

BANDITS

(Continued from Page 1)

Police officials in the Moscow region's most infamous city assured journalists at a Tuesday briefing that the Lyubertsi mob of the late 80s, known for minority bashing, murder, rape and racketeering, had virtually dispersed in the region thanks to mass liquidation efforts by local police, OMON, and MVD sponsored private security companies. Police claimed that in the last few years, many members of the Lyubertsi gang had "gone straight" and become legitimate bankers and businessmen.

The good news, they said, is that of the original Lyubertsi gang, which once numbered up to 700 20-25 year-olds, only 15 are now left. But the bad news is that police have no way of checking the so-called legality of businesses springing up all over the Moscow oblast, never mind in Moscow itself.

Semko said last year 138 criminal groups were liquidated, but admitted that it was "next to impossible" to "pin guilt on the ring-leaders" for lack of proper legislation.

"They tend to stay in the shadows," he said, and for every group "liquidated" in Moscow and its surrounding regions, a new one has sprung up to take its place.

In 1993 serious crimes, including murder, rape, armed robbery and extortion, were up 30 per cent over 1992 in the Moscow oblast, which includes 71 cities and seven million people. Further, over the last two years an altogether new crime has appeared on the regional and Moscow scene: contract killing. So far this year there have been 20 contract killings in Moscow, as compared to 100 in the whole of 1993; three to four years ago there were none reported at all.

Police attribute the rise in serious crimes to the growth of illegal business, which is allowed by loopholes in new privatisation laws and inadequate legislation overall.

"People used to be more law abiding," Semko said, "and then the private business sector grew and crime with it."

Yukhman said the Lyubertsi regional police has set up three special departments to investigate auto and apartment theft and serious

crimes. Lyubertsi in 1993 registered 66 murders and 97 assaults, as compared to 49 murders and 73 assaults in 1992. But after a day of a show of force by special forces police teams, which included breaking cement blocks on hardened stomachs, the regional police were set to prove that their cadre was tough enough to take on all the jogging-suited mafia for which Lyubertsi is particularly famous. Yukhman said his forces were often asked to participate in big Moscow raids and political demonstrations.

"We still have a handle on the criminal world," said Semko, "and the level of our professionalism is higher and more effective than in the most civilised countries."

"We uncover 85-90 per cent of all murders," he boasted, "whereas America solves only 60 per cent."

The reason for the high rate of success in solving crime, he explained, is that Russian police teams spend as long as it takes to resolve a case, while in the West unsolved cases may be buried in the archives and put into closed files after several years.