

Name: Alert ID: TMML2024031138490 MEXICO CITY — Federal agents called in the Mexican army to arrest one of the nation's most powerful drug barons, a man wanted in the 1993 murder of Guadalajara's Roman Catholic cardinal, during a late-night raid that also snared 33 federal agents who were protecting him, authorities said Saturday. Mexico's attorney general said Hector Luis Palma Salazar, reputed leader of the Sinaloa cartel, was arrested in an exclusive neighborhood of Guadalajara and charged with several murders and drug-related crimes. Palma allegedly took over one of the five major cartels that U.S. drug enforcement agents say transport three-fourths of the cocaine entering the United States after its previous leader was jailed in the murder of the cardinal, Juan Jesus Posadas Ocampo. Palma was also wanted in connection with that crime, and the Mexican government had posted a \$1-million reward for information leading to his capture. The arrests late Friday were seen as a clear sign of President Ernesto Zedillo's commitment to crack down on the cartels. They also underscored the close ties that exist between drug kingpins and some federal officials. Confirming Palma's arrest at an evening news conference in Mexico City, Atty. Gen. Antonio Lozano said the army was called in as a precaution because federal police were directly involved with Palma. Mexican soldiers formed a cordon around the Guadalajara office of the federal attorney general--to guard against retaliation--while agents from Mexico City arrested Palma, along with Apolinar Pintor Aguilera, the federal judicial police commander. Jalisco state authorities said Palma identified Pintor as his "protector." Authorities also detained 33 federal police officers who they said had been serving as Palma's personal bodyguards. Lozano said his agents seized large quantities of drugs and about \$10,000 in cash. Palma was reportedly a lieutenant of Joaquin (Chapo) Guzman, former leader of the cartel in Sinaloa, a state notorious for violence and marijuana production. U.S. and Mexican officials said the cartel has extensive networks in Central and South America and has been instrumental in exporting Colombian cocaine into the United States through Mexico. Authorities said Palma became the cartel's leader after Guzman's arrest in 1993. Guzman has also been charged with participating in the murder of Posadas, who was shot more than a dozen times in what the previous government called a case of mistaken identity. Lozano, the first attorney general to come from an opposition political party, has vowed to arrest the leaders of all the major cartels and to solve several high-profile political murders, among them the killing of the cardinal. Religious leaders and human rights groups have cast doubt on the official version of the slaying on March 24, 1993, outside the Guadalajara airport. Posadas was an outspoken critic of the drug cartels that Mexican and U.S. drug enforcement officials say have infiltrated the government at high enough levels to threaten the nation's stability. Officials now say the airport slaying, in which six others died, was masterminded by the Arellano Felix brothers and their Tijuana drug cartel, a rival of Palma's Sinaloa cartel. One of the four brothers, Francisco Arellano Felix, has been captured, but the three others remain at large. There is a \$1-million reward for information leading to the arrest of any of the brothers. Authorities have not released details of what roles Guzman and Palma allegedly played in the cardinal's assassination. The cardinal's slaying was the first in a series of political murders that caused billions of dollars in investment to flee the country, helping to trigger Mexico's continuing economic crisis and fueling national insecurity. A year after Posadas' death, ruling party presidential candidate Luis Donaldo Colosio was slain in Tijuana. And six months after that, the party's secretary general, Francisco Ruiz Massieu, was shot to death in Mexico City.