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Zondo commission – Bosasa favours were not bribes, says Mantashe

Mineral Resources and Energy Minister Gwede Mantashe has defended Bosasa's security upgrades to his three private homes in Gauteng and Eastern Cape, saying they were a favour from company executive Papa Leshabane, and not the company itself. Mantashe was the secretary-general of the ANC at the time, a position he feels did not place him in conflict, as he was not in government.

Mantashe told the state capture commission on Friday that it was Leshabane who offered to replace security cameras that he had himself purchased for installation at his home in Boksburg in 2013. There had been a break-in at the Mantashe home, and he had instructed his security advisor, a man he referred to as Mzonke Nyakaza, to see to it that he bought and installed cameras around the home. It was at this point that Leshabane, a family friend of the Mantashes, happened to come around and offered instead to replace the cameras already bought with state-of-the-art versions.

Mantashe saw nothing wrong with this, and did not question Leshabane on how he would go about getting these, he told the commission.

"That he was working for Bosasa is immaterial," he said, when asked by evidence leader Advocate Viwe Notshe if he did not see it as a conflict for an executive of a company doing business with government to offer a favour to an influential politician.

Mantashe took offence to the inference, saying that it would have to be proven that he was indeed influential as secretary-general of the ANC at the time, and how he would have influenced anything in the interest of Bosasa.

"Did it not occur to you that this was payment from Bosasa for your influence since it had contracts with government departments?" Notshe asked.

"No. Bosasa had many contracts with many departments with ministers. None of those ministers was me," Mantashe retorted.

Notshe questioned Mantashe's relationship with the late Bosasa CEO, Gavin Watson, to which he responded that he knew him from his time in the trade union movement and that he'd been accused on several occasions of trying to bribe shop stewards to buy their loyalty to the catering and facilities company.

"He was bribing shop stewards at the time for catering at hostels. And I said 'no, we are not going to have any of that'," said Mantashe.

But then, said Notshe, he should have been concerned when a man who worked for Watson, who was known for bribing, sought to upgrade his security for free.

The two are not related, said Mantashe, and a favour from Leshabane in his personal capacity could not be seen as a bribe. "I am not amenable to bribes. I was known for that and I am known for that now."

The actual cost of the security upgrade at Mantashe's homes remains a question mark. Former Bosasa COO Angelo Agrizzi, who outed Mantashe and several other politicians who allegedly received favours from the company, placed it at R650 000, while former Bosasa technician and team leader for the installation project, Richard le Roux, told the commission it was in the region of R300 000. According to Notshe, Leshabane himself said in an affidavit before the commission the costs could not have been more than R70 000.

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