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Mexico Detains More Suspects in Colosio, Ruiz Massieu Assassinations

by LADB Staff

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In late February and early March, the Attorney General's Office (PGR) ordered a series of new arrests of individuals accused of involvement in the assassinations of former presidential candidate Luis Donaldo Colosio and Jose Francisco Ruiz Massieu, ex-secretary-general of the governing Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). Among those arrested was Raul Salinas de Gortari, brother of former president Carlos Salinas de Gortari.

The four new arrests ordered by the (PGR) include:

-Raul Salinas, who is accused of being the "intellectual author" of the assassination of Jose Ruiz Massieu in September of 1994.

-Mario Ruiz Massieu, for his alleged role in obstructing the investigation into his brother's murder. Mario Ruiz Massieu had been named as a special investigator in the death of his brother while ex-president Salinas was still in office. He is now accused, however, of blocking the release of information that could have resulted in the arrest of Raul Salinas de Gortari last year.

-Othon Cortes Vazquez, who is accused of acting as a second gunman in the Colosio assassination in March 1994.

-Fernando de la Sota, a former chief of security in Baja California state during Colosio's campaign trip to that region, who is accused of helping to plot Colosio's assassination.

Raul Salinas's arrest on Feb. 28 was especially significant, since the former president's brother had strong connections within the PRI and was considered "virtually untouchable." In a candid radio interview, special prosecutor Pablo Chapa Bezanilla said that Salinas ordered the assassination of Jose Francisco Ruiz Massieu to protect the personal interests of the Salinas family. "It was a known fact that (Jose Francisco Ruiz Massieu) was in line for a powerful leadership position in the Chamber of Deputies, and this was a threat to the personal interests of former president Salinas's group," said Bezanilla.

In an article published on Nov. 21, Proceso magazine reported that Raul Salinas used his position as a powerful PRI insider to gain financially from the privatization of banks and other government properties and from the concessions provided through the government's social works program, Programa Nacional de Solidaridad (Pronasol). Among other things, the article also mentioned allegations that Raul Salinas may have been involved in drug trafficking. On March 6, a federal judge ruled that the PGR had obtained enough evidence against Raul Salinas in the Ruiz Massieu assassination to warrant a trial.

In addition to Raul Salinas, a dozen other people with direct links to the PRI have been implicated in the assassination of Ruiz Massieu since investigations into the murder began last year. The list includes former federal deputy Manuel Munoz Rocha, who had originally been identified as the principal intellectual author of the assassination until Raul Salinas's recent arrest. Salinas's arrest was actually based on a tip offered to prosecutors in mid-February by a former Munoz aide, Fernando Rodriguez Gonzalez. Rodriguez said Munoz and Raul Salinas were close friends who collaborated in the assassination plot, but that the killing was actually ordered by the former president's brother.

The arrest of Jose Francisco Ruiz Massieu's brother, Mario Ruiz Massieu, also represents a bazaar twist in the case. Ruiz was arrested on March 4 in the US on unrelated charges that he had failed to declare US\$28,000 in cash that he was carrying to US customs authorities. Ruiz Massieu and his family were en route to Spain and Monaco at the time of the arrest. The Mexican government is already seeking Ruiz Massieu's extradition. The Zedillo administration is also investigating bank accounts in the US held by Ruiz Massieu that total US\$7 million. Authorities suspect the money may have come from bribes by PRI officials to cover up Raul Salinas's alleged role in the assassination last year.

Meanwhile, on Feb. 28 authorities announced the arrest of Othon Cortes Vazquez and Fernando de la Sota for their involvement in the Colosio assassination. The former is charged with acting as a second gunman in the murder, and the latter with helping to plot the killing. The arrests followed statements in mid-February by Attorney General Antonio Lozano, who said that new evidence had demonstrated that another gunman besides Mario Aburto who was arrested last year had fired shots at Colosio. Until Cortes's arrest, authorities were proceeding on the theory that Aburto had fired all the shots that killed Colosio in Tijuana in March of 1994 (see SourceMex, 03/30/94 and 04/06/94).

Lozano has offered no motive for the shooting, but news reports have speculated that the assassination was ordered by PRI members who were still angry over Colosio's decision while head of the party to remove the then PRI governor of Baja California state from office and allow the opposition National Action Party (PAN) to win the 1989 gubernatorial elections. (Sources: Proceso, 11/21/94; La Jornada, 02/25/95; Notimex, 02/26/95; El Nacional, 03/02/95; El Financiero International, Associated Press, 03/06/95; Reuter, 02/26/95, 02/28/95, 03/01/95, 03/03/95, 03/07/95; United Press International, 02/28/95, 03/06/95, 03/07/95; Deutsche Press Agentur, El Universal, 03/07/95; New York Times, 02/27/95, 03/01/95, 03/08/95)

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