

Nouveau riche Russians paint the town red

MOSCOW (AP) — Late every night, in an opulent nightclub that was once a KGB office, the filthy rich and the just plain rich gather to indulge in the spoils of new Russia.

Emerging from stretch limos, men in dark suits file past a guard toting a Kalashnikov rifle to enter the Up and Down Club, where admission costs \$120.

Amid Greek statuettes bathed in fluorescent light and artificial palm trees, they can watch an erotic stage show and indulge in suckling pig for \$240, pineapple flambé for \$190 or wine at up to \$995 a bottle.

A city that offered little night life during Soviet times, Moscow is now a wild frontier town after dark for those with deep pockets.

In this world of swank clubs and bustling casinos, thugs mingle with rich "biznesmeni" and \$5,000-a-night prostitutes. Young gamblers go through stacks of million-ruble chips like kids eating candy.

"There are people in these clubs who are rich beyond your imagination, richer than in Europe," said Alla, a 21-year-old hooker in a short black dress, soliciting customers in a posh nightspot on upscale Tverskaya Street.

These are the kind of "new Russians" who read *Domovoi* magazine, a glossy primer for the newly monied. Recent articles have included "Where to Send

the Heir to Study," "How to Buy a Private Jet" and "When to Wear a Tuxedo."

Only since the Soviet Union collapsed have Muscovites learned how to paint the town red. Under communism, entertainment was intended to support Soviet ideology and anything else was likely to be banned.

"Five years ago we had parties in our homes, and sometimes we'd go to a restaurant for a sort of fancy meal; that was all," said Dmitry Byezpalov, a young film production director.

Then came the Soviet collapse, private business and the birth of an "anything goes" mentality. Now Moscow can be deadly but it's far from dull after dark.

There are clubs that specialize in heavy metal, jazz and techno-pop, clubs for actors, artists and the young elite. There are a couple of unadvertised gay clubs, including one where young men swim naked in an aquarium.

"Moscow clubs are growing like mushrooms after rain," said Byezpalov, a member of three. "But unfortunately the nightlife scene is still dominated by the criminal element."

"Very few people can afford to spend honestly earned money in casinos and clubs."

In a country where the average salary is about \$100, admission to big clubs costs \$20 and up.

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— DMITRY BYEZPALOV
A film production director

Most Russians still stay home at night. But for the monied, the craziness starts around midnight.

Within shouting distance of the Kremlin, as many as 1,000 people a night pack the Cherry Casino, where a notice at the entrance warns: "Gas guns, stun guns and switchblades must be left with security."

Thick-necked men wearing gold watches hover over the 30 blackjack, craps and roulette tables of Russia's largest casino. A young player in jeans dishes out some 30 million-ruble chips — about \$6,000 worth.

Dozens of women with sullen faces and lots of cleavage cluster around the bar, wearing gold-lamé dresses and black miniskirts.

"We don't ask if they are prostitutes," casino spokeswoman Yelena Pantiushina said. "If they pay [the admission fee of \$36], we let them in."

At Night Flight, dozens of garishly clad prostitutes stand elbow to elbow, trying to score with the well-heeled men who come to drink or dance.

Alla, a medical student, visits occasionally for the chance at big money: \$200-\$300 a trick, \$5,000 to spend the night.

"Lots of girls come here after graduating because they can't find a job; it's not so bad," she said with a shrug.

Police acknowledge that Moscow's 150-plus casinos include gangsters among their clientele. But they appear to turn a blind eye to any shady characters or soliciting.

"Of course there are criminals there, but we have no proof," police spokesman Vladimir Buzkov said. "Nightclubs are simply places where the rich hang out, discuss their problems and spend time culturally."

Or just go for show.

At Silver Century, an elite restaurant converted from a czarist-era bathhouse, the nouveau riche bid every night on a single, long-stemmed rose. The weak of wallet need not participate: bidders have paid as much as \$2,500 cash, apparently just to impress their friends.

"Can you believe it?" said a disgusted waiter who gave his name only as Vladimir. "What this country is coming to, I don't know."

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Arafat moves toward violent confrontation with opponents

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip (AP) — In a move that could push Palestinians closer to civil war, Yasser Arafat cracked down on Islamic militants Monday after suicide bombings killed seven Israelis and an American college student.

Arafat's security forces arrested 112 followers of Hamas and the smaller Islamic Jihad after Sunday's deadly back-to-back bombings near two Jewish settlements in the PLO-ruled Gaza Strip.

Washington applauded Arafat's tough stance.

"We expect the Palestinian authority to take this type of concrete action against those within its jurisdiction who seek to destroy the peace process through acts of violence and terror," said State Department spokeswoman Christine Shelly.

But angry Islamic militant leaders raised the specter of civil war, apparently trying to force Arafat to back down.

"If he [Arafat] practices this behavior, we will defend ourselves by all means," warned Mahmoud Zahar, a leader of Hamas, the most powerful group opposing the faltering Israel-PLO accord.

Despite the tensions and anger, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin told negotiators to resume talks with the Palestine Liberation Organization on arranging Palestinian elections and an Israeli troop pullback to allow Palestinian self-rule in the West Bank.

The bombings wounded more than 40 people. Two of them died Monday, including Alisa M. Flatow, a 20-year-old junior at Brandeis University on vacation for Passover. She was wounded in the head while traveling to a beach resort at a Jewish settlement in the Gaza Strip.

After doctors declared her brain dead, Alisa's father, Steve, authorized an operation to remove organs for donation. In a statement, he said his daughter loved Israel and "her lasting contribution to the people of Israel is that her organs were donated for the saving of lives in need."

The mood in Israel was somber with funerals held for the victims.

"Stop killing the soldiers," wailed Pnina Regev as the body of her son, Staff Sgt. Yuval Regev, was carried on a jeep to a cemetery south of Tel Aviv for burial.

Arafat's police chief, Maj. Gen. Nasr Yousef, told The Associated Press more militants would be rounded up and some would be put on trial.

A military court convened in a hastily arranged all-night session Monday, and the three-judge panel imposed a 15-year sentence on an Islamic Jihad activist for recruiting suicide bombers. It was the first time a militant had been sentenced to jail.

Israel Radio said late Monday that Abdallah Shami, the leading Islamic Jihad figure in Gaza, would stand trial along with another group leader in a special overnight session of Arafat's military court. Palestinian sources

had earlier raised the possibility of such a trial but could not confirm it was imminent.

Arafat met with security chiefs late Monday and issued a statement condemning unspecified "external powers" fomenting instability in the Palestinian autonomy through terrorist attacks on Israelis. The statement said "several persons have been referred" to the special court for subversive activities.

It was unclear whether the sweep was window-dressing or whether Arafat meant business this time. The arrests targeted prayer leaders, intellectuals and political activists while the underground gunmen remained at large.

Islamic militants were defiant Monday.

"We will not be the first to start a civil war. But if this scenario [of trials and arrests] is implemented, do you expect people will not defend themselves?" Zahar said, speaking in an interview at his office at Gaza City's Islamic University.

"[Arafat] will face a popular uprising against his behavior toward the holy fighters," he added.

Zahar said all contacts between the Palestinian authority and the Islamic groups broke off last week.

Yousef, the PLO police chief, estimated that Hamas and Islamic Jihad had only about 150 armed fighters who could easily be disarmed by Arafat's 9,000 police.

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