

Oral Questions

rate a declaration could constitute by prejudicing current negotiations?

[English]

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, since this morning, we have been in touch with our Chargé in Beirut. As the hon. member has mentioned, the embassy is occupied by a Canadian citizen of Lebanese origin, Mr. Haymour, with a group of companions, who have made a series of demands upon the Canadian and Lebanese authorities. There is no doubt at the present time that lives are at stake. Among those lives are nine members of the Canadian Embassy staff. I also wish to mention that I have been in touch personally with the foreign minister of Lebanon who has assured me that the Lebanese authorities are making every possible effort to secure a safe release of all the hostages. They are presently in negotiation with the persons who are holding as hostages these Canadian and Lebanese citizens.

Mr. Wagner: Given the situation that the minister has explained, and given the fact that these individuals may not be political terrorists in the commonly accepted understanding of that term, can the minister explain how security can be so easily breached in a strife-torn country beset with continuing political turmoil?

Mr. MacEachen: As the hon. member may know, Mr. Speaker, the embassy is, on a daily basis, the place to which many persons go who are seeking to come to Canada. People have access to the embassy for consular business. I conclude that the Lebanese people who are being held were persons in the embassy for business and, of course, the embassy staff were providing services in the normal way. I may add that the female members of the embassy staff were released. However, it is impossible to apply total security when the embassy is open, as this embassy is, to do business with the public.

Mr. Wagner: What assurance can the minister give the House and the country that security at all Canadian embassies and diplomatic premises around the world is being strengthened in the light of escalating acts of terrorism?

Mr. MacEachen: Mr. Speaker, I can give the hon. member and the House assurance that prior to this present incident, security measures had been re-examined. In various embassies throughout the world, additional steps have been taken to meet the increased problems that are being faced throughout the world. However, the hon. member will realize that it is impossible, in a situation where the public has access, to provide totally effective security, as this incident has shown.

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VETERANS AFFAIRS**DATE OF INTRODUCTION OF LEGISLATION GRANTING PENSIONS TO EX-PRISONERS OF WAR**

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, may I direct a question to the Minister of Veterans Affairs. In view of the fact that last Friday the cabinet

[Mr. Wagner.]

had on its agenda the question of implementing the seventh report of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs having to do with Canadian veterans who were prisoners of war, can the minister say whether a favourable decision was reached and, if so, when the appropriate legislation will be introduced?

Hon. Daniel J. MacDonald (Minister of Veterans Affairs): I appreciate the hon. member's question but I shall not be able to make a statement today.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): May I ask whether there will be an announcement this week?

Mr. MacDonald (Cardigan): I anticipate there will be.

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PENITENTIARIES**DATE AND COST OF TRANSFERRING PRISONERS FROM BRITISH COLUMBIA TO NEW BRUNSWICK**

Mr. John Reynolds (Burnaby-Richmond-Delta): Mr. Speaker, I should like to direct my question to the Solicitor General. Since Air Canada has refused to fly the prisoners involved in last week's hostage drama at B.C. Penitentiary to Dorchester, and arrangements have now been made with the Ministry of Transport to do so, will the minister tell us exactly when these prisoners will be transported and at what cost?

Hon. Warren Allmand (Solicitor General): It is correct that arrangements are being made to transport these inmates by government aircraft, but I cannot give him precise information as to when they will be flown to New Brunswick. I can say, though, that it is likely these arrangements will be less expensive than had the men been transported on Air Canada aircraft.

Mr. Reynolds: Since Andy Bruce is scheduled to be returned to B.C. after a cooling off period and Dwight Lucas will have to be returned for trial on a charge of attempted murder, how does the Solicitor General intend to carry out this new arrangement of transporting prisoners back and forth? Is it his intention to buy a plane for the Canadian penitentiary service for just this purpose?

Mr. Allmand: This is not a new practice in the penal service. We have been transporting prisoners for years so as to break up different cliques and gangs in the penitentiaries and ensure better security in our prisons.

BRITISH COLUMBIA—ALLEGATION GUARDS ARRANGED FOR KNIVES FOR INMATES TO EMBARRASS DIRECTOR

Mr. John Reynolds (Burnaby-Richmond-Delta): In view of the fact that Gary Bannerman, a broadcaster in British Columbia, made statements on Saturday which said the staff had arranged for knives for the inmates to embarrass the director, can the minister tell us if there is any truth to these statements and whether his department has found there were inside people involved to embarrass the director of that institution, whose resignation has been called for by all the guards in that institution?