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## **Panama Facing Off With Mexican Embassy Over Asylum Granted Former Government Official**

*by Deborah Tyroler*

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Late March 16, the Panamanian Foreign Ministry sent a communique to the Mexican Embassy insisting that Rafael Arozemena Alvarado be turned over to local authorities immediately. The communique said Arozemena, former general manager of the National Bank of Panama, has been accused of corruption and embezzling more than \$21 million from National Bank accounts. The former government official requested asylum at the embassy on Feb. 28. According to the Panamanian government, legal proceedings had been commenced against Arozemena prior to Feb. 28. Consequently, the government refuses permission to grant him safe passage out of Panama. On March 20, Panamanian Attorney General Rogelio Cruz told reporters that a serious conflict with Mexico could develop if Arozemena is not turned over to his government very soon. According to Notimex, Mexico's Embassy receives innumerable telephoned insults via telephone on a daily basis. At present, relations between the two countries are at the level of business attaches, and official contacts are effectively non-existent. (Basic data from Xinhua, 03/17/90; Notimex, 03/20/90)

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