
Carlos Cardoso murder trial update

10th January 2003

Vicente Ramaya's murky finances

Maputo, 10 Jan (AIM) - The mysterious finances of Vicente Ramaya, the former bank manager who is one of those charged with ordering the murder of investigative journalist Carlos Cardoso, occupied centre stage at the Maputo City Court on Friday morning.

Questioned for the second time by the court, Ramaya claimed that, prior to his arrest in March 2001, his monthly income was around 1,000 US dollars a month - and some of that was provided by his in-laws.

This sum can hardly account for the behaviour of someone who lives in the plush part of Maputo, drives a BMW, flies repeatedly to the northern city of Pemba, and can afford to offer his consultancy services to clients free of charge.

It is widely believed that Ramaya became rich on the proceeds of the 1996 fraud in the country's largest bank, the BCM. The fraud occurred at his branch, involving the extraction of 144 billion meticaís (14 million dollars at the exchange rate of the time) via accounts opened in the names of members and associates of the Abdul Satar family. The prosecution argues that Cardoso's pursuit of this case was a motive for Ramaya, and the brothers Ayob and Momade Abdul Satar, to order the assassination.

Ramaya told the court he has a legitimate, registered consultancy company operating out of his house (though at no stage did he give this company's name). But when asked about this company's clients, he named just two people - Candida Cossa and Levy Muthemba - and said that he had not charged either of them for the work he did.

He said he worked on a failed bid by Cossa to secure exclusive representation of Nestle products. This would have required a banker's guarantee of 3.5 million rands (350,000 US dollars), "and the banks we contacted didn't have that financial capacity".

Ramaya said he had done unspecified consultancy work for free for Levy Muthemba's travel agency, Recil. Muthemba is the brother of Octavio Muthemba, former chairman of the Austral Bank, under whose stewardship the bank came close to ruin. Companies owned by Levy Muthemba were among the many debtors to Austral as the bank approached collapse in 2001.

The spectacle of a former bank manager working for free puzzled the presiding judge, Augusto Paulino. "So your company survives without charging for its services?", he asked.

Ramaya then claimed he had a portfolio of "about ten" clients, some of whom did pay, but he declined to name them.

Much of the questioning concerned a loan of 450,000 dollars made by Candida Cossa to a Pemba businessman, Zulfikar Sulemane, via Ramaya. He had said in November that he was "the guarantor" of the loan (which would have made him legally liable in case of default), but on Friday he downgraded his role to that of "intermediary". This loan did not involve anything as complicated as a cheque, or a bank transfer. Instead Candida Cossa just brought sackfuls of dollar bills round to Ramaya's house, and Zulfikar then appeared to collect them. The loan was given in four installments - three of 100,000 dollars, and one of 150,000.

When Cossa appeared on the witness stand later in the day, Paulino asked for the source of this money. She claimed it came from the sale of two houses - again, for cash, and without the involvement of any banks.

Zulfikar was supposed to repay the money in 90 days, by September 1999. Ramaya said he was certain that this would happen, because it was "guaranteed" that the International Finance Corporation (IFC), a branch of the World Bank, would lend 700,000 dollars for an "industrial project" of Zulfikar.

He claimed he had visited the World Bank office in Maputo, and the representative, "a Brazilian", told him there would be no problems.

But there was an insuperable problem: the project failed its Environmental Impact Assessment, and so no money at all was forthcoming from the IFC. Ramaya seemed very perplexed at this turn of events - but anyone who knows how the World Bank operates could have told him that no loan is final until the project has been approved environmentally.

Furthermore the Maputo office of the World Bank cannot dictate to the IFC (and the representative at the time was not a Brazilian, but a cautious Uruguayan named James Coates).

When Zulfikar proved unable to pay, Ramaya flew to Pemba where a local attorney told him that Zulfikar was deeply in debt to other institutions, including the BCM. Ramaya claimed to be greatly surprised "because he was one of our best clients when I was at the bank".

Ramaya said he visited Pemba three times, and the end result was that Zulfikar signed a legal document admitting owing the money to Cossa, and offering five buildings that he owned as guarantees for eventual payment. Ramaya admitted that buildings in Pemba are not much use to Candida Cossa in Maputo, who just wants her money back. He said the buildings are currently in the possession of the chairman of the Pemba Commercial Association.

This is a wonderful tale of caring and generous business people, who do months of consultancy work without charging, who offer interest-free loans to people they have never met before, just because they are on friendly terms with the middleman, who hand over, and receive, sackfuls of cash without asking any awkward questions. It is a story as charming as "Alice in Wonderland" and with the same relationship to the real world.

Failing to make much sense of Ramaya's business transactions, the court turned to his dealings with the BCM after he was sacked following the 1996 fraud. Ramaya boasted of regular meetings with "senior staff" of the BCM, who would pass him information about "other frauds".

He claimed he was working on these "other frauds" with top attorneys, but all his efforts were frustrated, when President Joaquim Chissano sacked Attorney-General Antonio Namburete in

July 2000, and there was a complete change of personnel in the Attorney-General's office. But some of these "other frauds" dated to 1994 and 1995, when Ramaya was still working at the BCM. Why had he not denounced them at the time ?, Paulino asked. "Was it only when your own fraud was uncovered, that you went on to investigate other frauds ?" As for his relations with leading attorneys, Paulino summarised this as "somebody accused of committing a crime advising those who are investigating the crime".

Ramaya also insisted that had "proof" that the BCM's lawyer, Albano Silva, had gone to the Civil Prison in central Maputo to persuade prosecution witness Osvaldo Muianga ("Dudu") to change his statement in order to incriminate Ramaya.

When asked the nature of this proof, it turned out to be conversations in the top security prison (B.O.) at third hand.

Some of the prison guards work at both jails. Ramaya claimed that guards from the Civil Prison had seen Silva with Muianga, and when they came to the B.O., they told other prisoners (whom he named as Domingos Mendes and Joao Horacio da Conceicao), who in turn told him.

Although he had not observed the alleged Silva/Muianga encounter, and had not spoken to anyone who had, Ramaya insisted that "this information is correct". (Silva has already denied any such meeting with Muianga).

Candida Cossa testifies again

Maputo, 10 Jan (AIM) - Businesswoman Candida Cossa on Friday told the Maputo City Court that she had personally witnessed four meetings between Nyimpine Chissano, the oldest son of President Joaquim Chissano, and loan shark Momade Assife Abdul Satar ("Nini").

One of those meetings took place in her house, two at the Unicambios foreign exchange bureau, owned by Satar's brother Ayob, and one at Expresso Tours, the travel agency and car hire firm owned by Nyimpine, his brother N'naite and their partner Apolinario Pateguana.

The Satar brothers are accused of ordering the murder of the country's top investigative journalist, Carlos Cardoso, in November 2000. Nini Satar admits making payments to the man who organised the death squad, the fugitive Anibal dos Santos Junior ("Anibalzinho") - but claims he did so at the request of Nyimpine Chissano. The money (equivalent to about 50,000 dollars), he alleges, was a loan to Nyimpine, but paid to Anibalzinho.

When he took the witness stand in December, Chissano said he had only met Satar once, and never had any business dealings with him. Cossa's evidence is thus extremely damaging to the President's son.

This was the second time Cossa had been called to testify.

Careful questioning from judge Augusto Paulino extracted an intelligible (though not necessarily truthful) chronology of her dealings with Nyimpine and his partners, and Nini Satar. Her account reads like this: Early 1998 - a man named Gulamo Shabir lends Cossa 130,000 dollars. She gives him a postdated cheque for that amount as security for the loan. In July 1998, she learns the cheque has been passed on to Satar - but she is unable to pay.

June 1998: the two Chissano brothers and Pateguana rescue her, by buying one of her companies, "Mocambique Licores", for 200,000 dollars. They give the money to Satar, he subtracts the 130,000 dollars owed, and passes the remaining 70,000 to Cossa.

April or May 1999: Using the proceeds from two houses she has sold, Cossa lends 450,000 dollars (in cash) to a businessman named Zulfikar Sulemane, via her friend, former bank manager Vicente Ramaya (who is also accused of ordering Cardoso's murder).

June 1999: Cossa "facilitates" the purchase, in the South African city of Durban, of three Mercedes saloons for the Chissano brothers and Pateguana. The salesman, Omar Hussein, knows her, and accepts a down payment.

October 1999: The South African company Budget Rent-a-Car threatens to take Nyimpine Chissano to court, over a debt of 750,000 rands (75,000 dollars) incurred by Espresso Tours. Cossa lends Nyimpine the money.

May 2000: Omar Hussein comes to Maputo and demands his money or the Mercedes: the two Chissanos and Pateguana have not kept up the payments. At a meeting in Cossa's house, attended by Nyimpine Chissano and Nini Satar, they decide to solve the problem by taking out another loan from Satar. To pay for the cars, Cossa receives a cheque from Nini Satar for 1.3 billion meticaïs. When presented for payment it bounces, and Cossa complains to the police.

August 2000: Nini and Ayob Satar hold Cossa against her will in a room in the Rovuma hotel, and threaten to abduct one of her children unless she changes her statement to the police, to back up their story that the cheque was stolen. She complies.

2000 (month uncertain): Cossa lends Nyimpine Chissano a further 532 million meticaïs. This transaction also involves the Satars: when Cossa goes To Espresso Tours to collect the money, Chissano rings up Nini Satar, who comes round personally with a cheque for this sum.

Some of this account is hotly contested by the Satars who deny ever threatening Cossa, in the Rovuma or anywhere else. Once again, at the request of the defence, judge Paulino on Friday confronted Cossa and Nini Satar - each of whom stuck to their original stories.

"I never gave any cheque for 1.3 billion meticaïs to Candida Cossa", said Satar. "This cheque was stolen. I was negotiating it for someone in South Africa from whom I was buying a house".

For her part Cossa insisted "The cheque was not stolen I received it from Nini's own hands".

New version of Chissano cheques?

Maputo, 10 Jan (AIM) - Businesswoman Candida Cossa, who has become a key witness in the Carlos Cardoso murder trial, has changed her story about the seven cheques that are central to the defence of one of those accused of the assassination, loan shark Momade Assife Abdul Satar ("Nini").

But asked about the cheques by judge Augusto Paulino on Friday, Cossa refused to give her new version, and just referred the court to the interrogation she had undergone at the hands of the Public Prosecutors Office on Monday.

The problem is that in addition to this trial, in which Satar and five others are charged, there is a second case, in which one of the accused is Nyimpine Chissano, the oldest son of President Joaquim Chissano. This case is still at the stage of preliminary investigation, and is thus sub judice: it was as part of this case that Cossa was questioned on Monday.

According to Nini Satar, these seven cheques, all from Nyimpine Chissano's company, Expresso Tours, and signed by him, but with the space for the payee left blank, were security for a loan from Satar. He told the court that Chissano asked him for a loan of 1.2 billion meticaís (about 50,000 US dollars), but stipulated that this money should be paid to Anibal dos Santos Junior ("Anibalzinho").

Anibalzinho is accused of organising the death squad that assassinated Cardoso on 22 November 2000. Satar says that it was only when he met Anibalzinho in 2001 in the top security jail that he realised the money was payment for a contract killing.

The seven cheques total 1.29 billion meticaís (the extra 90 million being Satar's "commission"), and were never cashed. Satar has delivered them to the court as evidence for his story.

When he testified, Nyimpine Chissano admitted signing the cheques but claimed he had given them to Candida Cossa as repayment of a loan. She had supposedly lent money to Expresso Tours when it faced cash flow problems, and had difficulty in paying for unspecified "supplies". Chissano said he could not understand why Cossa had passed the cheques on to Satar.

When Cossa first took the witness stand, on 9 December, she said that the deal reached concerned damaged vehicles from the South African company Budget-Rent-a-Car. in 1999. Budget had demanded 750,000 rands (75,000 dollars) from Expresso Tours and had threatened to take Nyimpine Chissano to court. Cossa lent Chissano enough money to save him from this fate.

In 2000, she claimed, a deal was reached whereby Satar would pay off Nyimpine's loan from Cossa. The security given by Expresso Tours to Satar was the series of postdated cheques - six for 165 million meticaís each and one for 247.5 million.

Cossa said that Satar cashed the largest of these cheques before he should have done, and when Expresso Tours found that 247.5 million meticaís had disappeared from its account, it demanded that Satar repay - which he did.

Expresso Tours then cancelled the whole arrangement, said Cossa, and tried to recover the postdated cheques, which Satar refused to hand over.

Last Monday, Cossa apparently changed this story. For if she did not change it, then she could simply have told the court on Friday that she stood by her December statements. Instead she declared "I don't want to explain this now, because I have made statements to the public prosecutor in the other case".

When pressed, she simply referred the court to her Monday interrogation, which is not in the public domain.

Nini Satar's lawyer, Eduardo Jorge, demanded that a copy of the minutes of the Monday interrogation be provided for the case file of the current trial. Prosecuting attorney Mourao Baluce opposed this, on the grounds that the second case was sub judice.

The Cardoso family's lawyer, Lucinda Cruz, suggested asking Cossa which parts of her December testimony she stood by, and which parts she now rejected.

This time, Paulino accepted the arguments of Jorge, and ordered that a photocopy be made of the Monday interrogation.

Mother of witness speaks of bribes

Maputo, 10 Jan (AIM) - Relatives of those charged with the murder of Mozambique's top investigative journalist, Carlos Cardoso, made two attempts - one successful and one unsuccessful - to bribe a key prosecution witness, Osvaldo Muianga ("Dudu") to change his story.

Muianga's mother, Fatima Razaco, told the court on Friday that the first bribe, in February 2002, resulted in Muianga retracting his original statement in which he had placed the brothers Ayob and Nini Abdul Satar, and former bank manager Vicente Ramaya, at conspiratorial meetings in the Rovuma hotel at which murder was planned.

Razaco said that Nini Satar, despite being a prisoner in a top security jail, was regularly in contact with her through mobile phones. In early 2002, he promised 200,000 dollars if Muianga would change his statement.

His sister Farida delivered post-dated cheques, totalling over a billion meticais (some 50,000 dollars) as "security".

Evidently this worked, for Muianga did indeed retract his statement, and claim that he had been induced to make it by Satar's enemies, notably by Gary Rouper, former managing director of the Polana Casino.

Razaco said she had believed Satar's claims of early 2002 that he had the judge and attorneys in his pocket, and so there was no point in Muianga resisting his offer. "So I obliged my son to sign the retraction", she said. "Later I realised it was all lies, and that there are no judges or attorneys on Nini's side". But once Muianga had retracted his statement, Satar reneged on the deal. He asked for the cheques back, promising Razaco that he would pay the bribe. She gave the cheques back, but Satar did not pay her anything. She did, however, have the good sense to keep photocopies of the cheques (although she told Satar she had not done so).

In October, Muianga changed his story again. Once again the relatives of the accused tried to use Razaco to manipulate her son. This time they wanted him to speak on behalf of the accused at the trial: a document was drawn up for him, in which he would claim that lawyer Albano Silva obliged him to incriminate Ramaya and the Satars.

Razaco claimed that Ramaya's wife, Mariamo, Ayob Satar's wife, Zumaia, and a second Satar sister, Rachida, were involved in this bribe attempt. They gave her 5,000 US dollars "as a sign of good will".

Mariamo promised her more cash, and even a house at the beach resort of Bilene, if she persuaded her son to copy out the document in his own handwriting. Razaco even claimed that one evening Ramaya's lawyer, Abdul Gani, telephoned her to urge her that her son should sign the document.

More money was forthcoming: via his sisters Nini Satar sent her another 1,500 dollars and over 100 million meticaïs, saying this was partly from him and partly from Mariamo. But Razaco never took the document to her son, and turned the money over to the police. Satar continued phoning her - but she taped the calls. She said she could not refuse to take the calls "because I'm afraid of them".

The defence lawyers, Gani in particular, objected to Razaco giving testimony. The bribes were the subject of a separate case, and for Razaco to speak about them at the murder trial would be a violation of sub judice rules. The president judge, Augusto Paulino, overruled these objections.

Gani, infuriated by the claim that he had rung up Razaco, interrupted her testimony to lodge "a solemn complaint". "She is saying things she cannot prove, she is denigrating people", he exclaimed. "We don't know who this person is, what her criminal record is. We too should be respected in this court".

Judge Paulino demanded that the defence lawyers show some respect for Razaco, adding that they were not obliged to like or believe her.

Nini Satar's mobile phone numbers

Maputo, 10 Jan (AIM) - Mobile phone numbers used by Momade Assife Abdul Satar ("Nini") in the Maputo top security prison are registered, not in the name of Nyimpine Chissano, oldest son of President Joaquim Chissano, or of his business partner Apolinario Pateguana, as Satar had claimed on Thursday, but in the name of a company owned by the Abdul Satar family.

At the start of the Friday session of the Carlos Cardoso murder trial, in which Satar is one of the accused, judge Augusto Paulino said that investigations showed that the phone numbers used by Satar were in the name of Mohasset Import-Export.

This company exists only on paper, and is owned by Satar's brother-in-law, Mohamed Asslam Satar.

Nini Satar admitted this - but insisted that initially phone number 312351 was registered in Pateguana's name. "But later I changed the contract at their (Pateguana's and Chissano's) insistence", he said. "Nyimpine insisted on changing the contract, so that any phone card found in my cell could not be traced to him".

He claimed that, in the illicit phone contacts between the accused and the outside world, other numbers, initially registered in Pateguana's name were used - but "they went to M- Cel (the mobile phone company) to change the numbers and hide the traces".

Satar insisted that numbers he had given on Thursday of phones belonging to Chissano and Pateguana should be checked. He claims that these show a pattern of contacts, thus contradicting Chissano's claim that he did no business with Satar.

At this point, Paulino waved aloft heavy envelopes from M- Cel, containing the phone records requested. "We have already subpoenaed this information from M-Cel", he said, "but we haven't even opened the envelopes yet".

<http://www.poptel.org.uk/mozambique-news/newsletter/Cardoso22.html>

