

. **Ben Chapman (Wirral, South) (Lab):** If he will make a statement on Veterans' day. [79714]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Tom Watson): I am pleased that the first-ever national Veterans' day is taking place on 27 June. Not only will a major event be organised at the Imperial War museum in London, but we know of 150 events that are being organised locally across the UK. More than 70 events have received financial support from the Department at a total cost of about £130,000. I am delighted that this opportunity to celebrate the achievements of our veterans is being embraced so enthusiastically by organisers, veterans and the general public.

Ben Chapman: While many congratulations are due on the introduction of Veterans' day and all that has been achieved, may we turn our attention to how we recognise those involved in more recent conflicts, such as the Falklands, now approaching its 25th anniversary? But a more pressing point—at least for me—is the situation of those interned by the Japanese during hostilities in the second world war. Can my hon. Friend update me on how we are settling that debt of honour?

Mr. Watson: I shall answer both parts of that supplementary question. I can confirm that there will be a major celebration of the 25th anniversary of the Falklands. I probably speak for both sides of the House when I give the reason why. Today, many of us were in the company of the most remarkably brave people, who have served their country in military and civilian capacities. Some of them served in the Falklands and they deserve a commemoration 25 years on. My view is that the anniversary should be celebrated in the UK and the Falklands. I am not in a position to sketch out the detail yet, but I will report to the House when we have more information.

On my hon. Friend's second point, I am pleased to say that the criteria for the new 20-year residence criterion for the far east prisoner of war scheme have been agreed with my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) and the chairman of the Association of British Civilian Internees Far East Region.

They will be implemented with effect from

26 Jun 2006 : Column 10

today. I hope to place the detailed rules in the Library of the House. Those who were British at the time of their internment who think that they meet the criterion of 20 years residence in the UK between 1945 and 7 November 2000, whether they were civilians or members of the armed forces of the British empire, should apply to the Veterans Agency. We expect the first payments to be made very shortly.