



3 June 2019

Zondo Commission – visa laws flouted in favour of Gupta employee

Laxmi Goel, a business associate of the Guptas in New Dehli, India, head-hunted Rajesh Sundaram in 2013, offering him the position of editor for the new TV news station ANN7 that was being set up by Infinity Media, the family's company.

Sundaram is currently testifying before the commission of inquiry into state capture, and has revealed what the first few months at the station- which closed down in 2018 – were like for him and some of the other professionals he brought with him into South Africa. Sundaram accepted the job, and was given a contract to sign in May 2013. The work of getting a work visa for South Africa began – but to his surprise, the process was completed sooner than he had expected.

Sundaram learned, through research into the procedure for the application of a South African work visa, that the job being applied for would have to have been advertised in the media and the applicant submit this advert as part of the visa process. His visa, however, was registered as an intra-company transfer permit, which implied that he was being seconded from one part of the same company in India to another in South Africa. This was not the case as infinity only existed in South Africa at the time.

Sundaram was never even interviewed as is the requirement for visa applicants. He played a part in the application process, getting a yellow fever vaccination and a medical certificate clearing him of tuberculosis, but the rest was expedited, he was told, with the help of Ashu Chawla's influence. Chawla would be able to do this through the office of the president, who was Jacob Zuma at the time. Sundaram had his visa within a day of submitting the relevant documentation.

When a human resources consultant made the mistake of enquiring with the high commission, the individual got a tongue lashing from Ajay Gupta for interfering. By this point, Sundaram had gotten a sense that he was dealing with highly influential people who could get things done. He was told by Goel that their conduct was above board and that they had acted within the requirements of South African law.

Along with his employment documents, Sundaram also received a breakdown of what Infinity would pay for, with regard to his relocation to Midrand. This included air tickets for himself and his family, but he decided not to bring them along.

For the first month of his employment, Sundaram worked out of the office of Goel, whom he understood to also have a stake in Infinity, and conducted interviews of potential employees. It is also around this time that he created the organisational structure of the station, a role that made up part of his position. Sundaram told the inquiry that he had been involved in several start-ups in several countries.

Upon arrival in Johannesburg, Sundaram was taken aback by the conditions that he was expected to live and work in, given his senior management level post. He was accommodated in a guesthouse

owned by the Guptas, where the labourers recruited for the physical set up of the station's studios were also placed.

From those already living there, he would soon get a sense of the appalling conditions they were working under. One of the people there, who cooked for and cleaned after the labourers, told Sundaram that his own salary was not paid to him, but to Goel back in India, who was in charge of then forwarding it to his family.

Useful links:

[Zondo Commission website](#)

Corruption Watch's [Zondo Commission update page](#)