

Los Angeles Daily News - May 25, 2010

Mexico arrests 'King of Heroin' drug trafficker

MEXICO CITY — Federal police have arrested Mexico's "King of Heroin," a powerful drug trafficker allegedly responsible for running thousands of pounds of heroin into Southern California each year, authorities said Thursday.

Jose Antonio Medina, nicknamed "Don Pepe," was arrested in the western state of Michoacan on Wednesday and is being held for prosecution, said Ramon Pequeno, head of the anti-narcotics division of Mexico's federal police.

Medina, 36, ran a complex smuggling operation that hauled 440 pounds of heroin each month across the Mexican border in Tijuana for La Familia drug cartel, Pequeno said.

The White House National Drug Threat Assessment says that while heroin use is stable or decreasing in the U.S., the source of the drug has shifted in recent years from Colombia - where production and purity are declining - to Mexico, where powerful drug cartels are gaining a foothold in the lucrative market.

Heroin production in Mexico rose from 17 pure metric tons in 2007 to 38 tons in 2008, with the increase translating to lower heroin prices, more heroin-related overdoses and more overdose deaths, according to U.S. government estimates in a report by the National Drug Intelligence Center.

Border Patrol agents seized 4.8 million pounds of narcotics at border crossings last year, and heroin seizures saw the most significant increase during that time, with a 316 percent jump over 2008.

Mexico and the U.S. are working together to counter a handful of increasingly violent drug cartels that supply most of the illicit drugs sold in the U.S. each year.

The arrest came the day after top U.S. Cabinet officials, led by Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, visited Mexico to underscore their shared responsibility for the country's drug-related violence.

Nearly 17,900 people have died in drug-related violence since President Felipe Calderon launched an assault on cartels after taking office in December 2006.

That violence continued Thursday in Ciudad Juarez, a border city of 1.3 million just south of El Paso, where police on Thursday found a decapitated man lying in a shopping center parking lot, his head inside a black plastic bag nearby.

Killings such as this are believed to be the result of drug cartels fighting among themselves for control of the drug trade, a lucrative business estimated to bring

\$25 billion in cash into Mexico each year.