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## Accused Gold Smuggler Faces Tribunal

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Associated Press  
January 4, 2005

GUANTANAMO BAY NAVAL BASE, Cuba - A prisoner with alleged links to Afghanistan's ousted Taliban regime and an accused gold smuggler for al-Qaida appeared before a review tribunal Tuesday at the Guantanamo Bay Naval Base.

Wearing a black skull cap and speaking through a Russian interpreter, the 24-year-old alleged Taliban supporter from the former Soviet republic of Kazakhstan said he traveled to Afghanistan to study, and was there for five days before he was taken captive.

The man said he went to Pakistan to find a religious school and then while on break went to Afghanistan, where he was captured by Afghan forces in August 2001 and turned over to the U.S. military in December.

The U.S. government says he stayed in a house in Afghanistan with two others who worked as cooks for the Taliban, an allegation he denied during questioning by the three-member tribunal.

"I have only one question," said the man, when asked by the review tribunal president if he had questions for the panel. "When are you going to release me?"

The man is one of 22 members of the Uighur ethnic minority from Central Asia being held at the U.S. prison camp in Guantanamo Bay. Other Uighurs being held in Guantanamo have come from China where they have not been able to practice their religion and where some have fought for independence. The State Department is currently trying to find a third country to accept the Uighurs if freed.

Only one other prisoner appeared before the review tribunals Tuesday, a 38-year-old who has been in Guantanamo since May 2002, according to Navy Lt. Terry Green, a spokesman for the review tribunals.

The man, whose nationality was not released, was described as speaking "Persian," or Farsi, a language spoken in Iran and parts of Pakistan and Afghanistan.

He was accused of being an associate of Osama bin Laden, leader of the al-Qaida terror network, and of involvement in gold smuggling and money transfer operations for the terror network, Green said.

The tribunals are meant to determine whether the 550 or so prisoners at the U.S. naval base at Guantanamo should continue to be held as enemy combatants, a classification that affords fewer legal protections than prisoner-of-war status.

Only 23 tribunals remain, Green said. So far, two men have been ordered released or transferred off the base as non-enemy combatants.

More than 45 percent of detainees have refused to attend their tribunals. The military does not provide individual reasons for their refusals. No lawyers are present during the proceedings. Prisoners are only told unclassified portions of the allegations against them.

