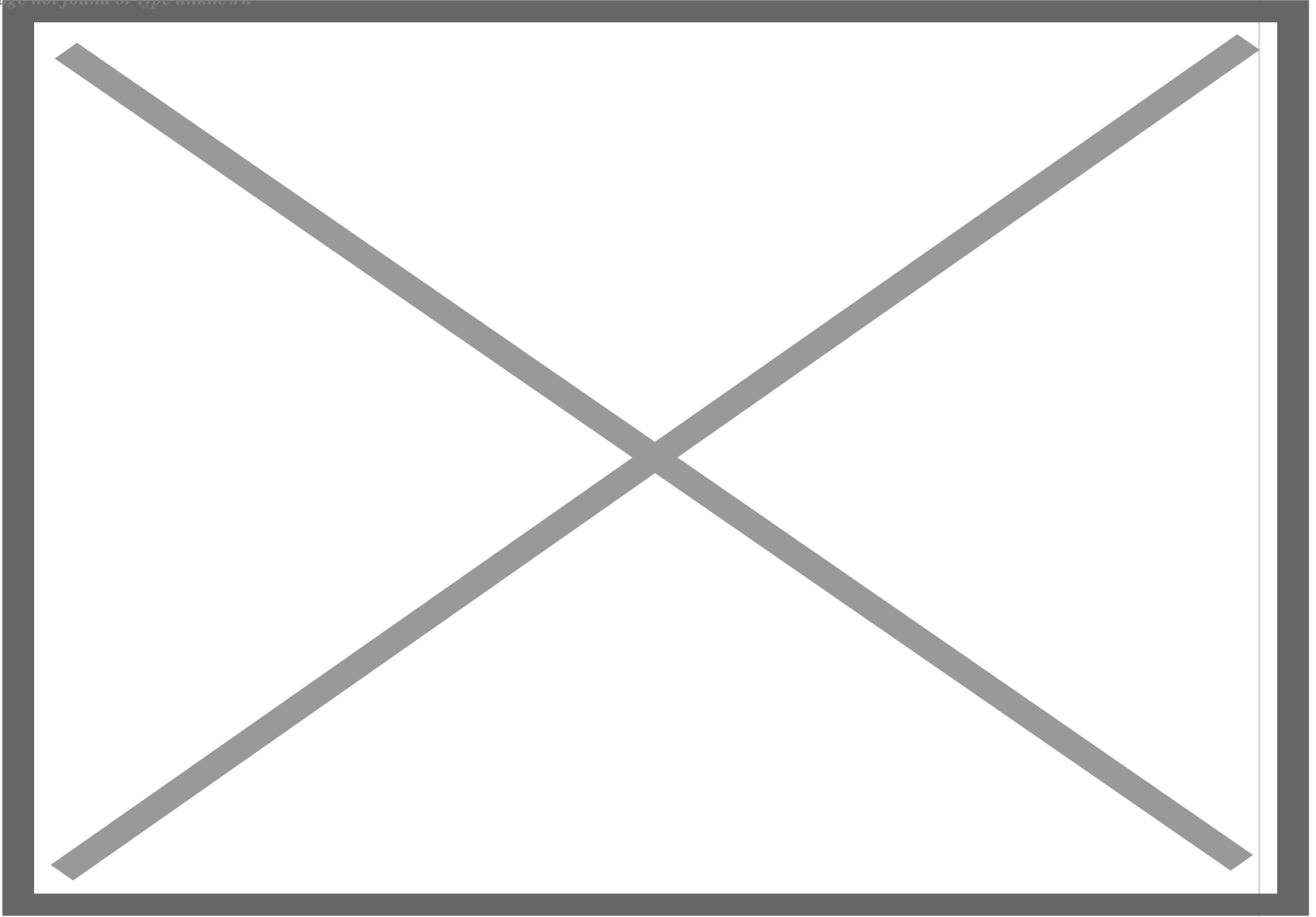


El Salvador seizes opposition party assets in corruption probe

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Anti-riot police stand inside the National Republican Alliance (ARENA) party headquarters during a raid executed by the National Civil Police and Attorney General's Office in capital, San Salvador, on Friday [Jose Cabezas/Reuters]

San Salvador, July 3 (RHC)-- The attorney general's office in El Salvador has seized some assets of the conservative opposition party in what it said was an attempt to recover funds embezzled from a donation from Taiwan between 2003 and 2004.

Guarded by police agents, specialised officials raided the main headquarters of the Alianza Republicana Nacionalista (ARENA), which governed the Central American country between 1989 and 2009, seizing two buildings and 17 vehicles.

The attorney general's office also froze funds the party received per vote in the February election. In total, it seized assets and funds worth \$3.9 million. "We must develop all the necessary actions to recover the money that have systematically been stolen from the Salvadorans," Attorney General Rodolfo Delgado told reporters.

The late Francisco Flores, who was president between 1999 and 2004, received unspecified donations from Taiwan for reconstruction following two earthquakes in 2001, according to the investigations.

However, Delgado said that \$10m had been transferred to ARENA party accounts and was later used to finance the electoral campaign of Flores's successor, Antonio Saca, who was president from 2004 to 2009.

El Salvador's president, Nayib Bukele, announced on Twitter that one of the seized buildings would be converted into a gym for athletes while public debt would be used to remodel 15 schools. The bronze statue of the ARENA party founder, the late Roberto d'Aubuisson, located inside the party building in San Salvador, would be melted to make manhole covers, Bukele added. "Justice at last," he wrote on Twitter.

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