

Rabbis laundered money

By BARBARA ROSS and JUAN GONZALEZ
Daily News Staff Writers

Colombian drug cartels, in their never-ending search to conceal drug profits, have even used rabbis and tax-exempt organizations run by Orthodox and Hasidic Jews to launder millions of dollars in recent years.

While law enforcement sources differ on how widespread the practice is, a Daily News investigation has found at least three major court convictions involving rabbis and the laundering of drug money in the past five years.

Abraham Low, a Satmar rabbi from the prestigious Mogen Abraham Synagogue in Los Angeles, for example, was convicted April 7 in that city's federal court for conspiring to launder drug money.

An FBI sting caught Low telling an undercover agent of a "holy network" of fellow Satmars in New York's Diamond District, as well as in charitable institutions in Europe, that could launder up to \$5 million a week.

Low, who is married to the niece of Satmar grand Rebbe Moses Teitelbaum of New York, said his fee was 30% of the money handled.

Interviews with law enforcement officials and a review of the federal and state prosecutions also show that a network of Israeli mobsters in the U.S. serves as intermediaries for the Colombians with the religious groups.

Laundering money "is good for the yeshivas and religious institutions," said a federal prosecutor in New York who asked not to be identified. "Many of them are running on a song and a prayer so they look the other way" in order to get drug dealers' fees that can pay their bills.

"Many do it to help members avoid taxes. (With others) the attitude is, 'So long as it does not injure our community, it does not matter if drugs are being sold,'" the prosecutor added.

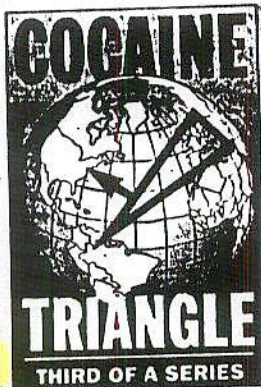
But others, such as Greg Passic, head of the money laundering division of the Drug Enforcement Administration, called the practice "not epidemic. I don't see any sponsorship or people turning their backs."

Religious organizations which get involved do so when a member of the community takes advantage of his ties, Passic said.

While religious institutions ensnared in laundering schemes are rare, federal authorities say more are being used by their members in other tax evasion schemes.

Drug dealers and others seeking to launder money are attracted to the Orthodox and Hasidic institutions for several reasons. Large cash deposits don't raise eyebrows because banks figure they're donations.

In addition, some members of these communities traditionally operate their businesses in cash — particularly



in the diamond and precious metals industries — and they have good channels for moving funds worldwide.

Other recent cases involving religious institutions are: The February 1990 arrest of Joseph Krozer, a non-practicing rabbi whose father runs a yeshiva in the Hasidic village of New Square in Rockland County, on federal money laundering charges.

In the month before his arrest, Krozer bragged to a federal informant that he was processing \$300,000 a day in drug money.

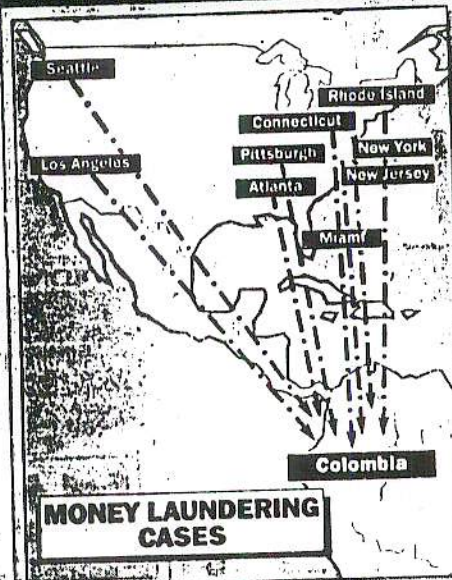
DEA agents tracked Krozer carrying bags of cash from the office of Israeli national Ahron Sharir, a 47th St. gold manufacturer under surveillance as a money launderer, to Congregation Chesed & Tzedeka, a Brooklyn schteibel (little place of worship).

Krozer, whose lawyer said he didn't know Sharir was laundering drug money, was sentenced to a year in prison after helping authorities indict Sharir.

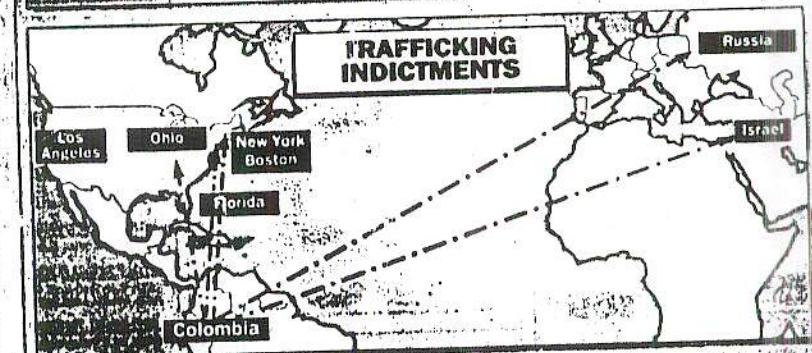
Both Sharir and Krozer were part of a giant money laundering operation that

PASSING THE BUCK

Areas of major federal and state indictments handed up in the past few years



- 1984:** Mesivta Tifereth Jerusalem ring led by Mendell Goldberger, David Vanounou.
- March 1988:** Adi Tal ring's operation stretched from Newark to Los Angeles to Seattle rabbi.
- February 1990:** Joseph Krozer in New York and Miami, tied to Ahron Sharir and Duvan Arboleda.
- March 1990:** Ahron Sharir, Uhu Ichikou ring: \$300 million through Diamond District in New York.
- March 1992:** Duvan Arboleda, Barry Slomovitz, Igor Lomanov, Mark Natanzon ring: \$3 billion in the Diamond District in New York and through precious metals companies in Pittsburgh, Rhode Island, Atlanta and Miami.
- May 1993:** Sdon Jacob Abenham, David Vanounou, Adi Tal ring: Through New York and Greenwich, Conn.



- 1987:** David Vanounou: New York.
- April 1988:** Shmuel David, Joseph Zalmonovich ring: From Colombia to Florida, Ohio and New York, headquartered in Boston and tied to Johnny Atlas gang in New York.
- January 1992:** Benjamin Zeev, Leo Markonetti ring: From Colombia to Los Angeles to New York.
- February 1993:** 1,100 kilos of Colombian cocaine seized near St. Petersburg, Russia. Shipment linked to importing firm in Israel and Russian mobster in New York. (No indictments yet)

organizations that got kickbacks for those checks.

His Colombian clients paid Sharir a fee that was as high as 6% of the money he moved. And Sharir started living the good life. He moved from Queens to a \$500,000 house in Woodmere, bought a Jaguar and jewels for Miriam, and invested more than \$2 million in the stock market.

However, as the volume of cash that he moved soared in the fall of 1988, Sharir got into trouble with the Colombians and federal investigators.

First, the Colombians complained that \$28 million was missing. Sharir hired a fellow Israeli, Lihor Ichilov, to track it through a maze of paper work that had accumulated. Ichilov also flew to Panama for him, to open two bank accounts and create two businesses.

Then, in December 1988, IRS and Customs agents, alerted by bank officials who were suspicious of Sharir's enormous cash deposits, stormed into his office with a search warrant.

Even as agents packed up boxes of records and their dogs sniffed his premises for drugs, the ever resourceful Sharir managed to transfer \$600,000 from his bank accounts so that the government could not seize it with the rest of his assets.

A few weeks later, Sharir brazenly set up two new companies and opened four new midtown offices to continue his laundering operation.

"Did you think the government wouldn't know that you had moved and were continuing in business?" Jack Hill, one of Saccoccia's lawyers, asked Sharir.

"I changed the system of money laundry and I thought they (were) never going to find (it)," Sharir replied.

Federal agents eventually put Sharir's new businesses under surveillance after the 1988 raid and soon noticed a man who looked like a Hasidic rabbi regularly visiting Sharir's office with a suitcase.

Agents followed the "rabbi" to Brooklyn, where they learned his name: Joseph Krozer.

Krozer told a Drug Enforcement Administration informant that he traded checks for about \$300,000 a day in cash in the Diamond District.

Wearing pasted-on side curls, Krozer was arrested in February 1990. DEA agents found five passports on him, papers suggesting that he was Sharir's partner in some businesses and \$280,000 in the trunk of his car.

Krozer's lawyer, Stanley Lupkin, said his client did not know Sharir was getting drug money: "He just thought (Sharir) was a jeweler who dealt in cash."

However, Krozer pleaded guilty to money laundering and was sentenced to a year and a day after helping to make a case against Sharir and Ichilov. On the eve of his trial in January 1991, Ichilov fled to Israel but was convicted in absentia.

U.S. District Court Judge Richard Owen, who presided at Ichilov's trial, said at the time, "Mr. Ichilov was more prepared to deal with the fallout from a Patriot and a SCUD missile than he was with American justice."

Drug cartels got stung by Feds

ALMOST EVERY week from May 1991 to July 1992, the men sent by David Vanounou would strut into Prism Financial Services in Manhattan, or the firm's small Greenwich, Conn., office, carrying briefcases stuffed with cash.

The money — as much as half a million dollars per trip — belonged to the Cali drug cartel in Colombia. It had been collected from cocaine street sales in New York and

then entrusted for laundering to Vanounou, a 57-year-old Moroccan-born Israeli citizen, convicted drug traf-



JUAN GONZALEZ

ficker and sometime federal informant.

It would be more than a year before Vanounou discovered that the friendly officers of Prism who laundered more than \$22.5 million for

his ring, were undercover federal agents.

In the end, it was the FBI's Hebrew translator who betrayed the sting, making it possible for the ringleaders to escape.

The amazing story of the Prism sting has been culled from federal court records and interviews with prosecutors and defense attorneys.

In the spring of 1991, Vanounou, who once ran an electronics store on Church St. in lower Manhattan, and Raymond Chochana, another long-time New York drug dealer and money launderer living in Israel at the time,

began a new laundering ring.

They enlisted a group of Israeli immigrants in the U.S., and New York business people. Among those who were later indicted who have pleaded guilty in the case was a Brooklyn antiques dealer and a Bank Leumi vice president from Queens.

The group's task was to move cash from drug sales into legitimate bank accounts and then out of the country.

The ring's Colombian boss was Szion Jacob Abenhaim, code-named "Zero," a Moroccan who lived in Cali and

holds dual Israeli and Colombian citizenship.

Another key player was Adi Tal, a handsome, young former El Al Airlines employee who pleaded guilty in 1989, in U.S. District Court in Newark, to moving \$10 million in Colombian drug money out of the country.

In the Newark case, Tal got 52 months in jail. No sooner did he get out of federal prison in Danbury, Conn., than he proceeded to join the Vanounou-Abenhaim ring.

At Prism, meanwhile, everything was going smoothly — that is, until federal agents started wiretapping phone conversations and found, to their dismay, that ring members were talking in Hebrew.

The FBI hired a New Hebrew interpreter from New Jersey, Neil Elefant, to trans-

late the tapes. In May 1992, Elefant was shocked to recognize a voice on one tape as that of Jack Zebede, a New York antiques dealer and family friend.

Elefant could tell that Zebede, who had been a courier for only one \$500,000 cash delivery to Prism, was a minor player. Elefant became torn between his duty to the government and his loyalty to another Jew, according to his lawyer.

The interpreter consulted his rabbi, Elazar Teitz, who advised him to warn Zebede. Elefant then held a secret meeting not only with Zebede but with Alex Adjmi, one of the gang's main operatives, alerting them to the sting. Zebede and Adjmi immediately scampered to the coast of Jersey. Neil Elefant, in trans-

their own hides and turned in Elefant as the government turncoat.

The feds arrested Elefant for obstruction of justice. He pleaded guilty, but subsequently gave an interview to an Israeli newspaper, complete with photos of what prosecutors called "a highly sensitive and confidential FBI memorandum" taken from the FBI office.

In his own defense, Elefant claimed that he "began to be disturbed by the investigators' eagerness to embroil Israel in a story of (money) laundering."

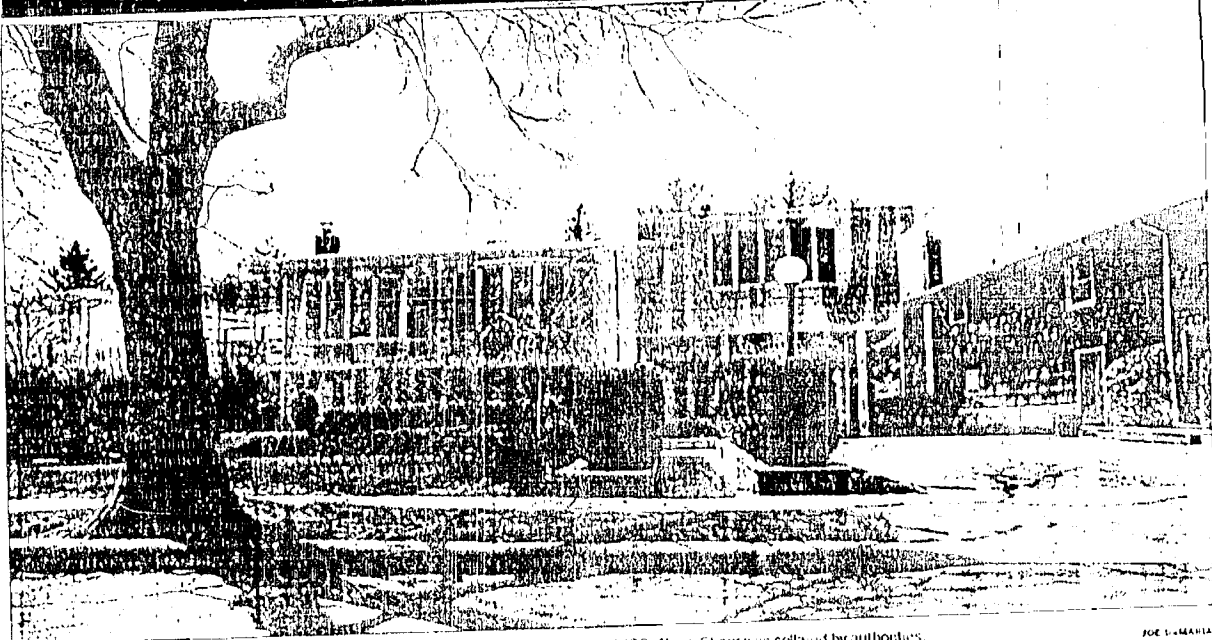
Unimpressed with Elefant's moral quandary, Federal Judge Kevin Duffy sentenced him to 18 months in prison.

But the Israeli newspaper article alerted ringleaders

and forced a sudden end to the Prism sting. The feds nabbed Abenhaim, the boss, in Switzerland. Extradited to Connecticut, he has since pleaded guilty to two counts of money laundering and is cooperating. Twelve others were indicted last May, and all who were arrested pleaded guilty to at least one count.

But key players like Vanounou, Chochana and Tal managed to escape to Israel, which, like many countries, does not extradite its citizens.

Vanounou's escape was especially embarrassing. His eight-year prison sentence for a 1987 drug trafficking sentence had been reduced by the feds in return for his becoming an informant for the Drug Enforcement Administration.



WALKING his dog outside his \$500,000 home in Woodmere, L.I., one March morning in 1990, Aaron Sharir was collared by authorities.

JOE L. MARINIA

The money launderer sang

By BARBARA ROSS and JUAN GONZALEZ

Daily News Staff Writers

Any fool can sniff cocaine. It takes a real pro like Aaron Sharir to know that bags of cocaine-smudged dollars give off such a stench that after a few hours of counting them, your workers need to break for fresh air.

Sharir, an Israeli who operated a jewelry business in New York's Diamond District on 47th St. during the 1980s, should know — he laundered millions of drug dollars for years.

His underworld career came to an abrupt halt one March morning in 1990 when he was arrested as he walked his dog outside the family home in Woodmere, L.I.

He has since admitted to laundering more than \$200 million for Colombian dealers between September 1988 and March 1990.

But Sharir's main claim to fame has come since then — not as a money launderer but as a canary, exposing what authorities are coming to know as the new Cocaine Triangle, a criminal alliance of Colombians, Israelis and Russians.

For the last three years, he has been chipping away at federal trials in New York, Rhode Island and Arizona, helping to put away more than a dozen launderers, including one of the biggest ever tried in the U.S.: Stephen Saccoccia, a Providence, R.I., precious metals dealer sentenced to 600 years in jail for laundering more than \$300 million for the Medellín cartel.

And Sharir's information helped make a case in Manhattan Federal Court against Duvan Arboleda, the chief Cali cartel money launderer in the U.S.



Some 35 people, including Arboleda, who escaped to Colombia, were indicted in 1992 on charges of money laundering in the Diamond District.

Two of those indicted with Arboleda were Russian mobsters — and wiretaps turned up conversations about setting up potential money-laundering work in Russia.

Sharir's testimony also helped prosecutors seize \$10 million in assets that belonged to the family and associates of Cali kingpin Jose Santacruz Londono.

But his biggest contribution has been his exposure

of "He gave us insights into how (laundering) operated in the (gold) billion industry," said Peter Farrell, head of the IRS' criminal investigation division in Manhattan.

Praise like that will help Sharir when he is finally sentenced. He's out on bail now after spending less than two years in prison.

The story of how Sharir made \$3 million laundering cash for Colombia's drug lords is gleaned from his testimony and sworn depositions he has given in those cases.

Through his lawyer, Ivan Fisher, Sharir refused to talk to the Daily News. His ex-wife, Miriam, who was arrested with him, also refused to discuss Sharir.

"That's why I divorced him ... to get away from him and his friends. I like to keep it that way," she said.

Sharir was born into a middle-class family in Iraq and reared in Israel, where he served in the military before coming to the U.S. on a tourist visa in 1979 with \$6,000 in his pocket.

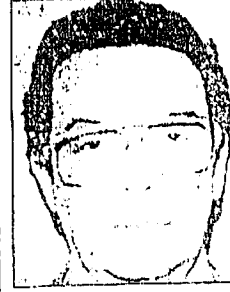
He came to attend the family wedding of an American who helped Sharir start his own business making gold chains. That first year, Sharir says, he made a \$250,000 profit.

The next year, the immigration and Naturalization Service raided his factory, looking for illegal aliens. Agents took Sharir into custody because he had no green card, but, inexplicably, they released him immediately.

Soon Sharir was laundering as much as \$100,000 a day for a fellow 47th St. jeweler who eventually introduced



TARGETED: Duvan Arboleda (left), the chief Cali cartel money launderer in the U.S., fled to Colombia after he was indicted in 1992 for money laundering. Money launderer Eduardo Lora fled to Brazil.



In 1985, Sharir had his second brush with the law. He was convicted of defrauding a bank of \$1 million. After making restitution, he walked away with a \$250 fine and community service. But his money-laundering business really took off in 1988, when he allowed Saccoccia to work out of his W. 47th St. office.

Testifying in broken English at Saccoccia's trial, Sharir said he received cash, wrapped in rubber bands and stuffed into cartons and canvas bags three times a week. Roy Lopez, a Colombian emigre, supervised the operation after arriving each Monday from Miami with coded instructions, faxed from Colombia, on where to wire the proceeds.

Sharir said cash deliveries on some days were as high as \$1 million. He said that even using counting machines, it took three hours to tally \$1 million in \$1, \$5, \$10 and \$20 bills.

"The money had a very strong scent ... which the employees couldn't stand. They couldn't count the money for more than two, three hours ... It was the scent of drugs," Sharir said in the Londono case. Sharir's job was to get the cash out of the U.S. and make it look legal. He did this in a lot of ways:

- He deposited cash directly into banks as if it were company income, or he bought planes later used by drug dealers.

- He bought gold at inflated prices and sold it at a loss to other dealers participating in the scheme. The paper trail was doctored to hide excess cash, which became a check or wire transfer deposited into Sharir's accounts here and abroad.

- Sometimes, Sharir traded the cash for checks drawn on the accounts of bona fide businesses and religious

saw more than 50 people busted in the Diamond District and a half dozen U.S. cities in 1992 for laundering up to \$3 billion in drug money for Medellin cartel launderer Duvar Arboleda.

■ Federal prosecutors in Newark broke a \$10 million cross-country "smurfing" operation which was operated by Israeli national Adi Tal for Cali cartel money launderer Jose Stroh. Among members of Tal's ring who pleaded guilty in 1989 was Rabbi Sholom Levitin, head of a Lubavitcher community center in Seattle.

"I meant well. You live and you learn," said Levitin. He told the court he believed the \$100,000 in cash he moved from Tal's associates was from Iranian Jews trying to get their money out of Iran. Levitin got 30 days community service.

But Tal knew where the money came from.

Part of a network of Israeli criminals who recruit launders around the country, he popped up again last year in a Colombian cartel federal laundering indictment in Connecticut but escaped to Israel before he could be arrested.

■ The first known drug-connected laundering indictment of a religious institution was in 1984, when the Manhattan district attorney's office broke a ring operating out of the city's oldest yeshiva, Mesivta Tifereth Jerusalem in lower Manhattan.

Prosecutors said the yeshiva earned \$2 million in fees by laundering \$23 million, some for merchants seeking to evade taxes and the rest for the Cali cartel.

Once again, Stroh was the Colombian receiving the money, and another Israeli gangster, David Vanounou, acted as intermediary.

Mesivta member Mendell Goldberger, a member of the Satmar sect, dealt with Vanounou, who gave Goldberger cash and checks bought with drug money to deposit into the Mesivta's accounts, according to a law enforcement source. Vanounou was later convicted of drug trafficking and money laundering.

Goldberger pleaded guilty to falsifying bank records and got five years probation.

Nine people and six firms were convicted of minor tax violations, including Rabbi Yisrael Eichelman, the executive vice president of the financially struggling Mesivta, and the school's accountant.

The Mesivta case, according to one knowledgeable source, "opened a Pandora's box that leads everywhere. They were like a Woolworth's. They did it for so many people."

Just last week, another money laundering case - this one not involving drug money - broke involving Camp Ada Yerikom, a Satmar facility in Rockland County.

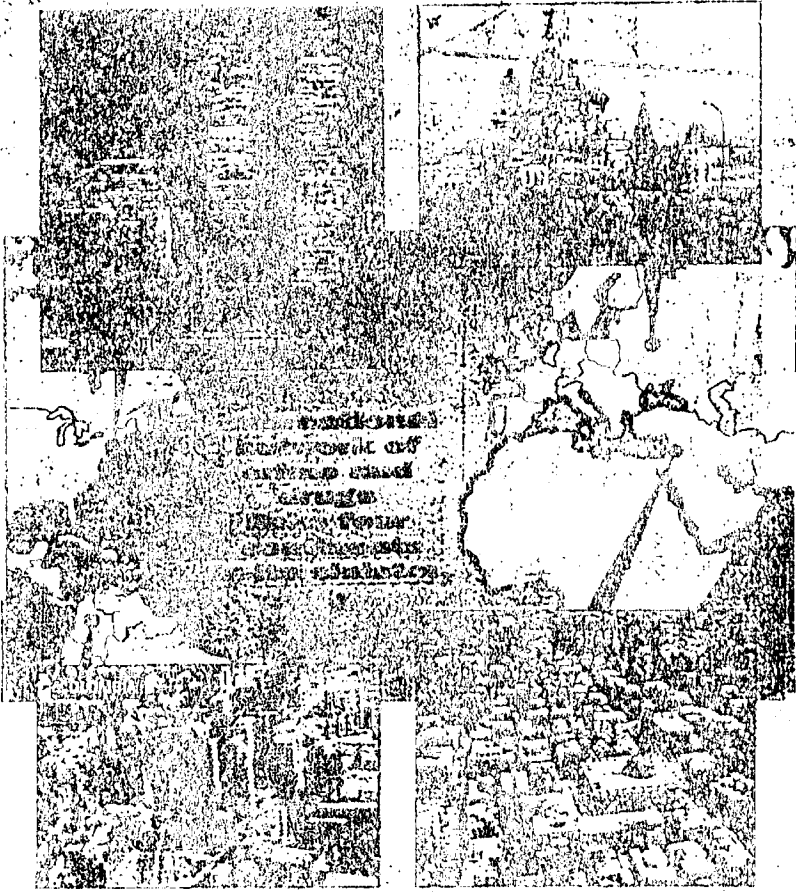
Multi-ethnic group invades drug biz

This is the first part of a series on the new Cocaine Triangle based in New York City, a worldwide network of Colombian druglords and Israeli and Russian mobsters.
By **BARBARA HOOZ**
and **JUAN GONZALEZ**
Daily News Staff Writers

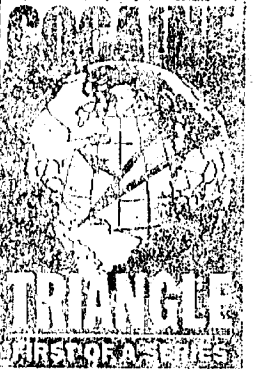
The Colombians control the cocaine.
The Israelis launder the money and have been players in the drug traffic.
And the Russians are there for hire.
It's the new Cocaine Triangle — and New York is at the center of its international reach.
Much of the activity here involves the laundering of billions of dollars of drug money through the Diamond District and gold markets.
There also have been recent cases in which Israelis and Colombians used religious institutions and rabbis in Brooklyn and Seattle to launder their illicit profits.
A six-week series by the Daily News of dozens of federal drug-related cases — and interviews with investigators — shows that the ties among the Colombians, Israelis and Russians are far more extensive than commonly known.

At their root is the tricky proposition of converting ill-gotten gains into usable money. Two new methods have surfaced:
1. The drug dealers are shipping more money directly to Colombia, where currency traders charge as much as 25% to convert it into financial instruments that can be deposited in banks.
2. They're sending treasure hoards of gold to Colombia via flight attendants and other airline personnel.
After being shipped to Italy and reworked into jewelry in Milan, the gold is returned to the U.S. via Colombia — but at a discount because of Colombia's favored-nation trade status.

Gold industry sources said U.S. demand for gold for jewelry (which consumes about 90% of the gold used here) jumped from 221 to 240 metric tons from 1983 to 1993.
Greg Pasic, chief of the federal Drug Enforcement Administration's money-laundering division, said the gold scam "might be the tip of the iceberg."
"What you have is a commonality of occupations," he said. "The Russians and Israelis are vendors. They provide a financial advantage the cartels need. It's a franchise type of setup."
Law enforcement sources said they're seeing an increasing number of Israeli



and Russian gangsters who have "graduated" from bootlegging to drug trafficking.
Authorities expect the Russians' involvement in drugs to grow as they get better organized and tap into an enormous supply of poppies, hemp and marijuana growing



in the former Soviet republics.
A new wave of Russian gangsters is coming here from Moscow, they say, to

take order on more loosely organized, Brooklyn-based crime rings of Jewish Jews — some of whom got here via Israel.
The FBI and DEA have assigned agents to keep full-time watch on the Russian gangs here and in Europe. And New York's FBI office is setting up a Russian group.
One of those being watched closely is Vyacheslav Ivanov, a leader among Moscow's crime bosses, who slipped into the U.S. last year. Known as Yaponchik, his mission is believed to be fashioning the Russian gang here into a more lethal and cohesive organization.
The court cases reviewed by The News — and interviews with more than two dozen law enforcement officials — show that Colombians are using others to launder money in the U.S. because they think this activity poses too great a risk for them. One count of laundering drug money exposes a suspect to a 20-year prison sentence.
"They have turned to businesspeople — like jewelers," said COCAINE Page 10

Multi-ethnic ring is a key player in the city drug biz

COCAINE FROM P. 2

in New York — who are willing to take a bit of a chance," Pasic said.
Israelis and Russian Jews in the 47th St. Diamond District are logical money-laundering agents for the Colombian cartels, said Peter Farrell, chief of the criminal investigations division of the IRS in Manhattan.
For years, the DEA has noted that Israeli expatriates in the Colombian cities of Cali and Barranquilla have been "a very major presence" as cartel money launderers.
One former prosecutor said the jewelry business is prime ground because "cash is king" there. Farrell said religious institutions also provide good cover because they, too, handle lots of cash contributions.
Several New York-based Israeli jewelers who have pleaded guilty to laundering money have helped prosecutors break bigger money-laundering rings led by Colombians such as Duvan Arboleda, a fugitive accused of exporting \$3 billion from the U.S.
One such jeweler, Ahron Sharir, is credited with giving investigators critical insight into how gold bullion sales can be manipulated to hide the flow of drug funds.
Most Israelis convicted in recent years have been focused on money laundering, but several have been convicted of dealing directly in drugs and murder.
These include more than a half dozen members of the vi-

olent Joanny Atlas gang, New York, which imports heroin and cocaine. After this killed several members in disputes over drugs, a gang killed Atlas in 1990.
One Israeli tied to the gang was Shmuel David, a Massachusetts-based entrepreneur now serving 30 years for operating one of the large cocaine rings ever found, New England.
Russian Jews, who can direct to the U.S. through Israel as political refugees and were involved in bootlegging and credit card fraud, have branched out into dealing.
One example: Boris N. Feld, a Russian Jew, not 1949 in the office of a Brighton Beach, Brooklyn, pet team company, is now in custody in Manhattan, accused of leading a gang that smuggled heroin through Poland.
Prosecutors said Nayfeld, Staten Islander and former welfare recipient who has two homes, also is linked to Russia's largest drug business made in St. Petersburg 1 year.
Russian organized crime is expanding, looking for partners and markets.
"The Russians are open so many damned companies in the U.S., we have no freak idea what's going on," said one Customs Service official.
U.S. law enforcement sources said Russian, Italian and Colombian mobsters recently and two meetings in Eastern Europe to plan how to divide crime in former Communist countries.
"It's a horse race to who takes control first, source said.

Russian gangs up on B'klyn

By BARBARA ROSS
Daily News Staff Writer

In Russian, Yaponchik means little Japanese one. In Brooklyn, it means trouble — because he's Moscow's little John Gotti and he's here.

The FBI is keeping tabs on Yaponchik, the nickname for Vyacheslav Ivankov, who they say represents the "emergence of professional" gangsters from Russia.

Seen around town with beautiful women and bodyguards, he is believed to have entered the U.S. under an assumed name about 18 months ago to organize Russian criminals in Brighton Beach and elsewhere into a more lethal force.

They're slowly building a

GOTTI
FROM PAGE 2

chain to the U.S. and back," said Jim Moody, the FBI's organized crime chief.

Until now, the estimated 2,000 hard-core Russian gangsters in the U.S. have been like the mob called the Brighton Beach Boys, parlaying their political refugee status into careers in credit card, bootleg gas and money laundering scams.

But the well-dressed, teetotaling Yaponchik is believed to have them aiming higher.

Sergei Dontsov, head of organized crime for the Moscow police, said that last summer the top mob bosses there picked Yaponchik to help end a spate of street violence.

"He would reestablish order, consolidate the powerful organized groups and strangle these small-time hoodlums who carry out the shootings in the street," he quoted the mobsters as saying.

American law enforcement and other sources said Yaponchik seems to be doing the same in Brooklyn — where they attribute several recent killings to his efforts.

The wake for one victim in January was described by one person who attended as "a scene out of 'The Godfather.'"

"There were 20 black Mercedes around the block, about 40 bulky, high-chested guys in sunglasses and leather coats, their wives in mink and diamonds, and one little guy, probably the FBI, videotaping the whole thing," the witness said.

According to published accounts in the U.S. and Russia, Yaponchik, 53, was a "vor v zakonye" — "thief in law" — a mob boss who settles disputes and divides the crime turf.

Peter Grinenko, a former NYPD detective who is now a consultant on Russian crime, said a "thief in law" cannot work in any legitimate business, cannot plea bargain when caught and must spend some time in prison.

TALE OF THE TALE



Vyacheslav Ivankov



John Gotti

53.

MOSCOW.

Manhattan Beach, Brooklyn.

Yaponchik (means little

Japanese one), Little John Gotti.

Russian (but looks Japanese).

Booze, the FBI.

53.

Home Address

Howard Beach, Queens.

Present Address

Marion Federal Penitentiary.

Nicknames

Teflon Don, Dapper

Don, Gona Don.

Persuasion

Italian.

Passion

Flying, wiretaps, snitches, the

FBI.

Vor v zakonye, or "thief in law"

— equivalent of Godfather

(makes no secret of being a full-

time gangster).

Favorites

Metropol Hotel in Moscow. The

Russian Samovar on E. 52d St.

and Brighton Beach spots

favored by emigre Russians.

Seen around town with beautiful

women and bodyguards in tow.

Head of Gambino crime family

(told everyone he was salesman

for a plumbing contracting com-

pany). Now a federal prisoner.

Bergin Hunt & Fish Club in

Queens, Raritan

Social Club in Little Italy, Sparks

Steak House on E. 46th St., Da

Nol Italian restaurant on York

Ave. Seen around town with

beautiful women and body-

guards in tow.

College educated. Went from

Moscow thug to major mobster.

Loyal to friends, deadly to ene-

emies. Sent to Siberia in 1982

for robbery. While in prison

became mob boss. Released in

1991, he split for America to

organize Russian gangsters

known as the Brighton Beach

Boys.

Fashion Highlights

Said to be a dandy with a neatly

trimmed beard. No sandals with

socks for this guy. Currently

accompanied by bodyguards in

leather coats and sunglasses.

High school dropout. Went from

Brownsville thug to major mob-

ster. Loyal to friends, deadly to

enemies, has a photographic

memory, a devourer of books.

Arrests include: public intoxica-

tion, car theft, bookmaking, gun

possession, burglary, hijacking

clothing trucks from Kennedy

Airport, racketeering, murder.

Favors expensive, custom-made

double-breasted topcoats and

pinstripe suits, floral silk ties

and pocket squares in shades of

olive and paprika, Italian shoes,

diamond pinky rings. Silvery

mane exquisitely tended.

— Corky Siemaszko

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 27, 1994

COCAINE TRIANGLE

BUST JUST TIP OF ICEBERG

Russian cops seized the 18 tons of canned "meat" in Vyborg, a border town near Finland, in February 1982.

Opening the 29,000 tin containers labeled as food for desperate consumers, the cops turned up the largest cocaine stash in Russian history — 1,100 kilos.



JUAN GONZALEZ

Destined for a trading firm in St. Petersburg, the cans had been shipped from Colombia to Finland, then carried Russia by train.

But the trail of the case has led back to New York City — a graphic and remarkable example of how locally based Russian and Israeli mobsters have quietly forged ties with the world's biggest drug dealers.

One of the Soviet Union's Brigade Beach change gangs, with their elaborate gasoline tax, insurance and credit card scams.

But a sixweek Daily News investigation has revealed that Russian and Israeli mobsters have been branching out during the past few years into new joint drug and/or money laundering operations with Colombian traffickers.

Russian detectives, alerted by Israeli police intelligence, immediately arrested a customs officer and a Russian-emigre Israeli citizen in whom the containers were addressed.

We have all heard of mushrooming organized crime gangs in Russia since the collapse of the Soviet Union. And we know about Brooklyn's Brighton Beach change gangs, with their elaborate gasoline tax, insurance and credit card scams.

Colt it Free Trade for the Underworld — complete with marketing conferences.

There's information that meetings did occur between the Russians and Italians (in Europe), and we believe with the Colombians, said a U.S. Customs source.

As for the Israeli, according to a top U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration official, there has been "a long and fruitful relationship" between the Colombian cartels and retired Israeli intelligence officers who created arms and drug smuggling networks in the early 1960s, as well as with some South American Jewish refugee businessmen who historically have performed money laundering services for both the

COCAINE TRIANGLE

ICEBERG

Modellin and Cali cartels. Certainly, Russian police are worried. With criminal gangs there already threatening anarchy, the Yelstin government has set up its own organized crime strike force. They're called The Gomborgables.

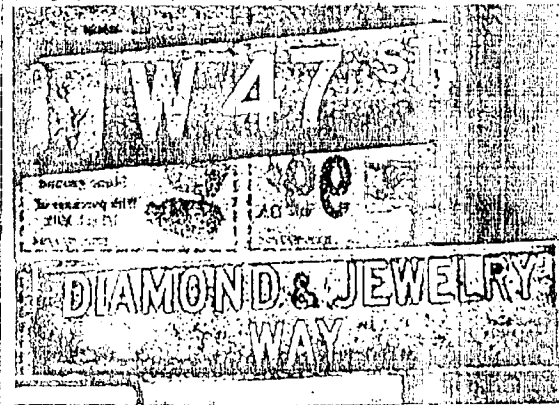
In 1982, more than 50 underground drug facilities employing some 4,000 Russians were uncovered.

Forty per cent of the movement of capital in Russia is now linked with narcotics, Col. Valentin Rozanov, former head of Moscow's anti-drug squad, told Journalist Stephen Handelman, author of "Comrade Criminal," a soon-to-be-published book on Russia's criminal gangs.

It used to be that heroin shipments passing through Russia from Central Asia to Europe were the only concern.



FEDERAL INFORMANT Michael Markowitz, an alleged homicide victim of the Johnny Altas gang, is aided by Emergency Medical Service personnel after being shot while in his Rolls Royce in Brooklyn in 1989.



THE DIAMOND DISTRICT on W. 47th St., through which much drug money is funneled.