

Cosatu, SACP join ANC in demanding answers on Gupta Waterkloof landing

Business Day, Pg 9, 2 May 2013
SARS to probe why customs officials had not been present to clear passengers, cargo

KARL GERNETZKY
Political Correspondent

THE fallout over the politically connected Gupta family landing a private aircraft at Waterkloof air force base earlier this week ahead of a lavish family wedding reception deepened yesterday, with the African National Congress' (ANC's) allies weighing in and demanding answers.

After ANC secretary-general Gwede Mantashe's strongly worded criticism, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) and the South African Communist Party (SACP) said they wanted to know who had given permission and why.

SACP first deputy general secretary Jeremy Cronin said the party was "deeply embarrassed" over the incident.

"We are not living in a banana republic. We are not a playground for rich foreigners to come and occupy our space, to come and take over a national key point," he said, addressing workers at a Cosatu rally at Durban's Curries Fountain stadium.

Their reaction again casts an unfavourable light on the relationship between the prominent Indian family, headed by computer and media tycoon Atul Gupta, and members of SA's ruling elite, especially President Jacob Zuma.

Mr Mantashe was adamant Mr Zuma would not have given permission for the Gupta family to

use the Waterkloof base. The Guptas have substantial business interests in SA, while Mr Gupta owns the pro-Zuma daily *The New Age*, which benefits from close ties with government departments and state-owned entities through its sponsored "business breakfasts" scheme.

Mr Zuma has previously faced, and denied, claims that the Guptas have a say in top government appointments.

Yesterday South African Revenue Service (SARS) spokesman Adrian Lackay confirmed that an investigation had been launched to determine why no customs officials had been present to clear the passengers and cargo of the Gupta aircraft.

Waterkloof does not usually have custom officials present, as it is not a commercial airport, and an application should have been made for a custom official to be present, he said.

Political analyst Prof Steven Friedman said yesterday that the quick denunciations from all the allies could be further evidence of what many analysts were warning against, that the ANC was not monolithic and the alliance's internal politics "are quite divided and quite complicated".

"Clearly what is happening is an attempt by the ANC and members of the alliance to distance themselves from perceptions that

Continued on page 2

Answers demanded over (Part 2) Guptas using Waterkloof

Business Day pg 3, 2 May 2013

Continued from page 1

there is a cosy relationship between the Guptas and the ANC, and that they benefit from it," said Prof Friedman. The implications for Mr Zuma were uncertain, but it was positive that transparency was being demanded in terms of decision making in the government, he said.

On Tuesday, the Gupta family said authorities had granted permission for a private jet, with wedding guests on board, to land at Waterkloof. It was used "as Lanseria airport could not accommodate the size of the jet chartered by the family," spokesman Haranath Ghosh said.

He said the Indian High Commission, and not the family, applied for and was granted the permission. Attempts to confirm this with the high commission in Pretoria were unsuccessful.

South African National Defence Force (SANDF) spokesman Siphiwe Dlamini denied permission was given, saying: "It is a military base and a national key point used by government and its guests."

Yesterday, the SANDF offered no further comment, but said its comment on Tuesday remained accurate.

Cosatu's Patrick Craven said: "It is an absolute insult to the people of SA that private individuals can use a public facility for their social activities and that state officials should escort them."

SACP second deputy president Solly Mapaila told a Cosatu Workers' Day rally at Sharpeville: "The aircraft has compromised our national security. We want

those responsible to be called on to account. This is a serious abuse and misuse of government resources."

An SACP statement said: "There is no reason in our view that such should have been allowed as it can possibly compromise the security of our country and its sovereignty."

On Tuesday, ANC spokesman Jackson Mthembu called for those who authorised the landing to explain how they came to that decision. "Those who cannot account must be brought to book. The ANC will never rest where there is any indication that all and sundry may be permitted to undermine the Republic, its citizens and its borders," he said.

The Congress of the People (COPE) yesterday added its voice to calls for an explanation, as have the Democratic Alliance and Freedom Front Plus.

In an interview with eNCA yesterday, COPE leader Mosiuoa Lekota, a former defence minister, said the landing would not have happened on his watch. He called it further evidence of an inappropriate relationship between the Guptas and Mr Zuma, who was running the country as his personal "fiefdom".

"The relationship between the Guptas and the president has been under a question mark for a long time, because even ministers have been first informed by the Guptas they will become ministers."

Mr Mthembu said yesterday Mr Lekota's comments were "malicious" and "had no factual basis". *With Sapa gernetzkyk@bdfm.co.za*