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# Mafia arrests reveal mob was 'going green'

Police in Italy have seized Mafia-linked assets worth \$1.9 billion – the biggest mob haul ever – in an operation revealing that the crime group was trying to "go green" by laundering money through alternative energy companies.

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Investigators said the assets included more than 40 companies, hundreds of parcels of land, buildings, factories, bank accounts, stocks, fast cars and luxury yachts.

Most of the seized assets were located in Sicily, home of the Cosa Nostra, and in southern Calabria, home of its sister crime organisation, the 'Ndrangheta.

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At the centre of the investigation was Sicilian businessman Vito Nicastrì, 54, a man known as the "Lord of the Wind" because of his vast holdings in alternative energy concerns, mostly wind farms.

Interior Minister Roberto Maroni called the operation "the largest seizure ever made" against the Mafia.

General Antonio Girone, head of the national anti-Mafia agency DIA, said Nicastrì was linked to Matteo Messina Denaro, believed to be Mafia's current "boss of bosses".

Investigators said Nicastrì's companies ran numerous wind farms as well as factories that produced solar energy panels.

"It's no surprise that the Sicilian Mafia was infiltrating profitable areas like wind and solar energy," Palermo magistrate Francesco Messineo told a news conference.

Officials said the operation was based on a 2,400-page investigative report and followed the arrest of Nicastrì last year.

Senator Costantino Garraffa, a member of the parliamentary anti-Mafia committee, said the Mafia was trying to break into the "new economy," of alternative energy as it sought out virgin ventures to launder money from drugs and other rackets.

In the past few years, Italian authorities have cracked down hard on the crime group that once terrified the country.

The cupola, or hierarchy, of the Sicilian Mafia has been in freefall since the mid-1990s, when police began arresting its most enigmatic and charismatic bosses.

Salvatore "The Beast" Riina, who had declared war on the state and ordered a string of killings, bombings and kidnappings, was arrested in 1993 after nearly a quarter of a century on the run.

His successor, Bernardo Provenzano, was captured in 2006 after 43 years on the run. Both Riina and Provenzano hailed from Corleone, the hill town near Palermo made famous by the Godfather movies.

Provenzano was succeeded by Salvatore "The Baron" Lo Piccolo, who was in turn arrested a year later in 2007.

Police say the circle is now closing in on Messina Denaro, who hails from the grim western Sicilian town of Castelvetro and is known as the "Playboy Boss" because he likes fast cars, women and gold watches. He has been on the run since 1993.

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