

■ COURT

# 'Arms deal opened gates of corruption'

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THE R60 billion "corrupt arms deal" scandal opened the floodgates for corruption and state capture in South Africa.

It was according to Public Works Minister and Good party leader Patricia de Lille, who blew the whistle on the web of corruption surrounding the deal which dates back 20 years.

Yesterday, the North Gauteng High Court in Pretoria set aside the findings of the Seriti Commission report, released in 2015.

During the commission, Judge Willie Seriti, who was tasked with probing corruption and malfeasance in the R60bn arms deal made scathing findings against De Lille, campaigner Terry Crawford-Browne, Dr Richard Young, academic Raenette Taljaard and other witnesses who testified before him.

Seriti and his team found there was no substantive proof of corruption among politicians and other officials, especially former SANDF arms acquisition head Mo Shaik and businessman advocate Fana Hlongwane, who were said to have been instrumental in the deal.

However, a full bench of the high court led by Judge Dunstan Mlambo yesterday set aside his ruling following an application by civil society organisations Corruption Watch and the Right2Know Campaign who maintained that the Seriti Commission failed to probe material evidence which was brought to its attention.

The court agreed with them, adding that the commission erred as it

had neglected to investigate reports that Chippy Shaik – head of arms acquisition for the Department of Defence at the time – solicited a \$3 million bribe for his personal use from the German Frigid Consortium.

The court further ruled that Seriti and his team failed to probe evidence that Shaik instructed a French company, Thompson CSF, to give his brother Schabir Shaik business through his company Nkobi Holdings.

The court also accepted evidence that the commission failed to investigate claims that Schabir Shaik solicited a bribe of R500 000 from Thompson CSF for the benefit of former president Jacob Zuma allegedly in exchange for providing the French company protection against criminal prosecution.

It also pointed out that the Seriti Commission turned a blind eye on investigating allegations that Hlongwane benefited more than R1.5bn "for unexplained consultancy work" with some of the British company who were bidding during the arms deal.

De Lille was elated about the ruling.

"In the 20 years that have passed since I blew the whistle on the corrupt arms deal, South Africa's integrity has taken a beating.

"We have slipped, in the perception of many, from the high table of global ethics and morality to occupy a much lower position beset by allegations of malfeasance and maladministration, on the one hand, and continuing inequity and grinding poverty on the other," De Lille said.

The DA also welcomed the ruling.