasting of their control of Hawks, NPA, and NIA

Former deputy finance minister Mcebisi Jonas revealed on Friday that one of the Gupta brothers, whom he believes to be Ajay Gupta, threatened his life should he ever tell anyone about a meeting held between them at the Gupta home in Johannesburg in October 2015. Also present at the meeting were Zuma's son Duduzane as well as former defence advisor Fana Hlongwane.

Jonas told the commission of inquiry into state capture, sitting in Johannesburg, that Gupta appeared emotional when it became clear that Jonas was not in favour of Gupta's previously reported offer for the position of finance minister, held at the time by Nhlanhla Nene. "He (Gupta) had come into the room and immediately told me that they had information on me and the 'old man' had suggested that they talk to me," said Jonas, reading from the sworn statement he made to the commission. By 'old man', he said, Gupta had been referring to former president Jacob Zuma.

According to Jonas, he had been driven to an undisclosed meeting venue by Duduzane, whom he had met earlier at the Hyatt hotel in Rosebank. Duduzane appeared nervous when they met at the Hyatt, and told Jonas that he would prefer to move to a more private place. Jonas told the commission he was unaware of what the meeting agenda was or that they would be joined by others. He had previously been invited by Duduzane to the South African of the Year Awards, but had declined, and later agreed to meeting at a later stage. Duduzane had not been clear on his reasons for wanting to meet with him.

'In control of everything'

The two of them drove to the Saxonwold home of the Guptas, where they met Hlongwane outside, before proceeding indoors. Hlongwane too had previously contacted Jonas, expressing Duduzane's interest in meeting with him.

A short while after having settled down inside the house, Gupta joined them, and immediately made the above statement, referring to the family having investigated Jonas for a while and therefore having known everything they needed to about him.

"You must understand that we are in control of everything...," said Gupta. Jonas added that he quoted in the next comment that the Hawks, the National Prosecuting Authority and the National Intelligence Agency were some of the entities the family had control over. "If you work with us, we could make you rich," Gupta continued, and then pointed to Duduzane before continuing, "We made him a billionaire."

Protecting their favourites

Gupta had also referred to his family having made sure that the career paths of former Eskom CEO Brian Molefe and former public enterprises minister Lynne Brown were safe. He further made references to Jonas of his apparent affiliation within the ANC, at which point Jonas said he got irritated and made it clear to the others that he did not want to continue with the meeting.

When he got up to leave, said Jonas, Gupta appeared agitated, and even seemed to be motioning to punch him. “He moved me to an area that has a bar, and seemed emotional.” To ease the tension, Jonas said he asked Gupta to explain what it is that the family does, so that he could understand what they wanted from him. “I then told him that I was pressed for time as I would be travelling and needed to head to the airport, but he could perhaps contact me with a list of things that they do, so that I could look at it.”

The meeting ended abruptly, but not before Gupta further tried to persuade Jonas with an amount of R600 000 in cash, as a token of how serious he was about his offer.

In the days following the meeting Jonas met with both Gordhan and later Nene. He was discouraged from resigning by Gordhan during their meeting. Later, in December, Nene was dismissed by Zuma, who replaced him with Des van Rooyen for a short period before responding to the negative reaction of the markets by reinstating Gordhan, a previous holder of the portfolio.

In the months that followed, Jonas would be contacted by Berning Ntlemenza, formerly the head of the Hawks, who then referred him to another senior staffer of the unit, Major General Zinhle Mnonopi, who would present a prepared statement for Jonas that claimed several inaccuracies in his media address detailing the offer of the bribe at the Saxonwold meeting. Jonas refused to sign this.

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