

Indicators



CLICK HERE to donate R20



Mail & Guardian online

Saturday, December 7, 2002

make this
your
homepage

BREAKING NEWS

FRONT PAGE
NATIONAL
AFRICA
INTERNATIONAL
BUSINESS
SPORT
THROUGH THE LENS
INSIGHT
NATIONAL
INTERNATIONAL
COMMENT & ANALYSIS
COLUMNISTS
EDITORIALS
KRISJAN LEMMER
MONITOR
SUPPLEMENTS
HIV/AIDS BAROMETER

PARTNER SITES

Q
ZA @ PLAY
THE TEACHER
NEWS24
REGULARS
FORUMS
NOTES & QUERIES
ZAPIRO
JOBS
GAMES
ARCHIVE SEARCH
NEWSLETTERS

WHAT'S ON

Find out what's on in your city...

Music...

Theatre...

Fine art...

Movies...

TV...

INTERNATIONAL

Berlusconi implicated in deal with godfathers

05 December 2002 07:24

Silvio Berlusconi, the Italian prime minister, was in personal contact with some of the mafia's most senior bosses, a major mafia turncoat has told investigators in a deposition revealed yesterday.

Antonino Giuffre, a powerful boss who began collaborating with magistrates in the summer, said the mafia decided to back Berlusconi's Forza Italia party from its foundation in 1993, in exchange for help in resolving the mafia's judicial problems.

The testimony was given last month to Palermo prosecutors, and published by Italian newspapers yesterday.

On Tuesday, they submitted it as evidence to a court trying Marcello Dell'Utri -- a Forza Italia senator and close associate of Berlusconi -- for alleged collusion with the mafia.

Last week, Berlusconi refused to answer prosecutors' questions when the court travelled to Rome to ask him about alleged links between his Fininvest business empire and organised crime.

Giuffre's evidence appears to add weight to the allegations of earlier mafia pentiti ("penitents") who claimed that Dell'Utri and Fininvest had been dangerously close to Sicilian crime families.

Giuffre, an aide to the mafia's supreme boss, Bernardo Provenzano, gave himself up to police in April and has reportedly been updating investigators' knowledge of the mafia's hierarchy and the evolving relationship between politics and organised crime.

Giuffre has reportedly told prosecutors that the mafia turned to Berlusconi's new party when its traditional contacts in the discredited Christian Democrat party proved unable to protect its members from the rigours of the law.

Worried godfathers sought assurances that their new political contacts would soften harsh prison conditions reserved for mafia members, help them overturn heavy prison sentences, and curtail the use of turncoat evidence and the confiscation of their ill-gotten wealth, Giuffre said.

This revolution in the justice system was expected to take 10 years, he said.

The mafia, for its part, was required to abandon its assault on the state and fade into the shadows.

Giuffre said Mafia representatives who were in contact with Berlusconi included the Palermo bosses Filippo and Giuseppe Graviano -- jailed for life in 1994 for ordering the murder of an anti-mafia priest -- and the allegedly mafia-linked builder Giovanni Ienna.

Other channels of communication passed through a mafia boss employed as a stable manager on Berlusconi's country estate, and a Sicilian-born financial police officer who moved from investigating Berlusconi's tax affairs to acting as his legal representative, he claimed.

Giuffre said of the establishment of the alleged mafia-Fininvest relationship: "Let's say, in all honesty, that it wasn't a very difficult battle."

"We didn't find -- at least, I didn't find -- any obstacle along my path," he said. "With God's help we officially embarked on the ship of Forza Italia."

Archive Search

 Go

Print edition

Daily news
[Advanced | Help]

**Get the truth
delivered
to your door,
every week**

Dating Buzz

Think you've met your match? Try out our new dating and relationships site.



Find out more...

Digital M&G

Have your M&G newspaper delivered via the web, anywhere in the world, directly to your PC!



Find out more...

Nando Dalla Chiesa, an opposition Daisy party senator, said Giuffre's declarations were not wholly new, but were nevertheless alarming.

The centre-left's muted response to their publication, he said, reflected its desire to avoid being seen as exploiting Berlusconi's legal difficulties. "But we will continue to raise the issue of Berlusconi's relations with this world," he said. "If these things were said about my own party, I would be the first person to demand an explanation."

Dell'Utri's lawyer, Enrico Trantino, dismissed the allegations as an "anthology of hearsay". He said Giuffre had perpetuated the trend that every new turncoat would attack Dell'Utri and the former prime minister Giulio Andreotti in order to earn money and judicial privileges.

A Forza Italia representative, Sandro Bondi, said the publication of the new claims threatened to poison political life in Italy. He told the Rome daily La Repubblica: "If the entire political world does not this time show a united front to oppose this disreputable manoeuvre, we should be very worried about the future of democracy in Italy."

While Berlusconi's supporters see the revelations as a judicial attempt to interfere with the sovereignty of the electorate, his opponents are equally convinced that democracy is at risk for as long as the levers of power remain in Berlusconi's hands. - Guardian Unlimited (c) Guardian Newspapers Limited 2001

[➔ Talkback: Have your say about this article](#)

QUICK LINKS

- [Today's weather](#)
- [Games](#)
- [Notes & Queries](#)

SERVICES

- [Subscribe to M&G](#)
- [Subscription queries](#)
- [Book/compare flights](#)
- [Find a job](#)
- [Send flowers](#)

[INTERNATIONAL NEWS](#) | [HOMEPAGE](#)

[CONTACT US](#) | [ABOUT US](#) | [M&G HISTORY](#) | [SUBSCRIPTIONS](#) | [ADVERTISING](#)

All material copyright Mail&Guardian.
Material may not be published or reproduced in any form without prior written permission.
[Read the Mail&Guardian's privacy policy](#)