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Zondo commission – Gigaba: I never discussed government business with Guptas

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Former cabinet minister Malusi Gigaba says he never discussed business with the Guptas while he was minister, as the executive is barred from doing so, and is sworn to secrecy on government matters. He returned before the state capture commission on Thursday evening.

“You know, the instances I would remember would be when we’re having those TNA SABC programmes, because then I would usually be the main centre of attraction and there would have been specific programmes that I would have spoken about,” said Gigaba in response to a question by commission chairperson Deputy Chief Justice Raymond Zondo. He had asked whether the Guptas had themselves tried to discuss business with Gigaba, given that his version was that he never did.

“They would use those issues, but not to solicit a tender from me. I am also quite a stubborn person when it comes to certain things, and if anybody tries to raise things of that nature I would tell them that this doesn’t belong within my purview.”

What of their influence in the appointments and dismissals of executives in state-owned entities under his watch as minister of public enterprises, asked evidence leader Advocate Anton Myburgh, who put forward an example cited by Gigaba’s estranged wife, Noma Mngoma. In her testimony, Mngoma said Gigaba once told her that the Guptas wanted him to remove Eskom CEO Brian Dames from office.

“And then she goes on to embellish her own importance by claiming that having met Mr Dames, she asked me why. This is irrational. This is completely irrational. When she met Mr Dames, what was she meeting Mr Dames for?” was Gigaba’s response.

Dames’s resignation, he added, arose purely from differences he had with the board of Eskom at the time, and was nothing to do with the Guptas. Gigaba said he had tried on several occasions to intervene in order to avoid the challenges resulting in Dames leaving, but with no success.

In another instance, Mngoma had alleged that a 2015 trip by Gigaba – which she had originally placed in 2011 – to India, was actually at the behest of the Guptas, but disguised as a state trip. In her affidavit, Myburgh said, she indicated that Gigaba had travelled to the country to quell challenges over the Johannesburg-Mumbai route of South African Airways, which the Guptas had lobbied to be abolished and taken over by India-based Jet Airways.

Gigaba denied this, adding that again Mngoma conflated events and issues, which suggested to him that she had been coached on certain matters.

The trip was actually while he was minister of home affairs, and had to do with him responding to challenges raised across BRICS countries over business visas that did not allow for smooth dealings for the business sector.

Gigaba is expected to return before the commission on Monday, right after his legal counsel cross-examines Mngoma.

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