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Investigators Link Collaborators of Ex-President Salinas to Drug Traffickers

by LADB Staff

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Key figures in former president Carlos Salinas de Gortari's administration have been linked with drug trafficking. New charges were announced in July against Salinas' former secretary Justo Ceja Martinez, the president's brother Raul Salinas de Gortari, former deputy attorney general Mario Ruiz Massieu, and Raul Salinas' chief accountant. In one of the most dramatic developments announced during the month, Switzerland's chief anti-drug prosecutor Valentin Roschacher said his office has compiled sufficient evidence to implicate Raul Salinas de Gortari in laundering drug-trafficking profits through Swiss banks.

Swiss uncover new evidence against Raul Salinas de Gortari

In an interview with the Associated Press in Geneva, Roschacher said investigators have confirmed that most of the US\$132 million deposited by Raul Salinas in Swiss banks since 1988 were bribes from drug traffickers. "We have a case against Raul Salinas that he got the money from drug traffickers," Roschacher said. Roschacher said his office has sent its findings to Swiss Attorney General Carla Del Ponte, who will decide whether the evidence, collected during the past two years, is sufficient to bring formal charges against the former president's brother.

Roschacher declined to offer specifics on the evidence against Raul Salinas. However, The Miami Herald reported that at least three members of international drug cartels told Roschacher's office that key members of the Salinas administration, including the former president, received bribes in exchange for protecting their activities in Mexico. Raul Salinas, who is being held in the Amoloya federal prison in Mexico state, is facing charges of murder conspiracy in the death of Jose Francisco Ruiz Massieu, former secretary-general of the governing Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI).

Raul Salinas is also charged with illegal enrichment because he has been unable to explain how he built up his personal wealth while serving as head of the government's foodstuffs agency Compania Nacional de Subsistencias Populares (CONASUPO). A Mexican federal judge previously cleared Raul Salinas of charges of money laundering and tax evasion. Arrest order issued for Carlos Salinas' personal secretary In another major development in July, Mexico's Procuraduria General de la Republica (PGR) issued separate arrest orders for Ceja Martinez, Mario Ruiz Massieu, and Raul Salinas' chief accountant Juan Manuel Gamez Gutierrez. Ceja and Gamez were charged with illicit enrichment because they were unable to explain how they acquired their personal fortunes during Carlos Salinas' term in office.

The PGR issued the arrest warrant for Ceja at the request of the Secretaria de Contraloria y Desarrollo Administrativo (SECODAM), which said Ceja has been unable to explain how he amassed an estimated 18 million pesos (US\$20.3 million) during Salinas' term in office, when his monthly salary as a public servant was only 24,000 pesos (US\$2,708). The PGR is investigating charges that Ceja's wealth came from connections to the drug trade. Adrian Carrera Fuentes, the

former head of the Policia Judicial Federal (PJF), told a federal grand jury in Houston in June that ranking members of the Salinas administration, including Ceja and Mario Ruiz Massieu, received bribes from Juan Garcia Abrego and Amado Carrillo Fuentes, leaders of the Gulf and Juarez drug cartels. Carrillo died during surgery in a Mexican hospital in July 1997 (see SourceMex, 07/16/97).

Ceja Martinez, who remains at large, is thought to be hiding out in the US or Europe. He was last seen in February 1995 when federal authorities first detained Raul Salinas at the home of Salinas' sister Adriana. The PGR also considers Ceja a key witness in the ongoing investigation of the assassination of then PRI secretary general Jose Francisco Ruiz Massieu in October 1994. Ruiz Massieu was gunned down as he emerged from a PRI function in Mexico City (see SourceMex, 10/05/94). The PGR has also issued a new arrest order for Mario Ruiz Massieu, the brother of Jose Francisco Ruiz Massieu, who remains in federal custody in New Jersey because of violations of US customs and immigration laws.

The Mexican government has requested Mario Ruiz Massieu's extradition, but the procedure has been delayed while US authorities attempt to confiscate US\$9 million from the former Mexican official's bank account in Houston. In his testimony before the US grand jury in June, Carrera said he delivered six cash payments of about US\$300,000 each to Mario Ruiz Massieu between November 1993 and August 1994.

US investigators said Carrera's account could be the evidence they have long sought in what has been a frustrating effort to prosecute Ruiz Massieu or extradite him to Mexico to face charges there. Also in July, federal prosecutors arrested Gamez Gutierrez in Ciudad Juarez on charges of illegal enrichment. The accountant is charged with having used his name to hide houses and other properties purchased by Raul Salinas. [Note: Peso-dollar conversions in this article are based on the Interbank rate in effect on July 22, reported at 8.86 pesos per US\$1.00] (Sources: The Miami Herald, 07/14/98; Associated Press, 07/16/98; The New York Times, 07/15/98, 07/17/98; The News, 07/17/98; Reuters, 07/19/98; La Jornada, El Universal, Novedades, 07/16/98, 07/17/98, 07/21/98; Excelsior, 07/16/98, 07/20/98, 07/21/98; El Economista, 07/21/98)

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