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Zondo Commission – Panday’s dealings with police revealed in assistant’s notebook

The smoking gun in the Thoshan Panday corruption case involving the KwaZulu-Natal South African Police Service (Saps) took the form of a simple-looking notebook in which the businessman’s personal assistant recorded every single detail of his scheme. Forensic investigator Trevor White told this to the commission of inquiry into state capture on Monday.

White was roped into the probe on behalf of PricewaterhouseCoopers after allegations of corruption involving Panday surfaced in 2010. By the time his investigation was ready to be submitted as a report to Saps, he had uncovered what he calls a multi-million-rand scheme that involved cover quoting, inflated prices for goods and services, and favours for senior police members who enabled the scheme.

Key to the success of Panday’s deals, said White, were Colonel Navin Madhoe and Captain Ashwin Narainpersad, both of whom were senior officials within the supply chain management unit of KZN Saps. Madhoe and Narainpersad allegedly helped facilitate the registration of several Panday-owned companies on the police supplier database. The only drawback for the trio, however, was that Madhoe – being head of procurement – could only authorise payments of up to R200 000, requiring that Saps go to tender. To avoid detection of the companies being owned by the same person, two of the entities were registered under the names of Panday’s mother and his wife, respectively.

Gold Coast Trading, Bravosat and Valotone were placed on the database in November 2009, with White believing the only reason the companies were set up was to do business with Saps. He could find no record of any other business conducted by the companies outside the police.

Panday’s personal assistant, Tasneem Rahiman, was found during the investigation to have kept the notebook detailing how each of the companies was doing business with Saps. The book, simply marked “Tasneem Rahiman record book” on the outside, recorded how the companies would go about bidding for the same contracts within Saps; how much each company would bid in “competition” with the other two, and who the pre-determined preferred contractor of the three was. Furthermore, Rahiman kept details of by how much goods and services would be inflated.

The book was discovered during a search and seizure operation by investigators. For White, its importance is that it shows the names of the companies in the same context, and proves the false competitive bidding.

In the end, Panday’s companies made almost R50-million just from contracts held with Saps, between November 2009 and August 2010.

As the investigation gained momentum, the Companies and Intellectual Property Commission was notified of the resignations of Panday's mother and wife, with the claim that by November 2009 when the companies started doing business with Saps, the pair were not linked to the companies.

In return for their loyalty, Madhoe and Narainpersad were repaid with such favours as holidays for their families, a car for Madhoe, varsity fees for Narainpersad's child, and a birthday party for the husband of then provincial police commissioner, Mmamonye Ngobeni.

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