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Zondo commission – “Coached” driver’s evidence fictitious, says Gama

The state capture commission has heard how a former driver of Siyabonga Gama was coached to implicate him in corruption. In return, the driver got his job back at Transnet, having resigned under a cloud while facing a disciplinary process.

Gama returned to the commission on Monday to answer to some of the allegations levelled against him by various witnesses about his tenure as GCEO of Transnet, and before that its subsidiary, Transnet Freight Rail.

According to Gama, the driver, known in the commission’s records as Witness Two to protect his identity, has been spoon-fed information relating to official engagements that Gama would have participated in as part of his duty, only to pepper it with innuendo to make him look bad. The instigator, he said without naming him, is Transnet’s current chairperson Popo Molefe, who may have engineered the reinstatement of Witness Two at Transnet, in return for his co-operation in implicating Gama.

Gama denied that Witness Two drove him to the Gupta residence on three or four occasions between 2016 and 2017, where Gama would emerge with bags full of cash. Gama also denied that he was driven by Witness Two to the Melrose Arch home of Gupta associate Salim Essa, also to collect cash.

After one such trip to Melrose Arch in June 2013, Witness Two said he had driven Gama to the home of an associate in Bryanston, where the former CEO spent some time before emerging to be driven home. This was in the late afternoon. Gama denied this, saying he was at a Transnet meeting in Pretoria, and could not have been where Witness Two placed him. He submitted that minutes of the meeting proved his whereabouts.

“He makes assumptions that I may have been with him during all of these times. For me, it’s quite clear from the minutes of that meeting,” said Gama. He could not categorically deny that he was not indeed in the company of Witness Two, however, when pressed by commission chairperson Deputy Chief Justice Raymond Zondo.

The same happened a month later, in July, where Witness Two claimed the two of them followed the same pattern of going to Melrose Arch, and proceeding this time to a home in Sandhurst, where Gama went into a private home for several hours. Again Gama said he was in a meeting at the time in question. “Once again, as I indicated, I deny this version that he was with me. I could not have been at Melrose Arch and also at the Carlton Centre. It’s just not possible,” he said.

Evidence leader Advocate Anton Myburgh then asked Gama about the veracity of Witness Two’s evidence that Gama accused him of stealing cash on one of these trips.

“It’s fiction that we’re trying to dealing with here. I never accused him of stealing money. There is no money that he would have stolen. I think he’s just putting flavour, putting Rajah or masala so that your story is believable.

“If anybody found money in a vehicle, they would have come to me and said I found some money. There was no time when Witness Two ever came to me and said look, I found some money.”

When questioned by Myburgh on Witness Two’s version of events with regard to a meeting of heads of state-owned entities at the Denel offices in Pretoria, where he again found stacks of cash in Gama’s car, the latter placed his suspicion of the witness being coached on the record.

“He’s been induced and coached. Some of the stories that he comes up with are of real events that took place so he’ll say there was a meeting at Denel, maybe if you go and check there was a meeting at Denel ... it just goes to show that as he tries to be flavourful he then continues to make mistakes.”

He told the commission that he learned through media reports that Witness Two met with Transnet non-executive chairperson Molefe, whom Gama believes has had a hand in his testimony.

Myburgh asked at this point who would have done the coaching. “I have a scenario here, chair, where somebody resigns from an entity like Transnet, and he leaves in November of 2017. He writes a letter to his manager and says I resign because I don’t want to face a disciplinary hearing.

“Why is a close protection officer meeting with the non-executive chair of Transnet? And then in there it says the non-executive chair refers him to Mr Mahomed Mohamedy to say you must reinstate this fellow.”

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