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Zondo Commission: Gordhan keeps mum on ANC members who knew of state capture, but didn't act

Even on the third day of his testimony at the commission of inquiry into state capture on Wednesday, public enterprises minister Pravin Gordhan could not be drawn to name and shame those from within his party who may have helped engineer alleged state capture in the country.

Gordhan was asked by commission chair, deputy chief justice Raymond Zondo, near the end of his testimony if he knew what it was that the ANC could have done to address signs of state capture. "What environment existed within the party that could have supported efforts to pick up signs of wrongdoing?" Zondo asked.

In answer, Gordhan argued that because politics, governance and patronage go together always, the test is in making sure that in pursuing patronage, the least harm is done to society and its needs.

Zondo sought to ascertain whether senior leaders of the party were in a position to curb state capture as and when it appeared to surface within government departments. He emphasised the question of who should have done what. Gordhan, in response, went to detail on policy standpoints of the party with regard to its mandate of enabling public participation in its governing work, but left out names.

"There are a number of factors that stop people from standing up," said Gordhan. "You see it in the boards of state owned enterprises. Taking the risk means sticking your neck out, when you look at the threats that are in the public domain."

However, Gordhan pulled no punches when it came to the knowledge of, and role played by former president Jacob Zuma in several issues that caused contestation between them. Zuma lied to Cabinet, Gordhan said, in relation to the matter of the task team set up to investigate the closing of Gupta linked bank accounts in 2016. Cabinet established the task team, for which Zuma appointed former minerals minister Mosebenzi Zwane as chair. Representatives of banks told the commission in September how they were intimidated by Zwane after being summoned to meetings to explain themselves. Gordhan said that as he stood up for Treasury when it came under attack for refusing to intervene and force the banks into a corner, he too was attacked.

Zwane would later be "reprimanded" by Zuma for publicly speaking out of turn at a meeting of the National Union of Mineworkers, where the former commented that the banks involved were trying to dictate to government how to run the country.

Zuma also interfered, Gordhan said, in the appointments of board members of SOEs as well as in relation to the Russia nuclear deal that he wanted South Africa to enter into.

Earlier in the day, the minister had alluded to a general fear of retribution from powerful people in the state capture machinery as the reason that many in the ruling party have not reported corruption they see happening. He said the fear cannot be underestimated, as attacks on individuals and members of their families are some of the consequences experienced by those who have attempted to stand up to corruption.

Gordhan called on his detractors to enter the fray of evidence submission. He invited them to give proof to the commission, under oath, of any inaccuracies in his testimony and those of other witnesses who want to see the commission succeed.

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