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## **Detainees to Get New Prison; Officials: Cuba Facility No `Sign of Permanency'**

Miranda Leitsinger  
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GUANTANAMO BAY NAVAL BASE, Cuba -- Four years after the first detainees in the U.S. war on terrorism were brought to makeshift jails at Guantanamo, construction workers in hard hats are putting up a two-story complex modeled after a mainland maximum-security prison.

This one will have air conditioning, a health clinic, recreation yards--and arrows pointing toward Mecca, the direction Muslims face while praying.

Officials at Gitmo, as U.S. soldiers and sailors call the base, say the prison will make life better for detainees. But critics fear it underscores that for many prisoners, detention is apt to be a very long road.

"The U.S. government would like to turn Gitmo into a permanent prison camp with no legal recourse for detainees and to create a permanent legal black hole in which hundreds of individuals are held without ever being charged with crimes," said Anthony Romero, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union.

When U.S. authorities flew the first 20 prisoners to Guantanamo Bay on Jan. 11, 2002, after the U.S.-led military campaign that ousted the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, detainees were placed into an improvised jail of open-air cells with walls of chain-link fence.

Contractors are erecting the new prison at the foot of hills covered with jumbo cacti, alongside the base's only other maximum-security facility, which opened in May 2004.

It is expected to be completed in June and will be able to house 200 prisoners.

"The new detention facilities are built because they're just more efficient and they improve the quality of life for detainees," said Army Lt. Col. Jeremy Martin, who insisted the prison is not a "sign of permanency."

But senior Bush administration officials have said the war on terror will likely last for many years. Some detainees might be held for the duration, said Maj. Jane Boomer, a spokeswoman for the Office of Military Commissions, created to try suspected terrorists.

"They're being detained to be kept off the battlefield," said Boomer.

Only nine detainees have been charged since the detention center opened. Air Force Col. Morris Davis, the chief prosecutor, said the military commission has completed several investigations but motions filed by defense attorneys have held up some trials.

A preliminary hearing began Wednesday on a conspiracy charge against a Yemeni man accused of being Osama bin Laden's bodyguard at the time of the Sept. 11 attacks. Ali Hamza Ahmad Sulayman al Bahlul said he is boycotting the proceeding even if he is forced to attend.