

Ministers own up to meeting the Guptas

Most deny it, others dodge DA's question or resort to obfuscation

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All other related questions are irrelevant to the work of the ministry A plan to enrich Zuma, the Guptas, some ministers and some at Luthuli House

EVIDENCE contained in Thuli Madonsela's State of Capture report placed Des van Rooyen in Saxonwold on seven consecutive days in December 2015, but the co-operative governance minister says it wasn't him.

His cabinet colleague Mineral and Resources Minister Mosebenzi Zwane has also denied being in the vicinity of the Gupta family although there is proof he was in Dubai and Switzerland around the same time as they were.

The two and their 33 cabinet colleagues were answering questions from DA leader Mmusi Maimane and his MPs.

"The minister and his deputy ministers have never met with members, employee[s] and/or close associates of the Gupta family in their official capacity." Approximately ities," said Van Rooyen in his written reply.

Twenty-four ministers denied having met the family, among them Minister in the Presidency Jeff Radebe and Public Works Minister Thulas Nxesi.

Others, such as Home Affairs Minister Malusi Gigaba, Sports Minister Fikile Mbalula, and State Security Minister David Mahlobo did not respond directly to questions.

However, Finance Minister Pravin Gordhan, Trade and Industry Minister Rob Davies and Defence Minister Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula were among those not ashamed of their interaction with the Guptas.

Although Gordhan said he had never visited their home in Saxonwold, he said he once met a Gupta brother at the official residence of President Jacob Zuma in



Pretoria.

"I once met one of the Gupta brothers at Mahlamba Ndlopfu around 2009/2010, during which a brief discussion on small business finance took place."

Davies revealed he had met the Gupta brothers, including once at his office in Pretoria. FAMILY FAVOURS: Atul, left, and Ajay Gupta are said to exert influence over Zuma and his cabinet

six years ago, one meeting at the request of the Gupta family was held at the DTI office in Sunnyside, attended by the minister, DTI officials and a Mr Gupta, to



Picture: SIMPHIWE NKWALI



discuss the company's investment plans. The nature of the meeting was similar to innumerable meetings the minister has held with potential investors, both foreign and domestic," said Davies.

Mapisa-Nqakula said she hadn't been to Saxonwold, but "I have attended events organised by the Hindu community to mark their Diwali, a Hindu festival, wherein members of the Gupta family attend as part of the members of the Hindu society".

The State of Capture report contains allegations that the Gupta family hold undue influence over Zuma's cabinet.

It emerged that a number of cabinet ministers had visited the Gupta family compound and that the family had allegedly offered cabinet posts to some ANC leaders. The brothers are close to Zuma's family as his son, Duduzane, has business relations with them.

Whereas most ministers flatly denied ever meeting the Guptas, some chose to provide intriguing responses instead of a simple yes or no.

Gigaba, for instance, said that "in the course of our official duties and since



an inclusive, dynamic and growing economy that creates jobs for the more than nine million jobless South Africans. This is why ministers lie about knowing the Guptas because it is an unethical relationship that they have entered into," said Maimane. Comment on this: write to tellus@sundaytimes.co.za or SMS us at 33971 www.sundaytimes.co.za

taking office, neither I nor the deputy minister have knowingly held any official meetings with persons who are associates or employees of any persons whose surname or family name is Gupta".

Mahlobo dodged the question by citing the code of secrecy governing the spy world.

"As a matter of principle, the minister and deputy minister of state security do not disclose who they meet in the conduct of their work. This principle is an established one with regards to the work of intelligence and security," said Mahlobo.

Instead of answering the question, Mbalula embarked on a rant about his constitutional and legal "obligations as a sports minister" before dismissing the question as irrelevant.

"All other related questions are therefore irrelevant to the work of the ministry of sport and recreation or any of his duties as a member of cabinet and a leader in the South African government and the same is applicable to the deputy minister of sport and recreation," he said.

Public Enterprises Minister Lynne Brown, the political head of Eskom, which has had questionable dealings with Guptalinked companies, also had a creative way of answering the DA's questions.

"The duties of ministers and HUSH-HUSH: David Mahlobo, who declined to answer, and Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula, who attended Diwali celebrations at which the Guptas were present. Left, Pravin Gordhan met a Gupta at Zuma's residence deputy ministers are outlined in the ministerial handbook," she said tersely.

Maimane said the responses of ministers revealed that they now realised the problems caused by the government's relations with the Guptas. "The programme of 'radical economic transformation' that the ANC is embarking [on] is nothing more than a plan to enrich Zuma, the Guptas, some ministers and some at Luthuli House, at the expense of