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Zondo Commission – Zuma cannot remember insisting on Gama’s appointment as Transnet CEO

Former president Jacob Zuma refutes the claims made by the former minister of public enterprises Barbara Hogan. Hogan told the commission in November last year that Zuma interfered heavily with senior appointments and wanted specific candidates even if they did not meet the requirements.

Zuma denied this on his third appearance at the Zondo commission of inquiry into state capture. He told the commission that there were no cadre deployments during his tenure but conceded that like any political party in government, the ANC preferred to appoint people who are loyal to the leading party. However, loyalty was not the only requirement.

Zuma also denied allegations made by Hogan that he insisted Siyabonga Gama be appointed as Transnet’s group CEO in 2009. Hogan previously told the commission that she had met Zuma to discuss issues affecting Transnet, especially the appointment of someone to replace Maria Ramos who was leaving the parastatal. Hogan added that after the selection process, the Transnet board recommended Siphso Maseko, at the time CEO of BP SA. According to Hogan Zuma would not accept the decision.

“I was extremely shocked. He would not hear of any other candidate except Siyabonga Gama. I informed him that Gama was facing serious misconduct charges that the board, in terms of the Public Finance Management Act, was obliged to investigate, and it would not be in the best interests of Transnet to appoint an executive who is defending allegations,” Hogan told the commission.

Gama was facing charges over tender irregularities in the awarding a R18-million contract to a company owned by Siphso Nyanda, who at the time was minister of communications. Hogan further testified that she was instructed by Zuma not to appoint anyone to the board until Gama’s disciplinary finished.

However, Zuma disputed all of this. “It could not have been like that, I could not have said this, not at all. It means I would be undermining the process itself because the final decision should be the result of the whole process.”

Zuma admitted that he was made aware of the investigation against Gama, but could not recall the conclusion of the inquiry. He added: “How could I have only wanted Mr Gama when he was being charged on serious charges, how could I say ‘no, take the person’? I don’t remember insisting on this.”

Hogan also criticised the ANC’s deployment committee that is responsible for recommending candidates to senior positions in government and SOEs. Before the commission last year, she said the committee was promoting only those who are loyal to certain factions within the party to senior positions.

Zuma defended the committee’s decisions, saying: “It is not meant to take your friends, because the committee discusses what type of person we want. In terms of the process, it is not done in the manner in which she is putting it... she is expressing her views as I explained, the party can’t just allow a situation where you take anybody anywhere.”

“The interest of the ANC is to ensure there are cadres who can implement the programmes,” he added.

He also told the commission that there is nothing wrong with deploying people who are loyal to the party if they have the skills for the job.

Zuma’s testimony continues on Friday.

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