

Siba-Siba murder: suspect arrested

Some 20 months after the murder of Antonio Siba-Siba Macuacua, interim chairman of the Austral Bank, the police have arrested a suspect. According to a report in "Mediafax" on 24 April, police picked up Carlos Silva Armacao in Inhambane province during the previous week. What is most chilling about the accused is that he should already have been in jail. He was sentenced to a 24 year prison term in 1997 for murdering the artist Eugenio de Lemos. But on 13 July 2001, Armacao "escaped" from the Maputo top security prison. Less than a month later, on 11 August, Siba-Siba was murdered. The suspicion must be that he was released specifically in order to assassinate Siba-Siba.

When Carlos Armacao and three others murdered Eugenio de Lemos, Armacao was a member of what is supposed to be a highly disciplined police unit, the "Casa Militar" (Presidential Guard). And in 2001, when Armacao escaped, the top security prison was being guarded by members of the ordinary police, the riot police - and the Casa Militar.

There seems to be a clear connection between the murder of Siba-Siba and that of investigative journalist Carlos Cardoso in November 2000. Both men were investigating banking scandals: Cardoso was demanding that those responsible for stealing the equivalent of \$14 million from what was then the country's largest bank, the BCM, be brought to trial, while Siba-Siba was chasing up the many individuals and companies that owed money to Austral, and trying to ascertain the true financial state of the bank.

During the trial, held from November 2002 to January this year, of the six men charged with murdering Cardoso, the Siba-Siba case was mentioned by several witnesses. Perhaps the most significant of these was convicted car thief, Marcial Muthemba. He got to know the assassins of Cardoso in prison and one of them, loan shark Momade Assife Abdul Satar "Nini", recruited him as an errand boy. Letters and mobile phones were smuggled in to Satar via Muthemba.

Muthemba overheard highly incriminating conversations between Nini Satar and the other murderers. In particular, he found that Satar had a hit list of people to be eliminated, including "somebody in the bank whose name I don't know".

Discussions were held about how to dispose of this unnamed banker. One idea was to release Carlitos Rachid, the man who pulled the trigger in the Cardoso assassination.

"Rachid didn't tell me who this person in the bank was, but he said he was to be executed", Muthemba told the court. Rachid was to be freed from prison to commit the murder, and payment for the killing was to come not from Satar, but from one of his associates, former bank manager Vicente Ramaya. Muthemba said this discussion took place before the murder of Siba-Siba, but he could not confirm who was the target.

Another witness at the trial, Gerry Opa Manganhela, specifically mentioned Siba-Siba. Opa was serving a 10 year sentence for firearms offences in the top security jail. He

struck up a friendship with Satar in the jail, and told the court that Satar asked him to murder Siba-Siba.

The plan was to corrupt a policeman named Manhica, who would release Opa from jail in order to assassinate Siba-Siba, for which Satar would pay a billion meticaís (about \$42,000). The plot fell through when Manhica delayed in responding.

If these two witnesses were telling the truth, an inevitable question arises - did Satar and his accomplices, having failed to release either Rachid or Opa to commit the murder, succeed with Armacao? Furthermore, Nini Satar was known to have corrupted members of the Casa Militar. Only after one of the Cardoso assassins, Anibal dos Santos Junior "Anibalzinho" mysteriously "escaped" in September was the Casa Militar removed from the prison.

When "Mediafax" contacted Custodio Zandamela, national director of order and public safety in the Interior Ministry, he confirmed that the police had re-arrested Armacao. "There's been a major effort in searching for this individual", he stated. "We're still working on the case, and we'll only give more information after we've concluded the work".

He would not confirm whether the police were looking for him in connection with the Siba-Siba murder, as well as with his escape from jail.

Eugenio de Lemos was murdered, and his car stolen, on 8 March 1995, at Costa do Sol, on the outskirts of Maputo. The police arrested three of the four killers. Armacao and a second member of the gang, Iziquiel Xavier, were members of the Casa Militar. The Maputo City Court heard that one of the killers, wearing a police uniform, stopped Lemos and asked him to give the four a lift. He did so, but once in the car the uniformed man pointed a gun at Lemos and forced him to surrender control of the steering wheel. The gang then drove the car to Costa do Sol, where they murdered Lemos.

"Mediafax" also cites a source in the Criminal Investigation Police (PIC) as saying that Armacao was suspected of involvement in the murder of Jose Lima Felix, a Portuguese banker who was an administrator in the International Bank of Mozambique (BIM).

This seems quite impossible. Armacao was sentenced to 24 years imprisonment on 29 October 1997. Lima Felix was murdered on 2 December 1997. As far as we know, Armacao was in jail between 29 October 1997 and 13 July 2001.