

Italian and American Crackdown on Mafia

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At least 80 people have been arrested in a major crackdown on the Mafia carried out by Italian and American law enforcement agencies.

Code-named 'Old Bridge', the operation focused on revived relations between organized crime families in the United States and Sicily.



About 60 of the arrests were carried out by the FBI in the US and regard members of the New York-based Gambino family, including its reputed rising star Francesco (Frank) Cali, also known as 'Frankie Boy'.

'Old Bridge' is the latest in a series of anti-Mafia offensives which began in 2005 and in 2006 allowed for the arrest of Cosa Nostra superboss Bernardo Provenzano, after over 40 years on the run, and last November of his heir in Palermo, Salvatore Lo Piccolo.

"Today's operation is the natural development of the investigations carried out by police in Palermo in recent years and which resulted in the arrests of Provenzano and Lo Piccolo," Italy's chief anti-Mafia prosecutor Pietro Grasso said.

"The evidence gathered in these investigations has shed light on the growing importance of renewed relations between Cosa Nostra families in Sicily and America, especially the Gambino family in New York," he added. Lo Piccolo had been instrumental in re-establishing ties with those Cosa Nostra families which were forced to flee Sicily in the early 1980s after they lost a bloody gang war for control of Cosa Nostra to the Corleone clan headed by Salvatore (Totò) Riina and Provenzano.

Provenzano took over as the boss of bosses after Riina was arrested in 1993 and in recent years gave his blessing to re-pacification with those families which had fled Sicily.

Among these was the Inzerillo family which in the US allied itself with the powerful Gambino family.

Thanks to Provenzano, several members of the Inzerillo family returned to Sicily and were allowed back into the business, also because the original Corleone clan had been depleted by arrests and defections.

The business primarily involved drug trafficking and money laundering, which the American 'cousins' carried out through the Gambino-Inzerillo family's various legal activities including construction and food imports.

Cali, who is married to a member of the Inzerillo family, is believed to have been responsible for relations with the families in Sicily and laundering their drug money in the US.

The FBI's investigation led to the discovery of a number of front companies operated under Cali's supervision including a law firm in Brooklyn which handled financial transactions as well as real estate investments for the family.

(Ansa News)

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