

Equatorial Guinea, and other stories

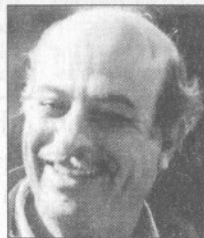
BEFORE I KEEP MY PROMISE TO TELL YOU about the "special relationship" that exists between the Islamic Republic and the great country of Equatorial Guinea (EG), I must note that my editor, for fear of offending the more delicate of his readers, changed the exact name I had used for the "parts" of his enemies that President Lt-Col Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo likes to have for breakfast. Well, let me try a gentler term than the one I used last week: prairie oysters! Fried eggs and prairie oysters — off his latest victim — gets the good Colonel's juices flowing.

Equatorial Guinea (1999): 28,051 sq kilometres, with not one kilometre of paved road; population 450,000 souls until almost half of them ran away to become refugees/were forced out by the brutish policies of President Francisco Macias Nguema, Mbasogo's uncle, who was removed from power and executed by his loving nephew. Main industry until oil was found very recently: saw-milling and fishing. Main trade: Clearing house for narcotics of every kind and hue, mainly cocaine and heroin, the president himself and the tiny diplomatic corps cited as dealers and carriers.

Because our story starts in Madrid, Spain, it is utterly crucial for us to note what the Geopolitical Drug Despatch, the publication of *L'Observatoire Geopolitique des Drogues*, a Paris-based NGO had to say of EG's embassy to Spain: "EG's diplomatic mission to Spain made up a vast international (drug smuggling) network operating under diplomatic immunity." Also, "this is not an isolated case in a country where drug trafficking and human rights violations are common practices".

Well, here is the gist of what happened according to several statements of our Foreign Office and which proves the point that we have a very special relationship with EG: On June 11, 1997, a fellow named Santos Pascual Bikomo Nanguande, EG's minister for information according to one FO statement, and foreign minister according to another (!) and son-in-law of the Prairie Oyster Eater, turned up at the Pakistan Embassy in Madrid along with a chap named Alogo (the FO seems not to know his complete name), and made a request for the both of them to be issued visas for visiting Pakistan as "official" guests. The purported reasons for the visit were to explore avenues of investment in Pakistan according to one FO statement, and seeking Pakistani aid for Equatorial Guinea according to another! Our embassy in Spain, despite the fact that it had nothing to do with Equatorial Guinea, processed the applications for the reason that it wanted to spare Nanguande, who was in Madrid for "work and med-

VIEW



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A day before talks between the Indian and Pakistani foreign ministers almost collapsed due to Pakistan's insistence on the centrality of Kashmir issue, Aziz went and said he was sure the issue would be solved soon! This is the sort of misplaced bravado, or shall we call it pseudo-machismo, one should guard against

ical treatment", the trouble of "having to return 'all the way' to Equatorial Guinea". Which was just the thing for Nanguande to do, for the accredited mission to Equatorial Guinea was Pakistan's embassy to Nigeria which should have been the Pakistani mission processing his request for "official guest" status.

The long and the short of it is that this Nanguande duly came to the Land of the Pure, called on the high and the mighty including the then president of the Islamic Republic, sundry ministers including Mushahid 'Mandela' Hussain, sundry high mandarins of the FO and other ministries, the Chambers of Commerce and Industry all over the country, and was caught red-handed at Madrid airport on July 6, 1997, carrying high-grade heroin worth \$13 million. When it became apparent that the shyder had been nabbed, it is reported, the Pakistani diplomat who had gone to receive him at the airport after his "official" visit to this hapless and helpless and ill-

served country, ran like hell!

It is to be noted that the FO has never given a full and satisfactory explanation of this very sorry episode: in the first place how in heaven's name an "official" guest, could be anointed so, even recommended, by an unconcerned mission; and second, how an "official guest", surrounded as he is by protocol, laid his hands on the vast quantity of heroin. Indeed, never has the much-acclaimed Anti-Narcotics Force investigated this shameful matter. One should have thought that after our FO's quite disgraceful mention-in-despatches in convicted drug smuggler Howard Marks' book *Mr Nice* it should have been shamed enough to make a full disclosure in this case. Proves my point, what?

Whilst there is so much else to write about Nanguande, our Commando General has pronounced yet again. As the time of his promised retirement from the Army draws near he has told us that fully 96 per cent of Pakistanis want him to continue wearing the uniform of a General of the Army and, therefore, to continue as Chief of Army Staff of the Land of the Pure. How he knows the exact percentage only he can tell us. Why it is not, say, 95.9 per cent or 96.5 per cent or even 97.2 per cent? How did he get to the exact figure of 96 per cent?

Could it be that a poll-taking outfit, say the *Pew wallahs*, have taken yet another lightning-fast poll? We do remember that the last one told us our General was hugely popular, don't we? Could it be that the US Embassy's staffers have roamed the length and breadth of the many diplomatic receptions held in Islamabad the Beautiful's scintillating air, and come up with the magic figure of 96 per cent? For we do know that American diplomats go about saying publicly how they well know that Musharraf is massively popular, don't we?

Really! The number of times one has cautioned the General to ease off when it comes to making loud statements. However, whilst he can get away with virtually anything being the acclaimed "boss" of the present dispensation, his appointees — whether at the lowest echelons or at the level of 'prime minister' — make loud proclamations too, little realising that they cannot get away with anything at all. 'Best man for the job' Shaukat Aziz, too, has gone and opened his mouth rather wide. Just a day before talks between the Indian and Pakistani foreign ministers almost collapsed due to Pakistan's insistence on the centrality of Kashmir issue, Aziz went and said he was sure the issue would be solved soon! This is the sort of misplaced bravado, or shall we call it (with the General's permission, for he seems to have a copyright on the word 'pseudo') *pseudo-machismo* one should guard

against.

Which reminds me: in the interview in which the General announced the results of the 96 per cent poll, he is reported to have used the 'pseudo' word (henceforth to be called the 'P' word in this column) at least ten times. I say 'reported' because I have neither cable nor satellite and depend on feedback from my son who is an avid politics watcher. Apparently to every question asked by Dr Shahid Mahmood the General admonished him for paying too much heed to "pseudo intellectuals". Question: "What do you say about the perception that every time the Americans growl we capture another Al Qaeda member". Answer: "As I have said earlier you should not listen too much to the pseudo-intellectuals"! So there.

Let me, in the end, say how disgusted I am at the building of a new and hugely expensive General Headquarters and Ministry of Defence buildings in Islamabad when most people in the country do not have access to clean drinking water. There is such a thing as 'giving' and 'sacrifice', isn't there? How good it would be if the Army made an announcement that even though it needed a new Headquarters (which it certainly does not!), and whilst all the other Services Headquarters had moved to Islamabad, it was returning the funds to the government to help alleviate the water situation in, say, Hyderabad and environs. How much goodwill would be generated by this one act by what is seen to be an ever more grabby Army. But no, like other sections of the Establishment, the Army too must go on shooting itself in both feet.

Just look at the statement put out by the ISPR about the cost of construction of the new GHQ Complex and Ministry of Defence. We are told that the costs will be met from the sale of surplus land located in cantonments all over the country. "75 per cent of the money collected from the sale of this land will be spent on construction of GHQ Complex and 25 per cent given to the government" says the ISPR. Excuse me, but aren't the lands located in cantonments the property of the State in the first instance? How has the Army arrogated to itself the right to do what it wills with government land, condescending then to "give" 25 per cent to the Government of Pakistan?

To top it all, is this the time to construct more monstrosities for which there is no earthly need? And is it even half-true in this age of instant communication, that the Army's HQ cannot be located 15 miles from the Headquarters of the other Services? Come sirs, come now.

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