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Detainee Appears Before Tribunal in Cuba

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SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico - An alleged courier for Afghanistan's ousted Taliban regime appeared before a U.S. military review tribunal Monday at Guantanamo Bay.

The 39-year-old detainee was accused of being recruited to deliver money to the Taliban, said Navy Lt. Gary Ross, a spokesman for the Combatant Status Review Tribunals. A religious educator financed his travel to the country, Ross said.

The man was arrested in Pakistan, where authorities allegedly found two flotation devices covered with explosives residue, Ross said.

The prisoner, whose name and nationality were not released, spoke during his tribunal Monday, but the government has not provided transcripts of testimonies.

Prisoners often refute much of the evidence against them during the hearings, even though they are allowed to hear only unclassified portions and are not allowed attorneys. At least three other tribunals took place Monday at the U.S. base, but two detainees did not attend, Ross said.

More than 45 percent of detainees have refused to attend their hearings in a process that has come under harsh criticism from defense lawyers and human rights groups.

The review tribunals are meant to determine whether each of the 550 prisoners at Guantanamo has been properly held as an enemy combatant - a classification that affords fewer legal protections than prisoners of war under the Geneva Conventions.

Only one Pakistani has been freed as a result of the tribunals, while 130 other prisoners have been ordered held as combatants. More than 230 cases are pending but nearly 200 have yet to be heard. The panels are to make a ruling in each case regardless of whether the detainee appears.

In a landmark court decision on Nov. 8, a district court judge ruled that Salim Ahmed Hamdan - Osama bin Laden's driver - should not be tried in a military commission until rules conform to the uniform codes of military justice. The court also ruled that Hamdan is entitled to a competent tribunal hearing to evaluate whether he qualified for POW status.

Although the decision was targeted at Hamdan, it could have far-reaching implications for other detainees at the prison camp and the future of the review tribunals.