

Mozambique's \$14-million banking scam in court

Date: 24 May 2002

A high-profile, \$14-million banking scam in Mozambique has landed 17 bank employees and prominent businessmen in court, six years after the crime took place, the independent weekly Savana reported on Thursday.

The 1996 theft from the commercial bank BCM was Mozambique's largest-ever banking scandal and came on the eve of its privatisation.

The Maputo Judicial Court decided that the accused could await trial out of custody, but ordered two key suspects to hand over their passports, the report said.

The two men were Vicente Ramaya, the BCM branch manager where the theft took place, and businessman Assif Abdul Satar.

The investigation into the scandal has been fraught with violence.

BCM lawyer Albano Silva told the court that he had survived an assassination attempt in 2000, apparently by the same people who killed Mozambique's leading investigative journalist Carlos Cardoso later that year.

Cardoso was investigating the BCM scandal before he was gunned down near his office in Maputo.

His work was probing whether alleged high-level corruption in the justice system prevented the BCM case from going to court six years ago.

At least six people have been arrested in connection with Cardoso's murder, but authorities have made little progress in the case despite domestic and international pressure on the Mozambican judiciary to bring the culprits to justice. ? Sapa-AFP

www.mg.co.za