

Mexico captures top cartel leader

by Sandra Dibble and Greg Moran -

BAJA CALIFORNIA SUR, Mex. -- Mexican authorities announced Wednesday that they had detained a man they described as a top leader of Arellano Felix's drug cartel and said he would be deported immediately to the United States.

Gustavo Rivera Martinez, 46, faces numerous narcotics-trafficking charges in San Diego.

Until his capture Tuesday night in Baja California Sur, Rivera headed the violent drug-trafficking organization's operations in Baja California, top Mexican authorities said at a news conference in Mexico City. Rivera oversaw the transportation of drugs to the United States and money-laundering operations, said Genaro Garcia Luna, Mexico's secretary of public security.

A U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration Web site listed Rivera as one of the top fugitives in Southern California.

Garcia Luna said Rivera assumed the top operational position in the cartel after the arrest of Francisco Javier Arellano Felix, who was captured Aug. 14, 2006, on a fishing boat off the coast of Baja California Sur and is serving a life sentence in a U.S. federal prison.

The detentions of top cartel leaders in recent years have led to the disintegration of the Arellano Felix cartel. But the cartel continues to move marijuana, methamphetamine and some cocaine across the U.S.-Mexico border, law enforcement officials say, and members have branched out into kidnapping.

Rivera, an early member of the gang, "was one of the most powerful folks among the lieutenants still with the organization," said John Kirby, a former U.S. attorney in San Diego who helped obtain an indictment against Rivera in San Diego federal court in 2002.

Rivera was born in California, U.S. authorities said. He is a graduate of Bonita Vista High School in Chula Vista.

Rivera and a confederate, Jose Albert Marquez, faced charges of conspiracy to import and distribute cocaine, according to court records. A second indictment against Rivera charging him with conspiracy to import controlled substances was filed in July 2003.

Court records show that Marquez was arrested in January 2007. His case is pending in federal court in San Diego.

The July 2003 indictment described Rivera as close adviser to Francisco Javier Arellano Felix, who had taken over the cartel after the demise of his brothers.

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