

Mexico captures Zetas cartel leader

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Morales is escorted by soldiers during a news conference about his arrest in Mexico City on Wednesday. Reuterspix

MEXICO CITY: Mexican authorities captured Zetas drug cartel leader Omar Trevino on Wednesday, dealing a blow to the feared gang and giving the embattled government a second major arrest in a week.

The suspect, known as “Z-42,” was detained without a shot being fired by federal police and soldiers in San Pedro Garza Garcia, an upper-class suburb of the northern industrial city of Monterrey, officials said.

Trevino, who had a combined bounty of \$7 million on his head, took over the Zetas after his brother, Miguel Angel Trevino, or “Z-40,” was captured by marines in the northeastern state of Tamaulipas in July 2013.

He was considered “one of the most dangerous and bloodthirsty criminals in Mexico,” said Tomas Zeron, the investigations chief at the attorney general’s office, adding that Trevino is accused of organised crime, kidnapping and drug trafficking.

Hours after his capture, the portly cartel honcho was wearing a button-down shirt, exposing a chest tattoo, as he was flanked by two soldiers with camouflage face-paint and hauled into an armored truck at the Mexico City airport.

His fall comes on the heels of another major coup for the government, the capture last Friday of Mexico's most-wanted man, Knights Templar cartel leader Servando "La Tuta" Gomez.

The arrests give President Enrique Pena Nieto, who is on a state visit to London, major victories over drug cartels amid public anger over his government's handling of security, particularly the investigation into the disappearance and alleged murder of 43 college students.

US Drug Enforcement Administration chief Michele Leonhart congratulated Mexico, saying the arrest "strikes at the heart of the leadership structure of the Zetas."

The US State Department had offered a \$5 million reward for information leading to his arrest. Mexico offered \$2 million. His age was listed at 38 by Mexico and 41 by Washington.

The Zetas are considered one of the most cruel criminal organisations in Mexico, accused of melting enemies in a barrel of "stew", slaughtering 72 migrants in August 2010 and igniting a fire that killed 52 people in a Monterrey casino in 2011.

The group, founded by former elite soldiers, was originally the armed enforcer of the Gulf Cartel until the two groups split in 2010, unleashing a wave of violence in northern Mexico. – *AFP*