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26Jun89 CUBA: EXPECTED SENTENCES IN SCANDAL HIGHLIGHT CASTRO ANTI-DRUG STAND.

By Lionel Martin

HAVANA, June 25, Renter - Cuba's corruption and drug scandal, in which a military honour court met on Sunday to recommend charges against a top army general, has underscored President Fidel Castro's tough stand against drugs, diplomats said. The tribunal of 45 generals and two admirals will recommend to the ruling Communist Party the charges to be brought against General Arnaldo Ochoa Sanchez, detained in the biggest corruption scandal since the 1959 revolution, and whether he should be tried by a military or civilian court.

Cuban television and the official national news agency AIN said the tribunal met to listen to a report from Defence Minister and Cuba's second-in-command Raul Castro. They gave no details on the proceedings.

Results of the closed-door session are not expected to be known until they are published in Cuba's official media.

Ochoa, a hero of Castro's revolution, was arrested on June 12 with six other army and security police officers. The government later charged that the men cooperated with Colombia's notorious Medellin drug cartel in shipping at least six tonnes of cocaine into the United States.

The government, in unusually forthright statements to the official newspaper Granma, has made it clear that those detained will be punished severely. Sources close to Ochoa's family quoted his 25-year-old daughter Yanina as saying he might be executed by a firing squad.

The expected severity of the sentences would be a direct reflection of Castro's longstanding opposition to drugs and other vices, diplomats said.

In a get-tough move, the government announced on Saturday that planes flying illegally over its territory and refusing orders to land would be shot down.

The scandal led some diplomats to ask if Castro himself, despite his strong public anti-drug stance, may not have known or approved of the activities of the arrested officers. It would have been, they contend, an easy way for Cuba to obtain sorely-needed hard currency.

But other diplomats said Castro's almost puritanical stance towards vice in the past made it inconceivable he would have allowed, even tacitly, any dealings with the drug mafia.

Drug indictments passed down in Miami last year said Castro mediated a drug payoff dispute between Panamanian strongman Manuel Antonio Noriega and the Medellin cartel.

But when Castro was asked by an American television journalist in February 1988 if the Cuban leadership had any relations with the Medellin cartel, he called the allegation "a miserable calumny".

Cuban historian Pedro Mendez said the Mafia began to operate in Cuba shortly after World War Two.

Lucky Luciano, the U.S. Mafia chief who had been deported from the United States, came to Cuba in 1947 to set up an operation only 90 miles (144 km) from Florida. By 1958, the Mafia owned the major gambling casinos in Havana and used Cuba as a hub for its drug trafficking.

Immediately after the revolution, Castro declared war on the crime syndicate. By the end of 1961 all organised gambling and prostitution had been outlawed and Mafia kingpins, including those involved in the drug trade, had fled to the United States.

A Communist Party Central Committee member, who asked to remain anonymous, told Reuters that in the early years of the revolution American gamblers associated with the Mafia contacted Cuban officials but Castro vehemently rejected any dealings with the crime organisation.

Castro has long boasted about Cuba's war against drug traffickers, saying, "We are the policemen in the Caribbean and we often wonder why the United States does not pay us anything for all this".

Cuban government statistics show that between October 1970 and March 1986, 328 foreign drug smugglers were jailed for violating Cuban territorial waters or airspace but figures are not available since 1986, when the arrested officers cooperated with the Colombian traffickers.

Castro said in December that Cuba was ready to cooperate with U.S. authorities. He met in Havana a congressional delegation led by Representative Charles Rangel of New York, who heads the House Select Committee on Narcotics Abuse and Control.

Some Western diplomats said that in the light of Cuba's latest admission, Castro would be even more disposed to cooperate with U.S. authorities.

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