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Zondo commission - "I'm conveniently placed at the supposed crime scene": Duduzane

For years there has been a strong narrative of Duduzane Zuma being a fixer and conduit between the Gupta family and influential government leaders, and it does not surprise him that details of such would surface before the commission of inquiry into state capture.

Zuma told the commission on Monday that he was "conveniently placed at the supposed crime scene" by several witnesses before the inquiry, including former mineral resources minister Ngoako Ramatlhodi and former deputy finance minister Mcebisi Jonas. He appeared before the inquiry to respond to allegations by Jonas, Ramatlhodi and four other witnesses of his presence at meetings or being part of organising meetings, either at the Saxonwold home of the Guptas, or with their interests in mind.

Zuma spent most of the first part of the day refuting Jonas's version of events on 23 October 2015 that he organised a meeting between him and Ajay Gupta at which the latter offered a bribe of R600-million and a promotion to the post of finance minister.

Jonas told the commission during his August 2018 testimony that he was under the impression at the time that he was to meet Zuma and businessman Fana Hlongwane, with whom he had personal issues to iron out. Both Zuma and Hlongwane agree with Jonas that a meeting took place, but refute his claim that Ajay was in it and the bribe offer was made.

Another meeting that Zuma was alleged to have been part of involved former Free State MEC for economic development, Mxolisi Dukwana, who told the commission in June that he was taken to Saxonwold by then premier Ace Magashule to meet with Rajesh Gupta, who offered him a stake in a mining interest owned by the family and Zuma in the Free State, if he would sign off on giving them business in a provincial project. When Rajesh mentioned that the family had made both Magashule and Zuma rich, the pair had nodded, not refuting his comment, said Dukwana.

Zuma denied having met Dukwana at any point at the Gupta home, saying if he had met him at all in the past, it would have been only in passing.

He also denied Ramatlhodi's version in his evidence that soon after the former minister's appointment in 2014, Zuma contacted him wanting to meet. The subject of the meeting, which Ramatlhodi said happened at St George Hotel, was rumours that he was badmouthing both Zuma and his business associates, including the Guptas, accusing them of participating in criminal activities.

On the evidence of former KwaZulu-Natal Hawks head General Johan Booysen, Zuma agreed that the two met in Sandton in August 2015 with the sole purpose of him introducing the general to the brothers at their home. The meeting happened because Booysen had been asking Zuma a lot of questions about the family, and because he wanted to show him a side of them that was not in the public narrative, he agreed to introduce them.

He did, however, refute Booyesen's claim that Rajesh mentioned the general's impending interview for the post of national head, which was to take place a few days later. Booyesen's version is that he drew inference from Gupta's comments on the interview to mean that he had some influence on how it would go.

The two of them meeting at the Gupta home was not in any way an issue. "There was no issue of the venue, we've met in interesting places," Zuma said, responding to a question from evidence leader Advocate Philip Mokoena, on why the meeting had to happen there. Zuma added that he had met Booyesen in Pretoria on numerous occasions, and did not see it odd that he made a Gautrain trip to Sandton. His lawyer Advocate Mike Hellens said commission chairperson Deputy Chief Justice Raymond Zondo's position in earlier questioning that it was immaterial whether or not Zuma and Booyesen met under professional circumstances according to the latter, was not so. According to Zuma, the two met under social circumstances and their relationship has proceeded on that basis since.

Zuma is expected to be questioned by another member of the legal team, Advocate Piet Louw, on Tuesday morning, before closing his testimony.

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