

Colombian Drug Lord Pablo Montano Arrested in Brazil

Contributed by O.Ch.
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One of the world's most hunted drug traffickers accused of shipping more than 70 tons of cocaine to the United States has been arrested in Brazil as part of a major international drug bust, Colombian police said Wednesday, May 17.

Colombian-born Pablo Rayo Montano, who had been on the run for a decade, was captured Tuesday, May 16, by Brazilian authorities in São Paulo as part of a three-year operation coordinated by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration.

More than three dozen others were arrested during simultaneous raids in the United States and Latin America, officials said.

"It's estimated the amount of cocaine supplied by this organization was enough to poison 37 million consumers," Colombia's anti-narcotics police said in a news release.

Called Twin Oceans, the operation targeted a major drug cartel that used go-fast boats and submarines to ship cocaine and other drugs from clandestine ports along Colombia's coastlines.

Officials in nine countries including Argentina, Ecuador, Costa Rica, Panama, Venezuela, Mexico and the United States have arrested more than 100 people during the investigation, and have seized 47.5 tons of cocaine, 22 pounds of heroin and 770 pounds of marijuana.

The U.S. Department of Justice considered Montano a key target, accusing him of running one of the world's largest drug smuggling operations from São Paulo, where he had lived for the past three years.

Colombian police said he began trafficking drugs in the early 1990s from the Pacific port of Buenaventura and quickly rose to prominence within the now-defunct Cali cartel alongside a top leader, Helmer "Pacho" Herrera, who was killed in a Colombian jail in 1998.

Police said that in Brazil, Montano set up a number of companies, including an art gallery in an upscale district, to launder proceeds from the monthly sale of an estimated 22 tons of cocaine to the United States and Europe.

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