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Vytjie Mentor tells commission that Guptas knew top-secret defence information

Former ANC MP Vytjie Mentor's second day of testimony at the commission of inquiry into state capture continued where she had left off on Monday, with more explosive revelations regarding the Gupta brothers' alleged interference with the running of the state. Her disclosures in this regard to former president Jacob Zuma, Parliament and later, the ANC leadership at Luthuli House went unaddressed.

Mentor started off by further detailing to the commission her September 2010 encounter with eldest brother Ajay Gupta at the family home in Saxonwold. He had told her, she said, that the family could always put in a good word for her with Zuma should she want a ministerial post.

"I felt he does not have authority to offer ministerial positions to me or to any other person. I said to him it is only the president in discussion with Luthuli House, that has the authority to do that."

Guptas in possession of classified defence information

Even prior to that, said Mentor, Gupta had revealed to her top-secret details associated with the state's defence company Denel. The only reason she herself knew of the matter was that she was a member of Parliament's joint standing committee on intelligence and was therefore privy to these details. It concerned her that a member of the public could have known of such.

With time, she grew agitated with Gupta and said she wanted to leave. Just then Zuma entered the room. She immediately made him aware of what had just transpired, but to her dismay, the former president did not seem surprised at this.

"I felt that he was not paying attention to the issues I was telling him," she said. "His main focus was to calm me down."

The seemingly unperturbed Zuma then helped Mentor, who was on crutches at the time, to leave the room. "He picked up my handbag from where I had placed it next to where I had been seated, and walked me out."

Mentor further observed what she referred to as the disrespectful tone in which Gupta enquired with Zuma if he'd be having something to eat. She recalled that she was shocked at the lack of protocol in the way Gupta spoke to Zuma. To this, Zuma responded by saying he "would eat next door." Noticing the puzzled look on Mentor's face, he explained that his son Duduzane stayed next door.

Far from Zuma reacting to Gupta, as Mentor would have expected, he was more interested in reassuring her as he escorted her out. "Don't worry about anything, and take care of yourself," he told Mentor in isiZulu, as he walked her out to the car that would then drive her back to the airport where she was to catch a flight back to Cape Town.

ANC leadership unconcerned by Mentor's concerns

Soon after the encounter, Mentor was back in Parliament for a meeting of the joint standing committee. Just before the proceedings began, she told some of the members of her recent meeting at Saxonwold, catching the attention of several of them. Once the meeting had commenced, an opposition party member raised the issue, with the understanding that the item would be added to the agenda.

The chairperson at the time, Siyabonga Cwele, took it on as a matter to refer to Luthuli House, suggesting that it would be dealt with there. Mentor noted to the commission that she recalled an update request from Cwele, away from the committee, but was only told that Luthuli House was dealing with it.

A later attempt to raise the matter with then ANC secretary-general Gwede Mantashe and his deputy Jessie Duarte was also unsuccessful, Mentor said. Mantashe left the room soon after she raised the issue, and with only she and Duarte in the room, Mentor got the sense that the latter too was not keen on tackling the matter.

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