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Pentagon Delays War-Crimes Court Hearing in Respect for Muslim Holy Day

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The Pentagon has delayed by a day the resumption of its war-crimes court at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, next week -- out of respect for a Muslim holy day, the Feast of the Sacrifice.

Defense Department officials had initially scheduled a Tuesday administrative hearing in the case of a Yemeni man, Ali Hamza Bahlul, who allegedly created propaganda videos for al Qaeda.

But news media traveling to observe proceedings were notified Friday that Bahlul's Military Commission will convene on Wednesday instead. The feast, known as Eid al Adha, is one of the holiest days in Islam's calendar, and some observers had privately expressed consternation about the scheduling.

Pentagon officials also plan to stage a second commission session later on the same day for Canadian Omar Khadr, who was 15 years old at the time of his capture in Afghanistan during a firefight that killed a U.S. Special Forces medic.

Khadr's lawyers have asked a federal judge to halt the proceeding until the Supreme Court decides the constitutionality of President Bush's procedures for the first U.S. war-crimes tribunal since World War II.

Judge John Bates has given government lawyers until Monday to file briefs on that case. Bahlul has not sought a similar delay; his administrative hearing is expected to revolve around his request a year ago to act as his own attorney -- or to bring in a lawyer from Yemen to represent him.

Pentagon officials say Military Commission rules do not permit Guantánamo captives to serve as their own counsel. Instead, an American soldier from the judge-advocates corps has been detailed to act as his lawyer.