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Attorney General's Office Offers Reward for Arrest of Tijuana Drug Cartel Leaders

by LADB Staff

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In early December, the Procuraduria General de la Republica (PGR) ordered the arrest of reputed drug traffickers Benjamin, Ramon, and Francisco Arellano Felix for their alleged roles in planning the assassination of Roman Catholic Bishop Juan Jesus Posadas Ocampo in May 1993, and for a recent assassination attempt against Tijuana journalist Jesus Blancornelas. As part of the arrest order, the PGR offered a reward of 8 million pesos (US\$992,000) for information leading to the arrest of the Arellano Felix brothers, who head the Tijuana drug cartel. The PGR announced the reward offer less than two weeks after the attack on Blancornelas, which injured the Tijuana journalist and killed his private bodyguard.

According to law-enforcement experts, the PGR's reward announcement apparently reflects the federal agency's lack of inside information on the Arellano Felix brothers and their whereabouts. "This institution exhorts the public to cooperate with the government in the fight against impunity," said a PGR communique, which also listed several national and international toll-free numbers for citizens to call in tips. Blancornelas, who publishes the independent magazine Zeta, apparently angered members of the Tijuana cartel when he published an article identifying David Barron Corona as a hit man for the cartel.

According to the Zeta article, Barron Corona participated in the murder of two Mexican soldiers outside a federal court building in Tijuana in mid-November. The PGR said Barron Corona, who was one of 10 assassins who launched the attack on the Tijuana journalist, was shot dead by Blancornelas's bodyguard. The PGR said Barron Corona was already wanted by Mexican and US authorities for his participation in the 1993 assassination of Bishop Posadas Ocampo at the Guadalajara airport. The PGR contends the bishop was caught in the cross fire during a gun battle between drug traffickers.

Mexican, US agencies offer cash rewards

The PGR reward is addition to a US\$50,000 offer by the US Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) for the arrest of the three Arellano Felix brothers. A fourth brother, Francisco Rafael Arellano Felix, is in custody at the federal prison in Amoloya de Juarez in Mexico state. Ramon Arellano Felix is also on the US Federal Bureau of Investigation's list of top-ten most wanted criminals. According to recent DEA and PGR reports, the Tijuana cartel is considered one of the most dangerous drug- trafficking operations in Mexico because of its violent intimidation tactics against criminal rivals, journalists, and law-enforcement officials.

In addition, the DEA said the Tijuana cartel pays about US\$1 million daily in bribes to law-enforcement officials and politicians. The DEA said the cartel, which operates principally in six states in western Mexico and several states in the southwestern US, is responsible for transportation

and distribution of thousands of tons of cocaine, marijuana, methamphetamines, and heroin in US territory.

The Tijuana cartel is said to have strong links with drug traffickers in Peru, Colombia, and Japan. In fact, the cartel is considered the major conduit of heroin from Southeast Asia into the US via Mexico. [Note: Peso-dollar conversions in this article are based on the Interbank rate in effect on Dec. 17, reported at 8.06 pesos per US\$1.00] (Sources: Associated Press, 11/28/97, 11/29/97; New York Times, 11/29/97; Deutsche Press Agentur, 12/07/97; El Nacional, The News, El Diario de Yucatan, 12/08/97; La Jornada, 12/08/97, 12/09/97; El Universal, 12/08/97, 12/09/97, 12/11/97)

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