
Carlos Cardoso murder trial update

18th December

Satar's casino story collapses

Maputo, 18 Dec (AIM) - A witness in the Carlos Cardoso murder case on Wednesday demolished the story provided in the first week of the trial by one of the accused, money-lender Momade Assife Abdul Satar ("Nini"), according to which he was the victim of a conspiracy masterminded by the then managing director of the Polana Casino, Gerry Rouper.

The prosecution alleges that Satar, his brother Ayob, and their acquaintance, former bank manager Vicente Ramaya, ordered the November 2000 assassination of Carlos Cardoso, because of his investigations into their activities, published by his daily newsheet "Metical".

Nini Satar, however, argues that the murder charges were cooked up so that he would be detained and thus unable to collect money owed to him by the Casino.

Satar claimed that Rouper asked him for short term loans amounting to 10 billion meticaïs (about \$420,000).

Since Satar did not have this money immediately available, he arranged for a South African friend, named Bachir Abdullah, to make the loan. Satar would collect the repayment from the casino and take a "commission" for himself.

He claimed that the loans were made to Rouper in South Africa rands, to be repaid by the casino in post-dated cheques in the Mozambican currency, meticaïs.

Satar said the casino ran into problems in meeting the repayment schedule. Only the first three billion meticaïs were repaid. The casino rescheduled the remaining seven billion meticaïs of debt - even so, when Satar tried to cash one of the cheques it bounced. For reasons Satar was quite unable to explain, the cheques are made out to his brother, Ayob.

Satar also alleged a conspiracy involving Rouper and Humberto Sartori, the Italian owner of the Kaya-Kwanga hotel, to extort money from him. He said they had first warned him that he would be killed, unless he paid them a million dollars. Later the threat was watered down - it became "pay us a million dollars, or we'll have you thrown in jail".

At various times over the past 18 months, Satar has tried to drag other people into this conspiracy, including the then head of the Maputo branch of the Criminal Investigation Police (PIC), Antonio Frangoulis, and even the judge trying the murder case, Augusto Paulino.

The whole story hinges on the cheques, and the Casino's alleged debt to Satar. So Satar's lawyer, Eduardo Jorge, on Tuesday called to the witness stand the chairman of the Polana Casino board of directors, Teodoro Waty (who is also the chairperson of the Maputo Municipal Assembly).

Waty was the first defence witness to speak, and presumably Jorge assumed he would bear out Satar's story. But Jorge had not bothered to speak to Waty first, before summoning him to court. In reality Waty turned into a succinct and effective witness for the prosecution.

Waty told the court that Rouper, and the casino's financial manager, Phillip Nevitt, were sacked in early 2001 for "unwise management practices". He said they were criticised for making unwise loans, not for seeking loans: in other words, under the management the casino was lending money, not borrowing it.

Waty denied there had been any cash flow problems, any need for short term loans. "The information we had did not indicate any financial difficulties at the casino", he said. "We honoured all our commitments to our creditors, and paid all our taxes".

Sacking Rouper and Nevitt took a few months, he said - but "as from February 2001, Rouper was not effectively in charge". The arrest of Satar occurred in late March 2001.

Waty admitted that the cheques, totalling seven billion meticais certainly looked like Polana Casino cheques, and the signatures they bore seemed to be those of Rouper and Nevitt. "We are investigating the matter", he said.

The first Waty had known about the cheques, and the casino's alleged debt to Satar, was when Eduardo Jorge wrote to him about the matter in June of this year. In August, the lawyer sent Waty photocopies of the cheques. The casino board had not replied to that letter, because it was still analysing the cheques.

Did the casino recognise the cheques?, Jorge asked. "If we recognised them, we would have replied", responded Waty.

If there was never any short term loan granted by Satar, and thus no debt from the casino, then the claim that Satar was arrested to stop him collecting the money collapses.

Defence witness questioned

Maputo, 18 Dec (AIM) - A defence witness in the Carlos Cardoso murder trial on Wednesday denied that Momade Assife Abdul Satar ("Nini"), one of those accused of ordering the assassination of Mozambique's foremost investigative journalist, had harboured any anger over the articles Cardoso had written about him.

Cardoso had written at length about the Abdul Satar family in "Metical", the daily newsheet he owned and edited. He wrote, not only of their role in the huge banking fraud which resulted in the theft of the equivalent of \$14 million from the country's largest bank, the BCM, but also of their illegal money lending at usurious interest rates, and their use of private wire taps to bug the phones of their adversaries.

According to one of Nini Satar's friends, Mahomed Riaz Ahmad, none of this made much impact on Satar. He told the court that after publication of Cardoso's articles, Satar's behaviour "was normal. He didn't talk about the articles". Nor had he ever seen Satar angry.

Riaz said that, on 22 November 2000, the night of Cardoso's murder, he, Satar, and another friend dined in a local restaurant. They knew of the murder from television news, and Riaz described Satar's reaction as "normal".

Unfortunately none of the lawyers asked what Riaz thought of the article Cardoso had published about him. For on 11 July 2000, "Metical" ran on its front page a story of how Riaz had physically attacked Ismael Magid, son of Abdul Magid Hussein, owner of the Maputo company "Bazaar Central".

"Metical" reported that Riaz destroyed property in a "Bazaar Central" shop, and that Ismael Magid was briefly hospitalised because of the attack.

Magid told "Metical" he believed Riaz had been sent by Satar because of a cheque for 1.3 billion meticais (about \$54,000), signed by Satar, that was in the hands of the Magid family.

This cheque cropped up earlier in the trial: supposedly it was to pay off a debt to a member of the Magid family resident in Durban. This man had sold three Mercedes-Benz saloons to Nyimpine and N'naite Chissano (the sons of President Joaquim Chissano) and their business partner Apolinario Pateguana. Wealthy Maputo businesswoman Candida Cossa told the court that, when payment for the cars was not made and the Durban salesman demanded his money, a loan from Nini Satar was arranged.

Satar was to issue a cheque, and Cossa would repay him later. But the cheque bounced three times, and so the Criminal Investigation Police (PIC) were notified. Hence Satar's desire to get the cheque back.

This story paints a picture of Riaz, not as a simple friend of Satar, as he told the court, but as an enforcer. (Though Riaz's story at the time was that he went to "Bazaar Central" to collect on a completely different debt, for \$17,000, owed by a northern Mozambican businessman, Zulficar Sulemane, and which Ismael Magid was guaranteeing.) The court also heard from David Mugabe, a security guard employed by Unicambios, the foreign exchange bureau owned by Nini Satar's brother and co-accused, Ayob.

It became obvious that the favourite words in Mugabe's vocabulary were "no" and "never". Had he ever seen Anibalzinho (Anibal dos Santos Junior, the fugitive accused of recruiting the death squad that murdered Cardoso) at Unicambios? No. Had he ever seen Candida Cossa there? No. Or Nyimpine Chissano? No.

Mugabe claimed that he had either never heard of any of the names mentioned by either defence or prosecution lawyers, or never seen them at Unicambios.

This charade was only broken when Helder Matlaba, lawyer for Cardoso's injured driver, Carlos Manjate, asked Mugabe if he had ever seen Orlando Joaquim Malate at Unicambios. No, I don't know him! came the automatic response.

But Malate is Nini Satar's bodyguard. When Matlaba pointed out that Malate accompanies Satar everywhere, Mugabe's memory suddenly improved, and he agreed that Malate "was always with Nini".

Three other Unicambios employees were called to the court as defence witnesses - but at the last moment the lawyers decided not to question them. Possibly they feared that their memories might be a little more extensive than Mugabe's.

<http://www.poptel.org.uk/mozambique-news/newsletter/Cardoso16.html>