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Us Authorities Arrest Mexican Mayor On Suspicion Of Drug Trafficking, Conspiracy

by LADB Staff
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US prosecutors have taken Ruben Gil Campos, the mayor of Izucar de Matamoros in Puebla state, into custody on charges of drug trafficking and conspiracy. Gil, who resides part time in the US, is accused of using his moving company Gil Moving and Storage to transport an undetermined amount of cocaine into New York City between 2005 and 2007. Gil, elected mayor of Puebla's third-largest city in November 2007, is said to have ties to Gov. Mario Marin Torres, who has faced corruption charges of his own.

The US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) had been keeping an eye on Gil and his associate Martin Nelson Garcia for several years because of suspected drug-trafficking activities. Some sources said the investigation might have been ongoing for as long as a decade. In 2004, authorities seized a truck, marked with the name Gil Moving and Storage, carrying about 150 kg of cocaine. The driver of the truck was the suspect's brother Eduardo Gil Campos. In March of this year, DEA agents and US Marshals arrested Gil, known in Mexico as El Gavilan (the hawk), as he arrived at the Long Beach International Airport in the Los Angeles area. He was later transported to New York City, where he will face charges of arranging the transport and delivery of cocaine into New York City between 2005 and 2007, in what investigators called a "far-reaching conspiracy." The indictment specifically mentions Gil's role in arranging for 11 kg of cocaine to be transported into New York City in November 2007, valued at about US$500,000.

Prosecutors said the arrest was the result of strong cooperation among several federal agencies. "This arrest exemplifies the commitment of global law enforcement to identify and arrest those individuals responsible for trafficking cocaine into New York," said DEA special agent in charge John Gilbride, who heads the agency's New York office. If convicted, Gil could face a sentence ranging between 10 years and life in prison. The Mexico City daily newspaper Reforma said Gil might also face charges related to weapons violations and embezzlement of funds from the immigrant-support organization he helped create in California known as Casa Puebla.

US authorities, who claim to have amassed ample evidence against Gil, are scheduled to present their full case before a federal court on May 22. Ruben Gil third Mexican official to face US drug charges Gil is the third prominent Mexican official, all members of the former governing Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), to face US charges of drug trafficking and money laundering. The most prominent of these officials is Mario Villanueva, governor of Quintana Roo state from 1993-1999, accused of using his office to help the Juarez drug cartel's operations in the US. US authorities first made their formal request for Villanueva's extradition in 2002 (SourceMex, January 30, 2002), but it wasn't until 2007 that the Mexican government initiated the process to send the former governor to face trial in the US (SourceMex, September 11, 2007). Villanueva remains in a federal prison while his attorneys appeal the extradition.
Another prominent Mexican politician to face drug charges in the US was Mario Ruiz Massieu, who was deputy attorney general during the administration of former President Carlos Salinas de Gortari. Ruiz Massieu committed suicide in the US just before he was to be arraigned on a 25-count indictment charging him with laundering US$9.9 million in bribes from drug traffickers through US banks while serving in the Procuraduría General de la República (PGR) in June-November 1994 (SourceMex, September 22, 1999).

Suspect had links to corrupt Gov. Manuel Marin Gil Campos, who immigrated to the US at age 7, has retained his Mexican citizenship and part-time residence in Puebla state, which allowed him to run for mayor of Izucar de Matamoros last year. He was swept into office in the landslide victory by the PRI in municipal and legislative elections on Nov. 11, 2007 (SourceMex, November 14, 2007). Still, there were allegations in Puebla that Marin was not eligible to run for mayor of Izucar de Matamoros because his established residence in the state is in the town of Chiautla. Critics contend he was hand-picked to represent the PRI in that race because he was a major donor to Marin's gubernatorial campaign in 2004 (SourceMex, November 17, 2004). "Gil helped finance the campaign of Marin, who returned the favor by making him a mayor," said syndicated columnist Miguel Angel Granados Chapa. La Jornada de Oriente reported that Gil has become a member of Marin's inner circle and has engaged in some of the same corrupt practices employed by the governor.

Marin is accused of conspiring with a local businessman to imprison prominent journalist Lydia Cacho Ribeiro on bogus charges (SourceMex, February 22, 2006 and September 27, 2006). The Mexican high court (Suprema Corte de Justicia de la Nación, SCJN) ruled in 2007 that Marin did not violate Cacho's individual rights (SourceMex, December 05, 2007), but the governor's political integrity remains very much in doubt. Cacho has received strong international recognition for her efforts to fight Marin, particularly from groups like Reporters sans frontières (Reporters Without Borders). Cacho received her first formal prize on April 9 from the UN Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (UNESCO), which awarded her the World Press Freedom Award for her efforts in promoting freedom of the press. "The members of the selection committee were impressed by the courage displayed by Lydia Cacho Ribeiro, who continued to denounce political corruption, organized crime, and violence," said committee chair Joe Thloe. "She did this even as she faced death threats, attempts against her life, and difficult legal battles." Cacho also received an award in April from the Spain-based Union de Periodistas Valencianos for her efforts to promote freedom of expression. Gil has won favor in his native state of Puebla by spreading wealth among the populace. He is known to have spent large sums on lavish parties, various news sources reported. "In Puebla, this individual is known as a successful businessman who emigrated to the US," said La Jornada de Oriente, based in the city of Puebla.

Gil has also become involved in US politics, becoming one of the main promoters of Republican presidential candidate John McCain among potential Latino voters in the Los Angeles area, said La Jornada de Oriente. La Quinta Columna, which cited information in Fundrace, which tracks contributions to the US presidential races, said Gil and his wife Maria de los Angeles Herrera had donated US$3,000 to the McCain campaign. While at least a portion of his wealth was likely obtained through his US moving business, Gil is suspected of earning large sums through his alleged involvement with the drug trade. "Many questions remain unanswered," said La Jornada de Oriente. "To what extent did Ruben Gil transfer his illicit activities to Puebla? Does he have
connections with the major Mexican drug cartels?" Added the newspaper, "These are questions that must be answered through a comprehensive judicial investigation."

**Opposition legislators seek to remove Gil from mayoral post**

The mayor's case has created conflicts in the Puebla state legislature between members of the PRI and the other opposition parties. Members of the Partido Accion Nacional (PAN), Partido de la Revolucion Democratica (PRD), and the Partido del Trabajo (PT) recently filed a petition to remove Gil as mayor of Izucar de Matamoros, but the PRI was able to block the action because of its large majority in the lower house. This prompted angry responses from opposition legislators. PRD legislator Meliton Lozano Perez called for new elections in Izucar de Matamoros while accusing the Marin administration of protecting Gil by refusing to investigate whether Gil was involved in any illicit activities in the state. PAN legislator Rafael Micalco Mendez went a step further by accusing members of the PRI's Puebla state organization, including several officials, of maintaining links to drug-trafficking organizations.

The opposition members managed to convince the standing multiparty committee (Comision Permanente) in the Puebla state legislature, comprising members of both houses of the state congress, to pass a resolution asking the Mexican Consulate in Los Angeles and the Secretaria de Relaciones Exteriores (SRE) to investigate the matter. Among other things, legislators want to clarify whether Gil's absence will require extraordinary action to replace him as mayor of Izucar de Matamoros. Lozano Perez cited the state's legal code on municipalities (Ley Organica Municipal), which states that a mayor can be suspended or removed if a "competent authority" declares him or her incapable of carrying out the duties of the office. One example of incapacity to perform is if the mayor is charged with committing a crime that is considered a serious offense. "The cover-up and the suspicions that have accompanied this case have left the people of Izucar de Matamoros mired in uncertainty," said Lozano Perez.

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