

# Guptas pulled the strings from Saxonwold house

Loyiso Sidimba

THE controversial Gupta family effectively ran a parallel state, former government spokesperson Themba Maseko testified yesterday.

Maseko, who completed his testimony yesterday, told the commission of inquiry into state capture headed by Deputy Chief Justice Raymond Zondo that the family operated a parallel system of government.

He said the Guptas would pull out big guns and drop former president Jacob Zuma's name to get their way with senior government officials and Cabinet ministers.

According to Maseko, the Guptas used to summon government officials, including him to their sprawling Saxonwold compound and rep-

rimand them should they refuse to follow their instructions.

Maseko's successor as head of the Government Communication and Information System (GCIS) Phumla Williams is scheduled to begin her testimony today. Williams, a former Umkhonto we Sizwe operative, has been acting GCIS chief executive and government spokesperson for a number of years.

She is expected to shed light on the family's newspaper The New Age and 24-hour TV news channel ANN7 and how much advertising they received from government departments' communications budgets that were spent through the GCIS.

Earlier this week, Maseko testified that he and several former directors-general including Barry Gilder, Xoliswa Sibeko and Thoziz Gwanya were concerned about state

capture and wanted to take a stand against it.

Zondo asked the commission's legal and investigations teams to ensure that serious efforts were made to contact the former directors-general who, along with Maseko, had publicly expressed their concerns. "The country needs them," said Justice Zondo.

Maseko told the commission that many senior public servants and middle managers had information on the Guptas' capture of the state and their political principals' irregular instructions.

"Very few people are willing to come forward," said Maseko, adding Justice Zondo had trouble getting witnesses to testify before the commission.

The former public works director-general also told Justice Zondo

about Ajay Gupta's approach when the controversial family wanted GCIS to support the establishment of The New Age and ANN7.

According to Maseko, Ajay Gupta demanded a share of the GCIS's R600 million media buying budget between September and October 2010.

Maseko was the third witness to testify before Zondo's commission following the National Treasury's acting chief procurement officer Willie Mathebula and former deputy finance minister Mcebisi Jonas.

The Guptas and other implicated parties including Zuma's former aide Lakela Kaunda, the Hawks' Major-General Zinhle Mnonopi and Advocate Mandla Mtolo have asked to be allowed to cross-examine witnesses.