

NATION BRIEFS

Canada told to seek clemency in Montana murder case

OTTAWA (Reuters)—A Canadian court ordered the federal government on Wednesday to help seek clemency for a Canadian citizen facing a death sentence in the United States for murdering two people.

Ronald Smith, who has admitted to the 1982 murders, won his case before the Federal Court of Canada to have the Canadian government plead for clemency on his behalf.

Smith was set to be executed in Montana and had argued that Canada's Conservative government was violating his human rights by refusing to intervene.

Canada, which does not have a death penalty, has traditionally intervened on behalf of Canadians facing execution in other countries. It also does not send people back to death-penalty states without assurances there will be no execution.

In 2007, however, the minority Conservative government, elected on a platform of law and order, said it would no longer seek clemency for death row inmates sentenced by what it called democratic jurisdictions.

Federal Court Judge R.L. Barnes ruled on Wednesday that Ottawa must "take all reasonable steps to support the applicant's case for clemency before the governor of Montana."

Ottawa to investigate Ticketmaster complaints

OTTAWA (Reuters)—The government has asked the Competition Bureau to investigate complaints that Ticketmaster diverts tickets to its reselling subsidiary, which then sells them for far higher prices.

"The government will not stand idly by when there is potential that companies are engaging in uncompetitive practices that are hurting consumers," Industry Minister Tony Clement told Parliament on Wednesday.

"And that's why I am referring this matter directly to the Competition Bureau for their review."

The province of Ontario said on Monday it was looking into Ticketmaster's practices, and in particular how tickets found their way to the TicketsNow reselling subsidiary.

Last month, an Ontario man filed a \$500 million lawsuit against Ticketmaster, claiming the company broke the law by reselling tickets at inflated prices.

That same month, Ticketmaster settled with the state of New Jersey to resolve more than 2,000 complaints over how it had handled ticket sales for Bruce Springsteen concerts, and Canadians are now complaining about inflated prices to hear Leonard Cohen.

"I want an investigation to determine whether Ticketmaster is abusing its position as a ticket seller by bumping people off their site to another site which sells the tickets at a multiple of many times higher than the original price," Clement said.

He said the power to refer such cases to the Competition Bureau had "been used sparingly in the past but I think it's time that we start using it a little bit more often."

Kandahar security worsened in late 2008: Ottawa

OTTAWA (Reuters)—Security in the southern Afghan region of Kandahar deteriorated in late 2008 as Taliban militants stepped up their attacks and crime spiked, the government said in a report on Wednesday.

Canada has 2,700 soldiers in Kandahar city on a combat mission that is due to end in 2011. The government report covered the last quarter of the year.

"In Afghanistan generally, and in Kandahar specifically, security conditions remained especially dangerous and by some measures deteriorated during the quarter," the report said.

"Insurgency activity continued in and around Kabul. Criminal and factional violence compounded the insecurity generated by the insurgency in the capital and surrounding areas."

The report said that in recent polling, more citizens of Kandahar said their security was getting worse.

Increased Taliban attacks meant the civilian and military casualties in the last quarter hit the highest level since 2001, something the report said showed the need to build up Afghan security forces.

"Progress will not come quickly. Afghanistan is a poor country at war against a determined and resourceful insurgency. Its full transition to a more secure and stable society will take decades," the report said.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper said last week that the Afghan conflict could not be won by military force alone.

MP hopes justice will be served by human trafficking bill

By MATTHEW LITTLE
Epoch Times Staff

OTTAWA—Joy Smith, the conservative MP for northeast Winnipeg, made the case for her human trafficking bill in an empty parliament on Friday when all but a few MPs had left for other duties or a weekend back in their constituency.

Smith's bill is a long shot, as most private members' bills are, but with the backing of three out of four parties it might just make it to committee, where it would be discussed and could eventually move into second reading. She won't know for sure until its second hour of debate in May.

An act to amend the Criminal Code, Bill C-268 would create minimum sentences of five years for those who traffic people under 18 years old.

Smith made her case with an example of the injustice she was hoping to correct.

"Imagine a courtroom here in the

province of Ontario where a young girl, no older than fifteen years when her exploitation began, head bowed, eyes down, quietly relates a story so shocking that you, as a parent, relive the images in your mind over and over, and pray it never happens to your daughter," she told the house.

"I am speaking of a young Canadian girl who lives not far from the nation's capital, telling of the horrors she has endured from the man who trafficked and sold her for sex for two and a half years—a man who made in excess of \$360,000 off this innocent young victim by threatening her, beating her, and forcing her to have sex with strangers."

From his ill-gotten gains, said Smith, the man was able to buy a BMW and an expensive house, in Niagara Falls.

"Even though he was eventually caught and convicted, he spent less time in jail than he did exploiting this young girl and destroying her life."

The man, Imani Nakpangi, was eventually caught and convicted. For over two years he forced two young girls, one 14, the other 15, to work as prostitutes. His eventual sentence was 47 months—less than the combined time his two victims spent under his threats.

The girls' degradation was profitable for him. He lived a lavish lifestyle with the \$400,000 he made from their suffering. The older girl had earned him around \$360,000 of that. In her victim impact statement to the court, she described what it cost her.

"I have nightmares about him. I have low esteem. Feel like I am only good for one thing...sex. I don't see why someone, a man would be interested in me, and try to get to know me, because I feel unworthy, dirty, tainted, nothing."

"I am constantly looking over my shoulder, afraid that either Imani or his friends are going to come after me for putting him in jail. I don't

feel safe at home. He knows where I live, what my family looks like, and where they live."

Imani would often beat her if she got out of line, Smith told the House. He would also threaten to kidnap her brother or hurt her parents.

"Traffickers make a great deal of money off innocent child victims. They prefer young children because they are impressionable, easy to control and to intimidate," she said.

If Imani Nakpangi had been convicted in the United States, his sentence could have reached 20 years. In Canada, he was handed five years—three for trafficking a teenager and two for living off the avails of a teenage prostitute. But that five-year sentence was reduced by 13 months because he got double credit for time served before sentencing. With normal parole, he is likely to spend less than a year in jail.

Smith said that sentence is similar to others that are equally light.

"This past November in Mon-

tréal, Michael Lennox Mark was convicted of human trafficking, and was sentenced to two years imprisonment for trafficking a seven-year old girl and selling her for sex. He served only a single week in prison after being convicted because he was given a 2 for 1 credit for his one year of pre-trial custody."

In a similar case, Jacques Leonard-St. Vil was sentenced to three years for trafficking of a 20-year-old woman outside Toronto but served nothing after sentencing because of credit for pre-trial custody.

The bill was supported by the Liberal MP for Mississauga South, Paul Szabo, and the NDP MP for Sackville, Peter Stoffer.

Claude DeBellefeuille, the BQ MP for DeBellefeuille opposed the motion citing research that minimum sentences don't help fight crime.

But Smith said her bill is not just about preventing crime but ensuring that victims receive justice.



The Older Drivers Blueprint aims to enable older drivers to improve their driving skills and maintain their fitness to drive for as long as possible. PHOTOS.COM

National blueprint enhances safety for senior drivers

By JOAN DELANEY
Epoch Times Staff

With the help of a new national blueprint launched last week, senior drivers will be able to improve their driving skills and maintain their fitness to drive for as long as possible.

Launched by the Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists (CAOT) and McGill University, the Older Drivers Blueprint aims to reduce injury and death among senior drivers by providing refresher programs.

According to CAOT, the leading cause of accidental death for persons 65 to 75 years old is driving-related crashes. Drivers over the age of 75 are 3.5 times more likely to be involved in a crash per mile driven than a 35- to 40-year-old driver.

Research also reveals that the risk of motor vehicle crashes increases even further when the driver is over 75, debunking the myth that the older the driver, the safer the driving.

"The national blueprint wants to draw attention to crash rates that are high in older drivers and are increasing, and we also want to draw attention to the fact that soon one in every four Canadians on the road will be greater than 65. So we need a health promotion attitude towards older drivers," says Nicol Korner-Bitensky, associate professor at the School of Physical and Occupational Therapy at McGill University.

By 2040, the number of older drivers is expected to be more than six million, up from three million today. Korner-Bitensky says the time has come to "find creative solutions" to

enable older drivers to remain competent behind the wheel.

"There is nice research suggesting that we can retrain response time, we can retrain visual scanning abilities, so it's time to set a national goal of getting refresher programs for older people when they want them across the nation."

The blueprint will be used by older drivers, occupational therapists, physicians and healthcare professionals, seniors' agencies, community groups, transportation departments, insurance and automobile industries, traffic safety professionals, and policymakers at all levels of government.

Korner-Bitensky stresses that the blueprint is not about taking away older drivers' freedom to drive, and decies the negative way in which older drivers are sometimes portrayed.

"We went across our nation and we spoke to older drivers and asked them what they wanted, and one of the things we heard very clearly is, 'We want to stop this punitive feeling and do something that's proactive.' Older drivers told us 'we're willing and we're able to get out there and come to community-based programs.'"

She says the blueprint will give physicians something positive to offer when they screen older drivers' fitness to drive.

"We need to draw attention to the positive part. Right now physicians do not like their role of only being seen as the person who tells you you can no longer drive. It's not a vision that they want to fulfill on a daily basis."

Biased treatment at auto shops, say women

By JOAN DELANEY
Epoch Times Staff

When it comes to car repairs, many women feel they receive not only inferior service but also pay more than men.

A poll commissioned by Speedy Corporation, which specializes in while-you-wait automotive services, found that almost half the women surveyed (43 percent) said they receive worse service than men when having their cars fixed.

In addition, 42 percent believe they are quoted higher prices than men when looking to service their cars.

And women are not the only

ones to make this observation. The poll also found that more than one-third of male respondents feel the level of service delivered by a mechanic is affected by gender.

According to the poll, 58 percent of women in both Alberta and British Columbia—15 percent higher than the national average—believe they receive worse service than men from their mechanics. In Quebec, however, only 27 percent of women feel they receive sub-par service.

In an effort to enable women to feel "confident and comfortable within an automotive repair environment," Speedy has announced

that it will initiate Women Drivers Workshops across the country over the next few months.

"Across all our Speedy locations we are seeing a tremendous amount of interest from women regarding car maintenance and servicing," said Steven Goldman, president and CEO of Speedy Corporation in Toronto, in a news release.

"In response to this growing demand, Speedy is proud to announce that it will offer Women Drivers Workshops through the spring and summer months. Maintaining your car today is the single most effective way to avoid expensive repairs tomorrow."

Canadian Forces aid southern drug busts

By CINDY CHAN
Epoch Times Staff

As part of U.S.-led multinational counter-drug efforts in the Caribbean and Eastern Pacific, Canada's armed forces helped stop \$272 million worth of cocaine from entering North America in the first two months of 2009.

The most recent drug bust involving the Canadian Forces took place on February 9 in the Caribbean Basin off the northeastern coast of South America.

The Halifax, Nova Scotia-based HMCS Montréal frigate helped a French warship intercept a go-fast boat that was carrying 600 kilograms of cocaine.

The FV Ventose delivered the smugglers and the cocaine, valued at \$30 million, to police on the French island of Martinique.

A month earlier, the Canadian Forces assisted a drug bust that was eight times greater in value.

On January 15, a CP-140 Aurora long-range patrol aircraft, based in Comox, British Columbia, helped the U.S. Coast Guard identify and track a self-propelled semi-submersible (SPSS) vessel in the Pacific Ocean off the coast of South America.

The SPSS was carrying seven metric tonnes (about 7,000 kilograms) of cocaine worth \$242 million.

Both missions were part of Operation Caribe, the Canadian Forces' code name for its participation in an international partnership that aims to reduce drug trafficking and other illegal activities in the Caribbean and Eastern Pacific.

In the partnership, Canada works with the U.S., U.K., France, Spain, and the Netherlands under the U.S.-led Joint Interagency Task Force South (JIATF-S), an organization led by the U.S. Southern Command within the U.S. Department of Defense.

Operation Caribe is led by Canada Command, a Canadian Forces organization responsible for routine and contingency operations in Canada and North America.

Since November 2006, Canada Command has been supporting the work of JIATF-S by providing warships, submarines, and long-range maritime patrol aircraft to help detect and track illicit activities.

"One of the goals of the Canada First Defence Strategy is for Canada to be a strong and reliable partner in the defence of North America. Operation Caribe is an example of this commitment in ac-



EASTERN PACIFIC DRUG BUST: The crew of a semi-submersible drug-trafficking vessel prepares to abandon ship before being intercepted by the U.S. Coast Guard northwest of the Colombian-Ecuador border on January 8. A dozen suspected drug smugglers were apprehended in the Eastern Pacific Ocean following interception of three semi-submersible vessels within nine days. U.S. NAVY PHOTO

tion," said Peter MacKay, Minister of National Defence and Minister of the Atlantic Gateway, in a news release.

The Canada First Defence Strategy, announced by the federal government in May 2008, committed long-term funding and set out roles and missions for the Canadian Forces for domestic, North American, as well as overseas operations.

Collaborating with the U.S. military, international allies, and intelligence and law enforcement agencies such as the FBI, U.S. Coast Guard, and U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, both in 2007 and 2008 the JIATF-S stopped more than 200 metric tonnes of cocaine from reaching Canada and the U.S. from the southern approaches to North America.

In recent years, SPSS vessels have become more advanced in range and capacity and are increasingly being used to smuggle large quantities of cocaine from South and Central America to North America.

U.S. officials estimate that SPSS vessels are used in 32 percent of all narcotics shipments in the Western Hemisphere Transit Zone, which includes the Caribbean and Eastern Pacific.

With their hull rising only about half a metre (18 inches) above the

waterline, these low-profile vessels are hard to see from a distance, leave little wake, and are difficult to detect with radar.

While operating in the Caribbean in January, HMCS Montréal became the first naval ship to conduct trials with SPSS vessels. The trials were a first step toward developing tactics and procedures that will help in the detection and tracking of SPSS vessels.

SPSS vessels range from 12 to 30 metres (40 to 100 feet) in length and can carry four to five crew members and as many as twelve metric tonnes of cocaine.

A growing concern is that these vessels can potentially be used by criminal organizations and even terrorists to carry other kinds of illicit cargo.

"What worries me [about the SPSS] is if you can move that much cocaine, what else can you put in that semi-submersible. Can you put a weapon of mass destruction in it?" said Navy Admiral Jim Stavridis, Commander of the U.S. Southern Command, as quoted on the Southern Command website.

While cocaine is the largest type of trafficking that JIATF-S deals with, the organization is also responsible for coordinating efforts to stem other illicit activities such as piracy, the smuggling of humans, money, weapons, and terrorism.