

Ample bank account suggests Mexico's top officials corrupt

MEXICO CITY — Claims that a former top drug prosecutor had millions of dollars in a Texas bank raised more questions Thursday about the scope of drug-related corruption in Mexico's government.

Juan Garcia Abrego, the reputed drug boss named Thursday to the FBI's "Ten Most Wanted Fugitives" list, heads the gang suspected of paying off former Deputy Attorney General Mario Ruiz Massieu.

Investigators say they have found nearly \$7 million in Texas bank accounts belonging to Ruiz Massieu, who headed drug prosecutions most of last year. Citing prosecution sources, numerous press reports here estimated he could have more than double that elsewhere in the United States.

Ruiz Massieu's assets became public in recent days with the partial unraveling of a complicated, high-level plot in which a former president's brother was accused of murdering a top ruling party official.

Ruiz Massieu — brother of the slain official — is under arrest in New Jersey, and Mexico is seeking his extradition in connection with the murder case.

"Narcotics trafficking corrupts everything it touches," said Jorge Shabat, a specialist on the topic at the Center for Economic Investigation and Teaching in Mexico City. "It's very difficult to believe institutions in a country such as Mexico could resist."

Prosecutors believe that Mexico's Gulf drug cartel was paying off Ruiz Massieu, the Washington Post reported Thursday. The former deputy attorney general is accused of a cover-up in the murder of his own brother, Jose Francisco Ruiz Massieu.

Garcia Abrego, who apparently holds both U.S. and Mexican citizenship, is the alleged leader of the cartel, described as Mexico's largest drug smuggling empire. The operation is based in the northern

border state of Tamaulipas. He faces drug charges in both Mexico and the United States.

Investigators hope the discovery of a drug link will help solve two other slayings: the 1993 killing of Roman Catholic Cardinal Juan Jesus Posadas Ocampo and the March 1994 assassination of Luis Donaldo Colosio, presidential candidate of the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party.

The Attorney General's office says that Ruiz Massieu has at least \$6.9 million in the Texas Commerce Bank of Houston, and it has asked U.S. officials to freeze his accounts. It asked Mexican banking officials to do the same.

Ruiz Massieu is accused of trying to protect Raul Salinas de Gortari, brother of former President Carlos Salinas de Gortari, from prosecution in last year's assassination of Jose Francisco Ruiz Massieu, the No. 2 man in the ruling party.

Republicans unveil tax deduction plan

WASHINGTON — House Republicans presented their long-promised tax cut for families, businesses and investors on Thursday, declaring that it would ease financial burdens on Americans and help companies create more jobs.

But the package faces political difficulties ahead.

Portraying the measure as a boon to ordinary Americans, House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Bill Archer, R-Texas, unveiled the package in a speech to the conservative Family Research Council in a House office crammed with couples and small children.

The pep-rally atmosphere, however, did little to cloak the fact that its introduction formally ignites what will be one of Congress' fiercest and least predictable battles this year: an effort to slash taxes even as lawmakers try to erase the mammoth budget deficit. The measure would cost \$189 billion over five years, though its 10-year price tag is likely to balloon to about \$700 billion.

Democrats immediately pounced, accusing the GOP of crafting tax cuts that would benefit wealthy families while pursuing reductions in school lunches, heating assistance and other programs that help the poor.

With some noteworthy exceptions, the measure delivers most of the tax reductions the GOP pledged in its "Contract With America" during last autumn's election campaign. Its cornerstone is a \$500 per child tax credit for families earning \$200,000 annually or less.

It also would reduce the capital gains tax rate for companies and individuals, establish new individual retirement accounts and reduce levies paid by many companies.

Majority Republicans seem certain to push it through the Ways and Means panel next week, and the full House soon afterward. But beyond that, its future is murky.

Not only does a possible veto fight

loom with President Clinton, but the legislation's fate in the Senate is shaky because many Republicans there prefer chopping away at the federal deficit to trimming taxes. Balancing the budget would take more than \$1 trillion in spending slashes over the next seven years, a sum budget-cutters have never before approached.

"I put a lot higher priority on deficit reduction than I do on tax cuts," said Senate Finance Committee Chairman Bob Packwood, R-Ore.

House Republicans have vowed to pay for the tax measure by revamping welfare, continuing some restrictions on Medicare and cutting other programs. But they have not specified where most of the savings would come from.

From the White House to Capitol Hill, Democrats attacked.

"The president rejects the idea of targeting the most vulnerable in our society — our children, needy families, the homeless — in order to pay for these tax cuts, especially for tax cuts that are benefiting the wealthiest," said White House Chief of Staff Leon Panetta.

"The Republican extremist express is out of control," said Rep. Sander Levin, D-Mich.

Clinton and House Minority Leader Richard Gephardt, D-Mo., have each presented their own tax-cut plans, much smaller measures than the GOP package and focused more on lower-income people.

But enthusiasm for reducing levies has waned among lawmakers of both parties, particularly Democrats, amid indications that many voters prefer deficit reduction to tax cuts.

The \$500 tax credit, which accounts for more than half of the measure's cost, would be nonrefundable. That means taxpayers who owe less than \$500 could use only as much of the credit as it would take to make their tax liability zero, and not get an Internal Revenue Service refund for the difference.

Storms slam into California

ST. HELENA, Calif. — A howling Pacific storm lashed Northern California on Thursday, swamping roads, snapping power lines and raising fears of a repeat of January's disastrous floods.

"The forecast unfortunately is for continued gusty wind and rain. I think we'll be in a roller-coaster situation for at least a day and a half," said Pacific Gas & Electric Co. spokesman Ron Rutkowski. The company called in extra crews to deal with more than 140,000 customers without power.

In Southern California, residents braced for the storm's arrival, especially in La Conchita, the Ventura County town where a hillside collapsed Saturday, burying nine homes.

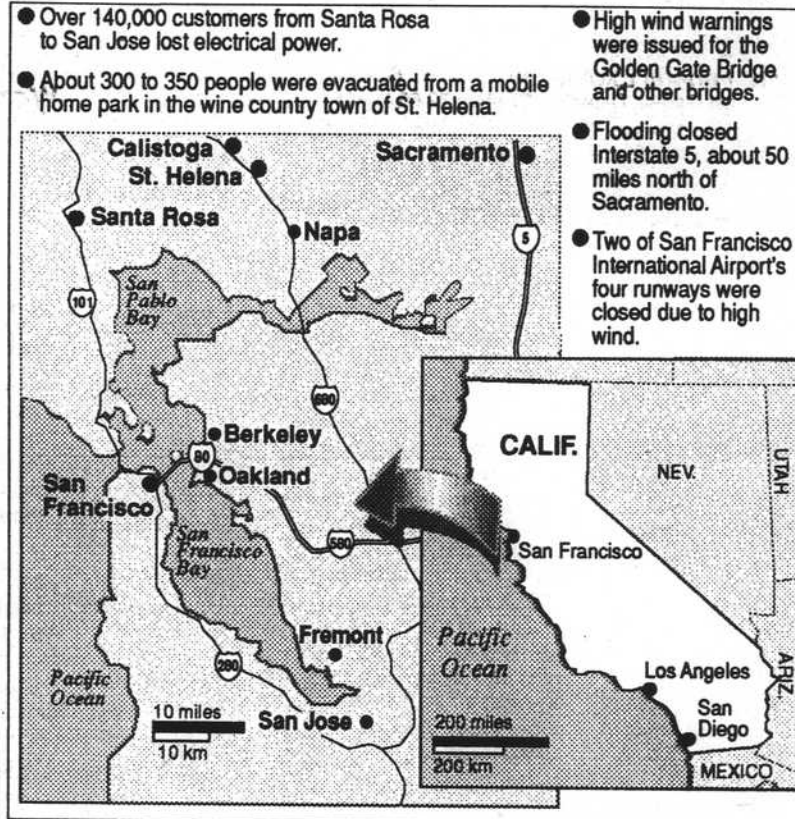
Streams pushed over their banks in many areas in Northern California; in St. Helena, a small town in lush wine country, more than 350 people were evacuated when the Napa River overflowed.

"The water just came rushing through," said 67-year-old Don Coffey, who was chased from his apartment building to an evacuation center. "I had water up past my waist. I was just able to get out with a few clothes. They are all soaked."

Rain was falling at a half-inch or more an hour in the Santa Cruz Mountains on the central coast south of San Francisco, and other areas reported that up to 8 inches of rain fell overnight.

Rain was expected intermittently until Saturday morning, raising fears that this latest storm could cause damage rivaling that from more than two weeks of rain in January. During that deluge, 11 people died and more than \$300 million in damage was reported statewide.

In Napa, the river rose 7 feet overnight, and was flowing less than 2



feet below its banks. Residents of about 20 homes near Napa Creek evacuated and were being housed in local hotels. Schools in three counties were closed for the day.

To the west, near Guerneville, one of the hardest-hit communities two months ago, the Russian River was rising. National Weather Service forecaster Miguel Miller predicted the river would get 10 feet above flood levels in some areas.

Fierce winds, clocked at 113 mph on Mount Tamalpais in Marin County, prompted warnings to motorists of dangerous driving on the region's bridges.

In San Francisco, winds fanned a house fire, killing one firefighter and injuring five other people.

Trees littered city streets, and officials closed roads through Golden Gate Park. Two of San Francisco International Airport's four runways were closed by winds. San Francisco Bay was closed to commercial traffic.

The state Transportation Department reported 30 state highways closed at various points because of flooding, slides or other weather-caused problems. Major roads closed included Interstate 5 and Highway 101.

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News... in a Minute

Program to teach info highway

WASHINGTON — Worried that America will turn into a nation divided between computer haves and have nots, the Clinton administration unveiled a national program Thursday to educate the public about the power of the information superhighway.

The program was prompted by 1994 census data confirming what most people already suspected and other reports have found: households with low incomes and little education were least likely to own a computer and a modem, which lets a person send and retrieve information over telephone lines. And, households with the highest incomes and the most education were the biggest computer owners and users.

Run by the departments of Commerce and Agriculture, the program will target people least likely to own a computer: low income; minorities; and the 65-million Americans who live in rural areas.

The program's most important aspect will be establishing centers around the country that will give people access to computers and train them, Commerce Secretary Ron Brown said. Specific locations will be identified later this year, he said.

Estrogen reduces heart deaths

SAN ANTONIO — Heart disease deaths dropped by 30 percent in older white women taking estrogen for at least 10 years, researchers reported Thursday.

Most of the benefits lingered even in women no longer taking the drug, who still had a 20 percent reduction in heart disease deaths.

The study adds to a growing body of evidence that estrogen can be critically important in reducing women's deaths from heart disease. In November, a \$20 million government study found that estrogen cut the risk of heart disease by 25 percent in women ages 45 to 64.

The new study showed that estrogen use is linked to a drop in deaths in women ages 65 to 74. The study did not find any benefits in women 75 or over, or in women who took the drug for less than 10 years, said Jane A. Cauley, an epidemiologist at the University of Pittsburgh. She reported the findings at the American Heart Association's annual epidemiology meeting.