

Alleged drug trafficker arrested in Md.

The Miami Herald
Jul. 24, 2007

MEXICO CITY --

U.S. federal agents have arrested a Mexico City businessman wanted in connection with one of the Western Hemisphere's largest trafficking rings for the main chemical ingredient in methamphetamine.

Zhenli Ye Gon was arrested in a Maryland restaurant Monday evening, four months after police discovered \$207 million at his Mexico City mansion in what U.S. officials have called the world's biggest seizure of drug cash.

Mexican Attorney General Eduardo Medina Mora called the arrest "magnificent news" and said Mexican officials had 60 days to file their legal arguments for Ye Gon's extradition. The Chinese-Mexican fugitive is wanted on organized crime, drug trafficking and weapons charges.

DEA spokesman Garrison Courtney said Ye Gon was arrested on drug smuggling and money laundering charges, adding that he was tracked down by agents and did not turn himself in.

Medina Mora said the cash seized at Ye Gon's home was connected to one of the hemisphere's largest networks for trafficking pseudoephedrine, the main ingredient in methamphetamines. He said the ring had been operating since 2004, illegally importing the substance and selling it to a drug cartel that mixed it into the crystal form and imported into the United States.

Ye Gon has said the chemicals imported by his company, Unimed Pharm Chem de Mexico SA, were legitimate and intended for use in prescription drugs to be made at a factory he was building in Toluca, just west of the Mexican capital.

Ye Gon also claimed that \$150 million of the money belonged to Mexico's ruling party, and that he was forced to store it for party officials in his mansion under threat of death during the 2006 presidential race, which Felipe Calderon narrowly won.

Calderon has called the accusations "pure fiction."

Ye Gon's U.S.-based lawyer, Ning Ye, denounced the "lousy evidence made up by Mexican government" and said Ye Gon would apply for political asylum in the United States.

Ye said DEA agents swarmed a restaurant in Silver Spring, Md., where Ye Gon was dining with another member of his legal team. The agents also raided the house where Ye Gon had been staying. Ye Gon went willingly, he said.

The Mexican Attorney General's office said Ye Gon was arrested in Rockville, Md. The discrepancy could not immediately be explained.

Ye said he was surprised by the arrest because he said he had reached a verbal agreement last week with a DEA agent in Mexico that called for Ye Gon to surrender to U.S. marshals on Thursday. In return, Ye Gon was to be tried in the United States, not Mexico, Ye said.

"Only the United States can provide the most comprehensive procedural safeguards concerning what is happening on the Mexican side," Ye said.

Ye said he will file the first motions in the legal battle at a U.S. district court in Washington early Tuesday.

Medina Mora said Ye Gon's girlfriend Michelle Wong had been detained in Las Vegas and may also face criminal charges.

Rogelio de la Garza, Ye Gon's lawyer in Mexico, said he feared that U.S. authorities may simply deport him to avoid a drawn out battle in a U.S. court.

De la Garza said he will fight for Ye Gon's immediate freedom if he arrives in Mexico, arguing the money was earned legally and that Ye Gon was not found with any narcotics.

U.S. anti-drug officials have praised Calderon's crackdown on Mexican traffickers since taking office. DEA chief Karen Tandy also applauded Mexican agents following the March money seizure.

"This is like law enforcement hitting the ultimate jackpot. But luck had nothing to do with this windfall," Tandy said, calling it "the largest single drug-cash seizure the world has ever seen."