

How to save SA from state capture and media elitism

 By Louise Marsland

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It is possible to turn the tide of corruption in South Africa and revitalise the economy within six months if our political leadership, in partnership with business, puts self-interest aside and works for the good of all 55 million South Africans. State capture thievery is estimated to have cost South Africa R100 billion.



The Gathering 2017 Media Edition. Credit: Ashraf Hendricks, GroundUp.org.za.

This was the word from Pravin Gordhan and Mcebisi Jonas, our two most famous former ministers in the South African government, at the *Daily Maverick's* The Gathering 2017 Media Edition, which was held in Cape Town this time round, Thursday, 3 August 2017.

Gordhan and Jonas were greeted like rockstars, receiving a standing ovation on arrival. There were shocked murmurs when Gordhan revealed that state capture could have cost South Africa upwards of R100 billion in corruption – enough to double up on social grants, to put it into perspective.



Pravin Gordhan

Gordhan and Jonas took to the stage at Cape Town's iconic convention centre at the end of a long day of presentations and panel discussions on media and its sustainability in the future, both in South Africa and globally. Of course the conversation over the course of the day with various media luminaries and politicians was dominated by corruption, state capture, fake news, #Guptaleaks and the maligned London PR firm, Bell Pottinger.

While the notorious Gupta Brothers, the architects of South Africa's state capture were sent an invitation and invited "to reply by saving it in their draft emails folder", by the defiant *Daily Maverick* team, they did not respond, but nonetheless, featured prominently on the agenda of most speakers.



ZANEWS Gupta puppets

Gordhan said there could not be an environment where everything being done diminishes confidence, when confidence needed to be increased. "If we have a deteriorating fiscal environment, add to that the corruption factor and lack of effective implementation, that makes investments even slower.

"We need to galvanise all resources in this country to achieve (confidence and growth). Allowing rampant looting of state resources at the same time, doesn't add up."

"The other thing we should be concerned about is the impunity with which this was done – if nothing bothers you, you don't care about impact on the country and its 55 million people and the unemployed... That don't care factor is a dangerous stage to reach as a country."

There is a glimmer of light at the end of the tunnel. Gordhan said we can turn South Africa around in six months. "But can we set aside self-interest? And put this country and its wellbeing first?"

Jonas emphasised that we need to understand the link between state capture and corruption, which sabotages and stunts growth and leads to unemployment. The media is critical in conveying this.

Media sustainability

The day-long intensive workshop opened, ironically, with Simon and Garfunkel's song *The Sound of Silence*, with the appropriate line, "Hello darkness, my old friend", echoing through the vast hall before comedian and MC, John Vlismas, took to the stage and lightened the mood, declaring the parking lot at the CTICC where the BLF were lurking to try disrupt The Gathering, to be the "scuffling zone".

But most media speakers did their best to inject a glimmer of hope into the darkness surrounding the media industry's survival prospects in this digital age of declining profits, battered by fake news and the intimidation of journalists.



Media freedom is a cornerstone of democracy

Louise Marsland 3 Aug 2017



Speaking on a panel on business having a voice in the media, AngloGold Ashanti chairman, Siphon Pityana, convener of the Save SA campaign, warned that business should be worried as the Guptas tightened their tentacles on the South African economy.

"Today it is journalists under attack. Tomorrow it could be you. If there isn't a vibrant media to report on the corruption, you will be increasingly vulnerable. We need to stand together to make sure they do not succeed. We should be increasingly worried about the global criminal conspiracy being exposed. We must not underestimate the lengths it will go."

He urged business to "get off the fence... decide which side of history you want to be on."

Adman Mike Abel, chief executive of M&C Saatchi Group, said knowledge was power so people should be prepared to pay for quality content or sacrifice it. When asked, he said he would question a client as to their reasons if they instructed his agency to buy advertising in Gupta-owned media in SA.

In a panel dealing with civil society, media and public activism, Section 27 executive director, Mark Heywood, warned the media not just to 'join the dots' on state capture, but to also report on the consequences of state capture.

"We need to see the human dimensions, the human cost of this crisis, or we won't galvanise our society to stand up for the poorest of the poor... It is the way states fail that you have the seeds laid for populism and civil war."

Media elite

It is this failing that the Economic Freedom Front (EFF) national spokesman, Mbuyiseni Ndlozi, also highlighted in cautioning the media that it was too elitist.

"The media in South Africa is trapped in the geography of apartheid. You are reaching the elite with the media, mostly white, not empowering the majority of South African citizens – the people who shift things in elections."

He added that those who were most important in shifting political power in South Africa, the majority of whom lived in the rural areas, should be receiving the kind of information peddled at The Gathering, but would not, as most media did not reach them.

"This is the legacy that apartheid has left and that South African media has failed to transcend."

Ndlozi added that SABC remained the only important media house, as it had the language spread and geographic spread to reach the real South Africans out there.



Jackson Mthembu. Credit: Ashraf Hendricks, GroundUp.org.za.

African National Congress (ANC) chief whip Jackson Mthembu, went a step further, saying the SA media should apologise for not doing enough under apartheid to unmask the crimes of apartheid inflicted on the black majority population in South Africa and in some cases, being complicit in propping up apartheid. He mooted the idea of a 'media TRC' (Truth and Reconciliation Commission) for the media to account for its past.

However, Ndlozi said the most tragic media event in our recent history, was the destruction of the SABC, which he placed firmly at the door of the ANC. "Mthembu can complain about the media... but he needs to ask himself the hard questions on how the ANC have messed up the SABC."

Ndlozi said the EFF believed in self-regulation of the media, but that it had to have teeth. "You are free, we are all free to express ourselves, but you are not free to lie. The very phenomenon of fake news... if your own self-regulation was up to scratch, you would be able to regulate fake news.

"We don't believe in attacking journalists, we must condemn that," he said, labelling recent attempts to intimidate journalists by certain sectors of society, as "hooliganism".

Accountability

Huffington Post South Africa editor-at-large, Ferial Haffajee, said that during the height of the onslaught against critics of the Zuma government and state capture allegations against the political elite in government, Pravin Gordhan was targeted for intimidation and misinformation with upwards of 33 000 tweets bombarding him in the course of the fake news campaign orchestrated by Bell Pottinger on behalf of the Gupta family, as the #Guptaleaks reveals.

Referring to Bell Pottinger, Gordhan said: "They came and messed up our country. They sabotaged our democracy. Why is Mr Henderson (Bell Pottinger CEO, James Henderson) not coming to South Africa to account to us? And we should ask with one voice: 'give us the money back' and we'll invest it in orphanages for victims of Aids in SA... So they can get a sense of what social responsibility means."

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