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Mexico says bloodshed shows progress vs drug cartels

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MEXICO CITY (Reuters) - Mexico's attorney general said on Wednesday a surge in drug gang killings, marked by murders of police and decapitations this month, showed an army crackdown on cartels is working.

Attorney General Medina Mora said he saw no quick end to the violence and saw the army battling drug gangs in trafficking hotspots around the country for another two years.

Drug violence has spiked dramatically this year as rival cartels fight over smuggling routes into the United States and shoot at the federal police and troops President Felipe Calderon has deployed against them since December 2006.

"We have curbed the power of these organizations, reducing the number of their hitmen, bosses and weapons," Medina Mora told Mexican television.

"This has broken down the structures and that is being expressed with violence between gangs because they have to compete for a smaller pie."

Seven police officers were murdered on Tuesday in Sinaloa, home to Mexico's most-wanted drug kingpin, Joaquin "Chapo" (Shorty) Guzman. Last week, suspected hitmen dumped four human heads in ice chests in a highway in neighboring Durango.

Medina Mora said higher street prices for illegal drugs showed the crackdown was shutting off some supply routes.

"When we see a significant increase in the price to final consumers of methamphetamines and cocaine in the United States and Mexico it reflects a lack of supply, which is hurting (cartel) revenues," he said.

Calderon has made the war on drugs the centerpiece of his 18-month-old presidency, but bloodshed has spiraled since he sent out some 25,000 troops and police to crush smugglers.

Some 1,380 people have died in drug gang-related murders so far this year, a much faster pace than in 2007 which saw around 2,500 drug violence deaths over the full year.

Killings have soared in northern states such as Chihuahua, Sinaloa and Baja California Norte, but Medina Mora said the states of Tamaulipas, Nuevo Leon, Guerrero, Michoacan and the capital, Mexico City, were now calmer.

(Reporting by Cyntia Barrera Diaz, editing by Jackie Frank)

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