

Name: Alert ID: TMML2024035190107 NEW YORK (AP) — The former boss of Honduras' Los Cachiros cartel testified Friday that he paid hundreds of thousands of dollars in bribes to the current and former presidents of Honduras in exchange for protection from extradition to the United States and other favors. Devis Leonel Rivera Maradiaga said in a Manhattan court that he gave then-President Porfirio Lobo between \$500,000 and \$600,000 in 2009 and alleged that Lobo helped him launder the proceeds from drug trafficking. Rivera Maradiaga also said he paid a \$250,000 bribe to current President Juan Orlando Hernández, without specifying the date. He said he bribed many Honduran politicians, including the current minister of security. Lobo has denied wrongdoing, saying last week that he did not receive illicit money from anyone and calling accusations against him "falsehoods from criminals who are trying to reduce their sentence in the USA." Juan Orlando Hernández, who is not charged, has similarly called allegations against him lies by "confessed murderers" who want lesser prison sentences and to get revenge against him for his extradition and anti-crime actions. Rivera Maradiaga's testimony came on the seventh day of the drug trafficking trial against Tony Hernández, Hernández's brother. The former trafficker, who acknowledged being responsible for 78 murders, later said on the witness stand that the leaders of another cartel, los Valle Valle, told him in 2014 that they planned to assassinate Juan Orlando Hernández because he stopped taking their calls after they helped finance his presidential campaign. Rivera Maradiaga said he had no intention of going along with that plan. "The FBI revealed the magnitude of the plan by los Valle Valle cartel and its partners to assassinate me, because they knew that sooner or later we were going to capture them, extradite them and seize property obtained through blood," President Hernández said Friday afternoon on Twitter. "Of that there is real proof; not like the accusations of the narco-assassins." Rivera Maradiaga's testimony adds to a string of corruption and bribery accusations made at the trial. He is considered one of the most prominent and violent drug traffickers in Honduras' recent history. He has said that from 2002 to 2013, he smuggled some 130 tons of cocaine to the United States. In late 2013, he began collaborating with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration. The following year, he said, he met Tony Hernández at a Denny's restaurant in the Honduran capital, Tegucigalpa, to discuss getting government money for a shell company that Rivera Maradiaga used to launder drug money. He filmed the encounter with a watch camera and gave it to the DEA, and it was shown in court Friday. Defense lawyer Michael Tein questioned the witness about the millions he earned from smuggling drugs. Rivera Maradiaga said he made about \$50 million and spent it on bribes, jewelry, property, contract killings and gifts to his girlfriends.