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Berbera

Somalians once again excited by sight of white faces

United Press International BERBERA, Somalia — "Aaddaar, addaar," cry the ragtag bands of children who push metal hoops around pillars of dust and, like tiny sentinels, announce the arrival of a white man in this sleepy port city.

It has been nearly three years since several thousand Soviet advisers and experts were expelled from the nearby "Moscow Village," so the appearance of a white face once again excites curiosity in Berbera.

At the children's cries, a few women push heads shrouded in gauzy fabric past wooden louvers of their mud brick shops and peer inquiringly. Customers swaying gently in string chairs at the local market, idling away the broiling midday heat chewing the narcotic plant called khat and sipping highly sweetened tea, pause to look over the intruders carefully.

"American, American," barks a Somali government official, and suddenly the edge of hostility gives way to giggles and smiles.

These days, Americans are welcome in Berbera.

In exchange for \$40 million in foreign military sales credits and \$5 million in cash, the United States

reached agreement in August with the Somalis for the use of naval and air facilities here, and, on a limited basis, in the capital of Mogadishu to the south.

The agreement capped months of negotiations to establish military

ment has not announced the agreement with the United States, so most of the 30,000 residents of Berbera have only a vague notion that Americans, like the Russians before them who built buildings and watched Russian movies at their outdoor

person in Berbera a visitor met in a day of interviews who speaks English.

"With the Americans, it will be, ah, so good," Suleiman says, pursing his lips as if to blow a kiss. "After all, they are coming to help the Somali people. I also hope to do some more business."

A lot of people — most of Berbera, in fact — thinks the United States is "going to import Disneyland to Somalia," one American official said. "Boy, are they going to be disappointed."

In testimony in Washington, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Robert H. Pelletreau told Congress that no U.S. military forces would be stationed in Berbera. He said \$1 million would be spent in fiscal 1980 to upgrade its facilities and \$10 million the following fiscal year.

Estimates vary, but most officials agree that several hundred American construction workers, either from the U.S. Navy or from private contractors, will be sent here initially to improve the facilities left behind by the evicted Russians, many of them uncompleted.

The greatest interest is focused on the airfield, about five miles from the seacoast. The airbase is unused, but is still out of bounds to nonmilitary personnel. Heat waves shimmering off the tarmac against a background of spectacular sandstone mountains is the closest most visitors get to it, despite the new friendship with the Americans.

American officials who have inspected the base say the runway built by the Russians is capable of handling most aircraft, even B-52 strategic bombers. But the facility lacks apron parking, underground fuel tanks, even runway lights. The control tower is a tiny wooden shack and communications is limited to an ancient Russian radio capable only of Morse code.

The port is equally unimpressive.

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facilities along the Indian Ocean for the so-called Rapid Deployment Force which the Carter administration hopes to use in the event of an emergency in the Middle East. Similar agreements have been concluded with Kenya and Oman.

Situated on the headwaters of the Bab el Mandeb Strait and the entrance to the Red Sea, Berbera has become virtually synonymous with "strategic" in the parlance of U.S. defense planners.

Berbera looks across the straits to Aden, capital of Southern Yemen, where the Soviet Union has naval facilities, including submarine pens.

Britain, the colonial power in both Northern Somalia and Southern Yemen before independence, recognized early that Aden and Berbera were strategically linked, though in the halcyon days of gunboat diplomacy it was the plentiful supply of camels in Somalia that gave Berbera its luster.

Nowadays it is the 15,000-foot airstrip, the longest in Africa, plus the port and fuel facilities which makes Berbera such a valuable bargaining chip to the two superpowers.

Curiously, the Somali govern-

"kinos," will soon be coming to settle here.

"We like Americans to come to our country," says Ibrahim Husein Yuusuf, the young-looking proprietor of a general store. "It's good for business."

On a recent afternoon, when the temperature in the current hot season crept above 115 degrees, making Berbera's few tarmac roads as mushy as porridge, Ibrahim managed a brisk trade by fishing from the depths of a deep freezer Coca Colas the consistency of ice. No other shop in Berbera has electricity.

"The Americans will buy things, you know," Ibrahim says. "We expect a lot of new business. They will buy everything."

He breaks into a smile and with a flourish takes in his inventory: everything from cans of popcorn imported from Yemen to American laundry soap.

Suleiman Jaman Ismail now runs a local hotel, though he is esteemed by his Berbera friends and neighbors for his worldly experience. Until recently he worked as a merchant seaman, and fondly recalls a month of liberty in Los Angeles. Suleiman is the only

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Deaf prof sues Rice for reinstatement

HOUSTON — A former assistant physics professor has sued Rice University for reinstatement with seniority and \$40,000 back pay, charging the institution denied him advancement and tenure because he is deaf.

Dr. Ralph F. Guertin's lawsuit was tried this week in the court of U.S. District Judge Gabrielle McDonald. The judge's decision is pending and is not expected before November.

Guertin's lawsuit was filed in 1976 under a law prohibiting discrimination against qualified physically handicapped persons participating in federal programs.

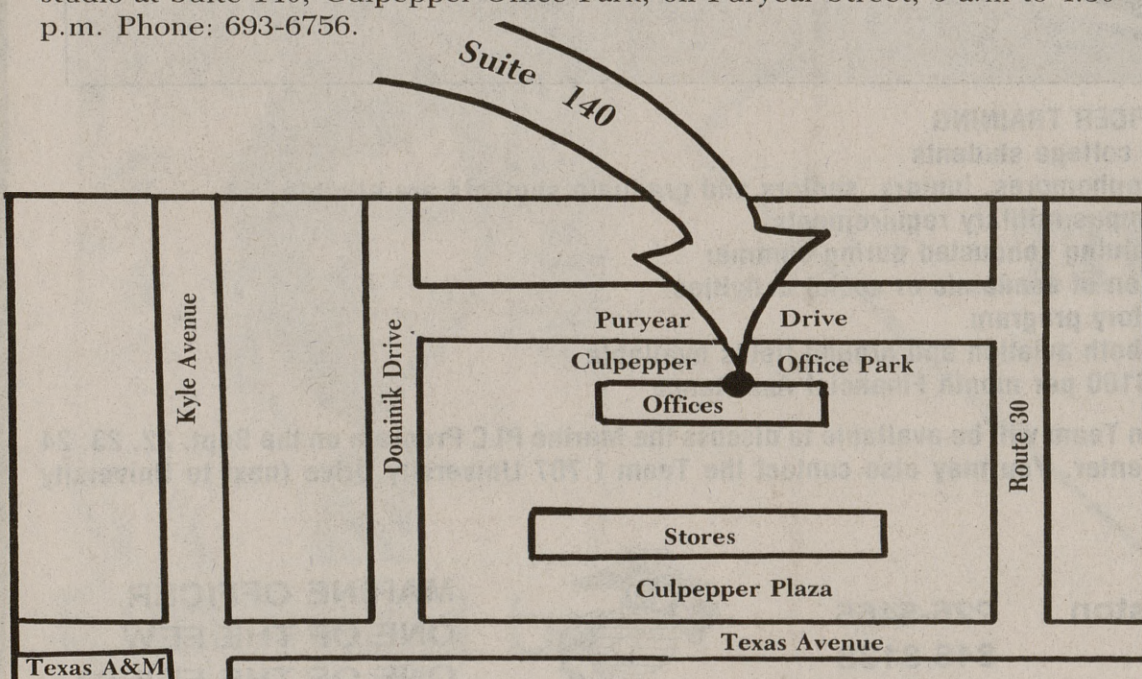
Although Rice is a private institution, Guertin's lawyer, Don Lopez, said he was participating in a program funded by the old Atomic Energy Commission when his work contract was terminated in 1973.

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