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INTERNATIONAL

NEWS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Arrest won't affect drug traffic

■ **DRUGS:** The recent arrest of smuggler Juan Garcia Abrego won't stop drug flow into the U.S.

MEXICO CITY (AP) — The flow of cocaine into the United States may slow temporarily as the rivals of jailed drug lord Juan Garcia Abrego battle over his turf, but there likely will be little long-term effect, experts said Tuesday.

Although Garcia Abrego was one of the most formidable smuggling kingpins in Mexico, his power had waned recently. Now, members of his cartel and others will be hungry to snatch up the multimillion-dollar business he controlled.

"A lot of people will struggle to get Garcia Abrego's business," said Phil Jordan, a retired DEA agent from Dallas who helped put together the U.S. case against the drug kingpin in the early 1990s.

"But it will take them years to amass the kind of power and fortune he enjoyed," Jordan added. "He was one of the big guys."

Recent blows to Colombia's Cali cartel have helped create a new breed of Mexican drug lords, poised to become equally powerful in the world market.

The Mexicans now are responsible for smuggling at least three-quarters of all cocaine entering the United States, U.S. authorities say.

Garcia Abrego, one of the FBI's

10 most wanted, was arrested by Mexican authorities and deported Monday to Houston, where he faces U.S. federal charges of drug trafficking, conspiracy and money laundering.

The arrest is expected to boost President Ernesto Zedillo in his effort to prove his administration can overcome widespread corruption and effectively combat drug trafficking.

Mexico comes up in March for U.S. recertification for its role in the drug war. The State Department and Congress annually rate countries for their cooperation and award U.S. aid accordingly.

"Hopefully Garcia Abrego's arrest is just a start," said Jordan. "If the Zedillo administration goes after the rest of the drug lords we could really see some results."

The arrest was seen as the most important in Mexico's drug war since Miguel Angel Felix Gallardo, the "Godfather of Mexican Drug Trafficking," was imprisoned in 1989.

Felix Gallardo's arrest put a temporary dent in Mexican trafficking as others battled for his territory. But within a few years, the vacuum was filled.

The same process is likely to happen again, the experts said.

Garcia Abrego's rivals "are celebrating tonight," said Peter Lupsha, a University of New Mexico professor who studies the drug

trade.

Juarez cartel leader Amado Carrillo Fuentes, described as Mexico's No. 1 drug smuggler, can only benefit from Garcia Abrego's arrest, Lupsha said.

Carrillo Fuentes, known as "The Lord of the Skies" for his use of old passenger jets to fly Colombian cocaine into Mexico, has risen rapidly in power — aided by the cool, professional manner he learned from his mentors in the Cali cartel.

"Nothing changes for drug trafficking," said Lupsha. "The arrest of Juan Garcia Abrego is simply cleaning up on the last Mexican administration and passing the baton: The corruption and trafficking will continue."

Felix Gallardo's empire ultimately was split between his lieutenants Joaquin Guzman Loera and Hector Luis Palma Salazar, who formed the Sinaloa cartel, and his nephews who took control of the Tijuana area.

The rivalry between the two groups has been blamed for much of Mexico's recent drug violence, including the May 1993 slaying of Roman Catholic Cardinal Juan Jesus Posadas Ocampo.

Guzman Loera was jailed soon after the cardinal's death. Palma Salazar was arrested in June after his light plane crashed. He was found guarded by federal police agents at a police commander's home in a Guadalajara suburb.

Sierra Leone's leader overthrown

■ **COUP:** Valentine Strasser is removed only six weeks prior to elections

FREETOWN, Sierra Leone (AP) — Army officers ousted Sierra Leone's military leader in a coup Tuesday, six weeks before elections designed to return the country to civilian rule.

There were no reports of bloodshed, and the ousted leader, Capt. Valentine Strasser, was said to have been given safe passage out of the impoverished, war-torn West African country. Heavily armed soldiers patrolled the streets and blocked roads leading to government headquarters, and a 7 p.m.-6 a.m. curfew was announced.

A statement read at 3 p.m. said the 30-year-old Strasser had been replaced by his former closest associate in the military junta, Brig. Julius Maada Bio. It promised a statement later from Bio.

The radio announcement, read by Lt. Col. Karefa Kargbo, said Strasser had been given safe passage out of the country. Foreign diplomats in the capital confirmed the coup.

In London, a spokesman for the British Foreign Office said it was their understanding Strasser was taken to Guinea. There was no independent confirmation.

"We have spoken to our high commissioner (ambassador) in Freetown, and the situation is calm and there are no reports of any violence," the Foreign Office representative said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

He said Britain, Sierra Leone's former colonial ruler, urged the new government to go through

with the transition to civilian rule.

Strasser had promised to hold elections for a civilian government Feb. 26, despite an ongoing civil war.

Aides close to the 33-year-old Bio, about whom little is known, said he opposes holding the election until the war has ended, or at least abated. Kargbo said some officers in Strasser's military junta had decided a coup was necessary to ensure a safe transition to civilian rule.

The overthrow appeared to set the stage for another indefinite term of military rule in one of West Africa's most troubled nations, and it indicated the region's long history of military bullying was far from over. In addition to Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Gambia and neighboring Liberia are under the control of military men or warlords.

Sierra Leone, rated by the United Nations as one of the world's 10 poorest countries, has been at war since 1991, when rebels of the Revolutionary United Front took up arms against a civilian government.

A country of about 4.5 million people, Sierra Leone gained independence from Britain in 1961. The war has killed an estimated 10,000 people and displaced one-third of the population. Adult literacy is estimated at 21 percent, and life expectancy is 43, one of the world's lowest.

A statement from the United Nations said U.N. Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali was "disturbed" by the coup report. "The United Nations remains committed to supporting the holding of such elections next month, as already agreed," the

statement said.

Strasser, in his youth famed more for his disco dancing than military prowess, was catapulted to power in April 1992 when a band of junior officers overthrew the civilian regime and chose him as their leader.

The rebels continued fighting Strasser's regime, calling it as corrupt as the previous government. It had vowed not to honor February's vote.

On Monday, members of Strasser's election commission reiterated their determination to hold the election as planned. Strasser had not planned to run for president, because under the election law he is too young to be a candidate.

In his statement, however, Kargbo accused Strasser of planning to become president anyway by passing decrees to change the law.

It was unclear what plans Bio had for the country. In an interview in November with Associated Press Television, he claimed to be firmly behind Strasser.

"Elections are definitely going to take place in February," said Bio, who wore army fatigues during the interview and proudly showed off two homemade rocket launchers displayed behind his desk. "The program was designed by us, not under pressure, because we think that democracy is the solution to our problems."

Bio was one of the junior officers who joined in the 1992 coup, and he had served as Strasser's chief of defense staff. Bio and Strasser fought alongside each other during the war before the 1992 coup.