

---

Carlos Cardoso murder trial update

7th January 2003

---

The Polana Cassino and the Satars' money

Maputo, 7 Jan (AIM) - The former financial director of the Polana Casino in central Maputo, Philip Nevitt, on Tuesday confirmed that in late 2000 the casino had borrowed money from the notorious loan shark, Momade Assife Abdul Satar "Nini", one of the men charged with ordering the murder of Mozambique's top investigative journalist, Carlos Cardoso.

Nevitt told the Maputo City Court that the then general manager of the casino, Gary Rouper, turned to Satar because the casino was desperately short of money.

"Gary told me that the casino was in serious financial problems, and he was able to arrange a short term loan from a foreign exchange bureau", said Nevitt. "My suggestion was to speak to the shareholders and explain the situation, but he wouldn't listen to that".

The foreign exchange bureau concerned is Unicambios, owned by Ayob Abdul Satar, Nini's brother. But Nevitt said that, as far as he was concerned, "Unicambios and Nini are one and the same thing".

Rouper told him the loan was from Unicambios, and it was Nini whom he frequently saw speaking to Rouper. This contradicts the testimony given by both Satar brothers, according to which Nini's business dealings were quite separate from Unicambios. Nevitt said the casino ran into problems because of Rouper's policy of allowing gamblers to play on credit. "The casino's results on paper were very good", he said, "but in reality they were bad, because most of the money was still owed by clients".

Although Nevitt seemed blissfully unaware of it, this practice was quite illegal. Under Mozambican gaming legislation, casinos may not lend money to their own clients.

The result was that, in effect, the casino had two sets of books, a fictitious one which showed a profit, and a real one which showed that the casino had run out of money. And the casino had to pay gaming taxes on the fictitious one, since it could not afford to admit to the Finance Ministry that it was in breach of the law.

So Rouper turned to Nini, so that the casino would have the cash to pay its taxes, and its wage bill. The loan was secured with a series of post-dated cheques.

Nevitt repeatedly claimed not to know the details of this deal. "I only signed the cheques", he pleaded.

"Is that the sole task of a financial director?" asked the judge, Augusto Paulino, sceptically.

"To understand this, you have to know Gary", claimed Nevitt. "He is someone who does things on his own. He just does them.

When the time came to pay Nini, he renegotiated the arrangement, and he didn't consult me".

Nevitt said the postdated cheques left blank the space for the payee. "I supposed this was to allow Unicambios to negotiate them with a third party", he said. In fact, all the cheques presented to the court are made payable to Ayob Satar. The loan was made in late 2000, to be paid off "in two or three months", said Nevitt. But the casino was still unable to collect from its debtors - and so Rouper "renegotiated the cheques, one at a time. He paid Nini something, and then issued another postdated cheque for the remainder".

Nevitt knew that these shady deals involved a large amount of money, but he was unable to say how much. He believed the casino's clients owed in the region of \$1 million. As for how much Nini had lent, he could only say "it was a lot of money, there were a lot of cheques. I once saw Nini pass Gary a sackfull of money. It contained hundreds of millions of meticaís".

In his testimony, Nini claimed that, in reality, the money did not come from him, but had been loaned by a South African called Bachir Abdullah. This man, he said, eventually came to Maputo to demand his money back from the casino.

But Nevitt said he had never heard of Bachir Abdullah - as far as he was concerned, the money came from Unicambios.

The loan to the casino is a key part of Nini Satar's defence. He claims that the real reason he was arrested in March 2001, had nothing to do with the murder of Carlos Cardoso - instead, he was the victim of a conspiracy mounted by Gary Rouper who wanted him in jail so that he could not cash the casino's cheques.

Nini spun tales according to which this conspiracy also involved the former head of the Maputo Criminal Investigation Police (PIC), Antonio Frangoulis, and Humberto Sartori, the Italian owner of the Kaya-Kwanga hotel, among others.

But Nevitt thought relations between Nini and Rouper were "reasonable" and he had never noted any animosity between them. As for Sartori, he merely provided services to the casino, including accommodation for its foreign staff.

One indicator of the closeness between Nini and Rouper is that they seem to have shared the same bodyguard, Paulo Esteveao ("Dangerman"). Nevitt said he knew Esteveao as Rouper's bodyguard, but earlier in the trial he was described as Nini's bodyguard.

Esteveao is also one of those charged with the November 1999 attempted murder of Albano Silva, lawyer for what was then the country's largest bank, the BCM, and which had been defrauded of the equivalent of \$14 million by members of the Abdul Satar family and their associates.

Nevitt admitted that the casino's board of directors were kept in the dark about the real financial situation. Rouper reported back to them, but told them nothing about the credit offered to clients. "Only in January or February 2001, when Gary fled the country and left me with the problem did the board of directors learn of the problem", said Rouper.

This date must be wrong: for Nevitt also mentioned Rouper speaking of Nini Satar's arrest, which was in early March 2001. By this time, Nevitt had apparently become suspicious of Nini. For he recalled that on one occasion Rouper paid Nini in cash - but Nini did not hand over the cheque to which this money referred. Nevitt then wrote to the casino's bank, ordering that all the cheques be stopped.

When Nevitt realised that Rouper would not be coming back, he asked for a meeting with the chairman of the casino board, Teodoro Waty, at which "I explained everything".

He then went on holiday, and when he returned found that his contract was cancelled, and he was no longer allowed to enter his former office at the casino.

Asked if the gaming authorities were informed about the loan from Nini, Nevitt said "No, they didn't need to know. It's not part of gaming as such. They didn't know about our balances. There was no reason for them to know".

-----  
Importance of BCM fraud confirmed

Maputo, 7 Jan (AIM) - The fraud whereby the equivalent of \$14 million was stolen from Mozambique's largest bank, the BCM, was one of the main concerns of murdered journalist Carlos Cardoso in the last months of his life, one of his closest colleagues, Marcelo Mosse, testified on Tuesday.

Mosse had been called to give evidence by Eduardo Jorge, defence lawyer of Momade Assife Abdul Satar ("Nini"), one of those charged with ordering Cardoso's murder in November 2000.

Satar is one of those who opened the accounts used to drain the money from the BCM immediately prior to its privatisation in 1996. The prosecution argues that Cardoso's campaigning work on the BCM fraud was a motive for Nini Satar and his associates to eliminate Cardoso.

Mosse was Cardoso's right-hand man on the paper he owned and edited, "Metical", and took over as editor after Cardoso's death.

Presumably Jorge called Mosse to the witness stand in the hope that he would provide some motive for the murder other than the BCM fraud.

But when he asked Mosse to list the important issues that concerned Cardoso in 2000, the first thing that sprang to his mind was the BCM. "One of the things which greatly concerned Cardoso was the fraud at the BCM", he said. "He had the strong conviction that if this case were to come to trial, this would help revive credibility in the judicial system".

Pressed to list other matters that were high up on Cardoso's agenda, Mosse mentioned his concerns as a member of the elected Maputo municipal assembly - particularly the illicit acquisition of land in Maputo, and the extravagant purchase of vehicles planned in the 2001 municipal budget.

Asked if Cardoso had changed his mind about the BCM fraud after Vicente Ramaya, another of the accused and a former BCM branch manager, had replied in mid-May 2000 to one of his articles, Mosse said he doubted very much whether Ramaya had altered Cardoso's opinion.

"Throughout 2000 he was producing editorials demanding that the case go to trial", Mosse pointed out. He had even urged the Public Prosecutor's Office to adopt as its own the charge sheet drawn up by the BCM's lawyer, Albano Silva. Less than a fortnight before his death, Cardoso had written another editorial along those lines, Mosse recalled.

It was true that Cardoso accepted Ramaya's suggestion for a public debate on the BCM case. "I think he believed a public debate would clarify matters", said Mosse. "It would clarify the way in which evidence had been hidden, and there was deliberate disorganisation of the case file. He was convinced that a public debate could clarify whether the attorneys involved had taken bribes. It might also help in understanding other frauds in the financial system". (Cardoso had repeatedly attacked the Attorney-General's Office for its handling of the BCM case, and the apparent collaboration of leading attorneys with the Satars and Ramaya.) Asked whether Cardoso had felt that his life was threatened, Mosse replied that Cardoso was "fearless".

"He did express shock at various facts to do with corruption and with organised crime", he added. "He felt shocked, not threatened".

<http://www.poptel.org.uk/mozambique-news/newsletter/Cardoso19.html>