

Haffejee inquest: call for probe into other apartheid crimes

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FOLLOWING the beginning of the reopened inquest this week into the death of Dr Hoosen Haffejee, the Apartheid Era Victims' Families Group has called for other apartheid-era crimes to be expedited.



The Haffejee inquest is being heard before the Pietermaritzburg High Court and has seen witnesses, including an aeronautical expert and Haffejee's siblings, testify before Judge ZP Nkosi.

Earlier this year the Foundation for Human Rights and Mfihlelwa Mzizi asked the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) to reopen the inquest into the death of Bayempini Mzizi and have the reopened inquest into his death consolidated with the reopened inquest into the death of Haffejee, which is under way.

Mzizi, a traditional healer living around Durban, was viewed by the Security Branch as a close ally of the underground military wing of the then banned ANC. His arrest, based on suspicions of terrorism, came on July 9, 1977, leading to him being detained for more than 35 days during which he was tortured and was found hanging in his cell at Durban's Brighton Beach Police Station on August 13, 1977, exactly 10 days after the death of Haffejee at the same police station under similar circumstances.

In almost similar fashion to the inquest in 1978, presided over by magistrate Trevor Blunden, that declared Haffejee's death a suicide, an inquest held into the death of Mzizi also ruled in 1978 that Mzizi committed suicide and nobody was to blame for his death in detention.

Speaking on behalf of the Apartheid Era Victims' Families Group, Imtiaz Cajee, nephew of SACP activist Ahmed Timol who died in police detention in 1971 at the notorious John Vorster Square Police Station in Joburg, called for these matters to be expedited. He said the families were left reeling as delays led to perpetrators of the crimes dying without being brought to book.

He said there was no coincidence that following the reopening of these inquests but there was a clear strategy to deal with perpetrators..

"They are obviously ill and so forth, but the state needs to account for why they are taking so long to deal with these matters.

"They take so long to deal with the matter that by the time it sits in court the perpetrators have passed on," Cajee lamented.

He said the Mzizi matter was quiet because the family did not have a voice to fight for justice for the dead man.

Efforts to track down Bayempini's son Mfihlelwa yesterday were unsuccessful.

"In the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) they set up the Priority Crimes Syndication Unit in 2003 in terms of a proclamation issued by president (Thabo) Mbeki so there's a dedicated unit there to deal with these matters, but the reality is that only in 2017 my uncle's matter gets heard.

"Then in 2020 the Aggett and the Dipali matters get heard and now we've just heard the Haffejee matter.

"The Nokuthula Simelane matter has been on the court roll since about 2013 and her case till today hasn't started and I believe two of the alleged perpetrators have passed on," Caejee said.

Written questions sent to the NPA in Kwazulu-natal on when an inquest into Mzizi's death would be reopened had still not been answered by the time of going to publication, although the prosecuting authority had acknowledged receipt of the questions with the promise of responding as soon as possible.