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Zondo Commission – Booyesen was also invited to the Gupta family home

Former Hawks head Berning Ntlemeza had a domineering, authoritarian approach with members of his staff and would victimise anyone who was found to have been in contact with his predecessor, Anwa Dramat. Ntlemeza had been appointed to act in Dramat's post in December 2014 when the latter was suspended by then police minister Nathi Nhleko. This is the evidence of the former KwaZulu-Natal head of the specialised unit, Johan Booyesen, before the commission of inquiry into state capture on Friday.

Booyesen himself was gunning for the post of national head later in 2015 when Dramat chose to retire. The latter had finally been cleared of his suspension, which had been pending a criminal investigation into the alleged illegal deportation in 2010 of two Zimbabwean nationals who were sought by authorities in that country. The head of the Gauteng Hawks at the time, Shadrack Sibiya, suffered the same fate. The charges against the pair were later withdrawn.

The two were being removed under the ruse of the investigation, according to Booyesen, when in actual fact it was their relentless chasing up of high-profile investigations that made them targets. Booyesen told the inquiry that at the time of the recruitment process for Dramat's replacement, he was shortlisted and asked to take part in an interview in Nhleko's Cape Town office. He got to meet people he thought were other candidates vying for the post, but Ntlemeza was not among them. It was with surprise then that Booyesen learned of Ntlemeza's appointment in September 2015. Ntlemeza had acted in the post from the time of Dramat's suspension in December 2014.

The first few months of Ntlemeza's appointment, said Booyesen, were difficult as he sought to replace all provincial heads who had been appointed by Dramat. For the administrative duties related to recruitment processes, he co-opted Nomfazi Ngembe from the KwaZulu-Natal office. In an informal encounter with Booyesen at the police head office, she would relay to him that she was co-opted, and that she was not well versed in the recruitment of people in the investigation field.

Shortly after being appointed permanently, Ntlemeza suspended Booyesen, marking the beginning of a back-and-forth process where Booyesen would be repeatedly suspended until he successfully challenged each process. The charges brought against Booyesen were linked to allegations that under his watch, the Cato Manor "death squad" – operating under the official mandate of an organised crime unit – ran amok, killing suspects and using unconstitutional methods to pursue its work. A parallel criminal case over the same charges had also resulted in a win for Booyesen in 2014.

In another surprise twist to his testimony, Booyesen told the inquiry how a short while before his interview, in mid-August 2015, he was invited to the Johannesburg home of the Gupta family, by Duduzane Zuma, the son of former president Jacob Zuma. He was with his son waiting for Duduzane in Sandton, as the young Zuma had asked to meet with him, and when he arrived they proceeded to Saxonwold, without Duduzane informing him of their destination. Arriving at the Gupta house,

Booyesen and his son were asked to hand in their phones, and then entered the house, where they were introduced to Tony Gupta.

According to Booyesen, Gupta told him that he knew that he was shortlisted, a fact that was generally not known, even in the law enforcement sector. Gupta further offered to “have supper in KZN” should Booyesen be appointed. There was, however, no discussion of offers or requests from Gupta, and the meeting ended shortly afterwards.

Booyesen first met Duduzane when he and a business partner claimed to need Booyesen’s assistance with an investigation involving a dubious partner who had allegedly defrauded the two out of millions.

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