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U.S. to give lawyers to more Guantanamo prisoners

By Will Dunham

WASHINGTON, Feb 5 (Reuters) - The Pentagon is set to assign defense lawyers to two more terrorism suspects held at a U.S. base in Cuba and plans to modify rules allowing monitoring of conversations between defense attorneys and defendants tried before military tribunals, officials said on Thursday.

The Defense Department also released about nine minutes of videotape showing some of the roughly 650 men imprisoned at the U.S. naval base at Guantanamo Bay, depicting what one official called the "humane conditions" in which they are being held.

Another official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the Pentagon was poised to name military defense attorneys to represent two more of the six men who President George W. Bush last July deemed eligible for trial before U.S. military tribunals. They will be the first such U.S. trials since World War II.

Officials did not reveal the names or nationalities of the two men, but said they are not considered well-known suspects.

This would bring to four the number of Guantanamo prisoners given military defense counsel. Two previously were given lawyers: Lt. Cmdr. Charles Swift was named to defend Yemeni prisoner Salim Ahmed Hamdan, and Maj. Michael Mori was assigned to defend Australian David Hicks.

Bush in November 2001 authorized trials before tribunals of American military officers, formally called commissions, of non-U.S. citizens captured in what he calls the global war on terrorism. None of the suspects at Guantanamo Bay has been charged with any crime, condemned to what critics call "a legal black hole."

Human rights groups and others, including Mori and Swift, have criticized rules created for the trials by the Pentagon.

Critics argue the system is rigged to produce convictions, noting that the Pentagon has complete control over the entire process and there is no independent judicial review.

CONVERSATIONS MONITORED

One of the most criticized rules is one allowing the government to monitor conversations between defendants and their lawyers.

An official said monitoring of conversations will still take place, but the rules may be altered to give defense lawyers notice of when the eavesdropping will occur and allow the attorney to inform the

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defendant about the monitoring.

The Pentagon calls the monitoring necessary for intelligence gathering and security purposes.

The rules call for the Pentagon to assign a military defense lawyer to a suspect brought up on charges, but also allow the suspect, at his own expense, to hire a civilian defense lawyer who is a U.S. citizen and agrees to certain terms.

The official said another expected rule change would clarify that civilian defense lawyers could get assistance from their law offices or other outside attorneys not part of the government's authorized list.

The Defense Department said it provided video to news organizations in response to their requests for footage of the detention facilities.

The footage shows the maximum-security Camp Delta prison and the nearby Camp Four medium-security facility in which prisoners are given more privileges. Men are seen playing soccer in a fenced-in field, and receiving meals and medical care, but their faces are not shown.

The Pentagon said the video was shot by U.S. military camera operators last June and July and was released only after ensuring no classified information was inadvertently revealed, officials said.

"The footage does show that they are being held in humane conditions in accordance with Geneva Conventions, just as we have said," an official told Reuters.

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