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Zondo Commission – Zuma’s memory blank on asking Themba Maseko to assist Guptas

Former president Jacob Zuma told the Commission of Inquiry into Allegations of State Capture that he does not recall making the call to Themba Maseko, telling him to assist the Gupta brothers. Maseko at that time was CEO of the Government Communication and Information System (GCIS). During his appearance at the commission in August 2018, Maseko said Zuma had called him and told him to help the Guptas in their pursuit for an alternative newspaper and television station.

Zuma further said he had no knowledge of any conversations between Maseko and the Guptas, and if the commission wants those answers, they should ask the Guptas themselves.

“I have no knowledge of that and I don’t think I should comment on the improper or properness of the decision to allocate the whole R600-million to the Guptas”.

Maseko had told the commission that Zuma called him in 2010 and said: “Mfokababa ngicela usize labafana bakwa Gupta,” which is translated as “my brother, can you help the Gupta brothers”. Zuma said he does not remember having this conversation and that when he speaks in IsiZulu he usually says “Mfanakithi”, not the word said by Maseko.

Maseko also alleged that he had a meeting with Ajay Gupta the same day Zuma called him. and at the meeting Ajay told Maseko that he was aware that the government spends around R600-million in advertising and that Maseko must redirect all those funds to their would-be media house.

Maseko told the commission that the tone of Ajay’s voice was very commanding, and he urged Maseko to let him know if there is a minister who objects to the new deal. The former president did not know why Ajay Gupta would speak like that to Maseko, because he had no power in government.

“It is natural that they would want to talk to him because they were in the media space and Maseko dealt with that, I see no problem with that. The Guptas were generally meeting people and it may happen that at some point they spoke to Maseko.”

Zuma told the commission that he agreed with the way Maseko handled the matter, refusing to redirect the advertisement funds to the Gupta newspaper if it went against how GCIS did things. He also maintained the relationship between him and the Guptas was pure friendship and they did not interfere with matters of the state.

Zuma’s testimony continues.

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