



UYGHUR PRISON SENTENCES TOTAL 4.4 MILLION YEARS



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EXCLUSIVE: UYGHUR ACTIVIST SAYS FORMER BUSINESS PARTNERS SENTENCED IN XINJIANG



Tahir Imin, a 42-year-old U.S.-based Uyghur activist and former political prisoner from China, tells VOA that he recently learned that six of his former business associates in Xinjiang were sentenced for allegedly attempting to split the country.

“I’ve learned from two sources that the sentences, handed down in early 2024 by the Urumqi Intermediate People’s Court, were linked to their association with me,” Imin told VOA. “One received 15 years, while the others got 12.”

Information in Xinjiang is tightly controlled, making it extremely difficult to get details about court proceedings. Imin — the founder of the Washington-based Uyghur Times and a member of the Washington-based Uyghur Human Rights Project — said his sources were unable to share documents for fear of retaliation from the Chinese government. Among those charged, he added, was the nephew of a top party official in Xinjiang.

The Urumqi Intermediate People’s Court is in the capital of Xinjiang, which is home to nearly 12 million predominantly Muslim Uyghurs. The U.S. and other countries have accused China of genocide in Xinjiang, where more than 1 million

Uyghurs are believed to be detained in facilities that Beijing describes as vocational training centers.

China says the measures are necessary to combat extremism, terrorism and separatism. Some people have been detained for practicing their religion or for their contacts with overseas individuals who are speaking out about China’s policies in Xinjiang.

When reached for comment on the case, Liu Pengyu, a spokesperson for the Chinese Embassy in Washington, told VOA he had not heard of the cases mentioned by Imin.

“China is a law-based country where laws must be observed and those who violate the law must be held accountable,” Liu said in an email to VOA. “If the sentencing is linked to accusations of ‘attempting to split the country,’ please refer to Article 103 of the Criminal Law of the People’s Republic of China.”

Article 103 of the Chinese Criminal Law states that people who “organize, plot or carry out the scheme of splitting the State or undermining national unity” face life imprisonment or at least 10 years.

The sentences of 12 to 15 years for Imin’s former associates suggest they might have been charged under this article.

NOT THE FIRST TIME

Imin believes the news about his former associates is part of China’s broader strategy of transnational repression against activists like himself.

It is not the first time this has happened to him, he said.

“Previously, I discovered that 28 of my family members were sentenced to prison simply because of their relationship to me,” he said. “I am deeply concerned about my daughter, who was forced to denounce me, and my estranged wife, who was forced to divorce me.”

Imin told VOA that he has not heard from his wife or daughter in years and has no way of knowing whether they are alive or living freely.

“That leaves me with a constant sense of guilt and sorrow,” he said.

Imin and the six sentenced business associates — Ismail Kerim, Elqem Ilham, Dawut Osman, Yashiq Ahmed, Nurmemet Imin and Rashidin Gheyret — founded Xinjiang Ottuz Oghul Import and Export Trading Co., Ltd. in 2014.

Imin left China in March 2017, first relocating to Israel before settling in Washington. After moving to the U.S., he lost touch with his former associates and began speaking out against alleged abuses in Xinjiang. As a result, his associates severed contact with him, leaving him unable to track the fate of the company they once shared.

VOA was able to find details about his import-export firm on Chinese company search websites. According to Alibaba’s 1688 business-to-business website, the company and its associates registered with the Urumqi Municipal Administration for Market Regulation on May 14, 2014,

with Tahir Imin listed as the representative and chairman and the other sentenced individuals in administrative roles.

Imin says his former associates all had separate businesses, with their joint company serving as a collaborative venture.

“We were all well-educated and focused on business and social improvement,” Imin said. “Our company’s motto was development, cooperation and social responsibility.”

FAMILY TIES

Ilham, one of the former business associates who was sentenced, is a nephew of Kaiser Abdukerim, the current vice chairman of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, according to Imin.

VOA couldn’t independently verify the connection between Ilham and Abdukerim. Despite multiple calls to a number listed on the Xinjiang government website, the calls went unanswered.

Abdukerim has long been a vocal supporter of the Chinese government’s policies in Xinjiang. At the United Nations in 2018, as president of Xinjiang Medical University, he defended the government’s policies, calling them social progress even as allegations of mass detentions and human rights abuses were growing.

In March 2023, as vice chairman of Xinjiang, Abdukerim claimed on CGTN that international criticism of Xinjiang was an attempt to interfere in China’s internal affairs.

RESTRICTED ACCESS

According to information collected by the Xinjiang Victims Database, which documents individuals affected by China's policies in Xinjiang, all of Imin's former colleagues were arrested in July 2021 on charges of problematic association. They later attended a hearing in March of 2023. Imin's update about their sentencing is the latest on their status.

According to Gene Bunin, curator of the Xinjiang Victims Database, access to court verdicts and legal documents is highly restricted with the government now requiring users who want to access them to use Chinese platforms such as WeChat or AliPay.

"The other reason is that, even when accessible, they [Chinese authorities] generally did not post any of the sensitive

cases, which is the vast majority of criminal cases for Xinjiang," Bunin told VOA.

He said that in a study he carried out in 2018, only 7,000 of 70,000 criminal cases in Xinjiang had verdicts posted.

"This rate, of around 10%, was by far the lowest in the country, as for most provinces/regions at least 60-70% of the verdicts were posted," said Bunin. "Of the 7,000 visible, almost all were for standard crimes that would be recognized anywhere in the world (drunk driving, theft, robbery, rape, murder, etc.), with essentially no political/religious cases."

According to a Human Rights Watch report released in 2022 that was based on Xinjiang government data, more than half a million people had been prosecuted since 2017.



DOCUMENTARY BASED ON POLITICAL PRISONER'S LIFE UNVEILS TRAUMA OF CHINA'S UYGHUR CAMPS

DOCUMENTARY FILM BEHIND THE MASK



Abduweli
AYUP

The documentary talks about the life experiences of a Uyghur internment camp survivor, Abduweli Ayup, who contacts a former guard from the camp days and has to deal with the effects that this incident could have on his children as they had witnessed everything. The movie screening continued with a public discussion and a question and answer session.

In a post on 'X', the UAA mentioned that "Join us for the screening of the documentary "Behind the Mask," featuring the story of Uyghur scholar and former political prisoner Abduweli Ayup, followed by a Q&A discussion. Looking forward to seeing you there!"

The 31-minute-long piece directed and written by Havard Bustnes was released in 2023 and the movie is a walkthrough of the Ayup's life after enduring immense torture at an internment camp for Uyghurs in China. This documentary follows Ayup's journey to Germany, where he meets a former internment camp prison guard who was involved in torturing him during

his camp days. However, just before departure, Ayup's daughter suffers a panic attack.

Now facing a profound dilemma, Ayup has to decide whether to stay with the family or to continue on his mission of shedding light on the Uyghur genocide or to leave the past behind and avoid traumatic memories for himself and his family of their time in China.

The movie has witnessed features in TIFF – Tromsø International Film Festival, Minimalen Short Film Festival, Big Sky Documentary Film Festival and Millennium Docs Against Gravity Film Festival this year. (ANI)



US BANS IMPORTS FROM FIVE MORE CHINESE COMPANIES OVER UYGHUR FORCED LABOUR



The companies were added to the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act Entity List, which restricts imports tied to what the US government characterises as an ongoing genocide of minorities in Xinjiang region.

The US on Thursday banned imports from five more Chinese companies over alleged human rights abuses involving the Uyghurs, according to a government posting, as part of its effort to eliminate goods made with forced labour from the US supply chain.

The companies include Hong Kong-based Rare Earth Magnesium Technology Group Holdings 0601.HK and its parent, Century Sunshine Group Holdings 0509.HK, which manufacture magnesium fertiliser and magnesium alloy products. Also included is Zijin Mining Group Co 601899.SS subsidiary Xinjiang Habahe Ashele Copper Co, which mines nonferrous metals.

The companies were added to the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act Entity List, which restricts imports tied to what the US government characterises as an ongoing genocide of minorities in Xinjiang region.

The list now includes over 70 entities tied to products including cotton apparel, automotive parts, vinyl flooring and solar

panels.

The list identifies those who work with the government of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region to recruit and transport Uyghurs, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz or members of other persecuted groups out of the region, and those who source material from the region or from people who work with the government of Xinjiang.

US officials say Chinese authorities have established labour camps for Uyghurs and other Muslim minority groups in Xinjiang. Beijing denies any abuses.

“The so-called ‘forced labour in Xinjiang is nothing but an egregious lie propagated by anti-China forces and a tool for US politicians to destabilise Xinjiang and contain China’s development”, a spokesperson for the Chinese embassy in Washington said on Thursday in a statement. “China will continue to firmly safeguard the legitimate and lawful rights and interests of Chinese companies”.

End Uyghur Forced Labour

UYGHUR ADVOCACY GROUPS LAUD US EXPANSION OF IMPORT BAN ON PRODUCTS LINKED TO FORCED LABOUR



The East Turkistan National Movement, dedicated to highlighting human rights abuses against Uyghur Muslims and other ethnic minorities in Xinjiang, has welcomed the US government's decision to ban goods produced with Uyghur forced labour.

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In a post on X, the group noted, "At present, 73 Chinese entities have been added to the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act's entity list. We urge a complete ban on all products made in China."

Similarly, the Center for Uyghur Studies reacted to the US decision to extend its import ban to additional Chinese companies accused of human rights abuses involving Uyghur citizens.

On social media platform X, the Center stated "The companies were added to the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act Entity List, which restricts imports tied to what the US government characterizes as an ongoing genocide of minorities in Xinjiang region. The list now includes over 70 entities tied to products including cotton apparel, automotive parts, vinyl flooring and solar panels."

The US government recently extended its import ban to additional Chinese companies over alleged human rights abuses related to Uyghur citizens.

The Department of Homeland Security revealed that five new companies have been added to its blacklist as part of its ongoing effort to eliminate goods made with forced labour from the US supply chain. The Uyghur Forced Labor

Prevention Act Entity List is a designation created under the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act (UFLPA), a piece of US legislation aimed at addressing and curbing the use of forced labour involving Uyghur Muslims and other ethnic minorities in Xinjiang region.

The Center for Uyghur Studies additionally stated that the list highlights entities involved in collaborating with the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region government to recruit and transport Uyghurs, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, or other persecuted groups out of the region. It also includes those sourcing materials from the region or from individuals associated with the Xinjiang government.

The Center for Uyghur Studies is an organization dedicated to researching and raising awareness about the human rights abuses faced by Uyghur Muslims and other ethnic minorities in China, particularly in the Xinjiang region.

Extensive reports indicate that Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities are detained in facilities that China calls "re-education camps," though many international observers classify them as internment or detention centres.

These facilities are reportedly used to indoctrinate detainees and suppress their cultural and religious practices. Within these camps, detainees are alleged to be subjected to forced labour under harsh conditions. Evidence suggests that they are compelled to work in various sectors, including textiles, electronics, and

agriculture, often enduring long hours with minimal pay. Human Rights Watch (HRW) has documented the systematic detention and forced labour of Uyghurs in Xinjiang, highlighting severe human rights abuses.

Additionally, the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) has published in-depth reports on forced labour in Xinjiang's textile industry, connecting Uyghur labour to major global brands. (ANI)



he US-based East Turkistan National Movement, a platform dedicated to highlighting the human rights abuses against Uyghur Muslims in China's Xinjiang, has urged global authorities on International Youth Day to address the plight of millions of Uyghur, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and other Turkic youths, who are forcibly separated from their families and subjected to enslavement through forced labour in Chinese camps and factories.

US-BASED RIGHTS BODY URGES GLOBAL COMMUNITY TO ACT AGAINST 'CHINA'S ONGOING GENOCIDE'



The US-based East Turkistan National Movement, a platform dedicated to highlighting the human rights abuses against Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang, has urged global authorities on International Youth Day to address the plight of millions of Uyghur, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and other Turkic youths, who are forcibly separated from their families and subjected to enslavement through forced labour in Chinese camps and factories.

“On this International Youth Day, we demand urgent global action to address the crisis in Occupied East Turkistan. Millions of Uyghur, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and other Turkic youth are forcibly separated from their families and subjected to enslavement through forced labour in Chinese camps and factories.” East Turkistan National Movement said in a post on X.

“The world must urgently act against China’s ongoing genocide, colonization, and occupation in East Turkistan to ensure these youths can live with dignity, freedom, and the right to their heritage,” the post added.

Further, the East Turkistan National Movement urges immediate action to protect the lives and freedom of young people in East Turkistan.

“Silence is not an option. We must act now to protect these young lives, restore their freedom, and preserve their identity from being erased forever. The future of an entire people hangs in the balance. Restoring East Turkistan’s independence is the only way to secure the freedom, dignity, and future of our youth,” said East Turkistan National Movement Activists. Many Uyghur youths who are coerced into forced labour, working under harsh conditions in various industries.

They are also made to work in factories, often under conditions akin to modern slavery.

Earlier, the US government extended its import ban to additional Chinese companies over alleged human rights abuses related to Uyghur citizens.

The Department of Homeland Security revealed that five new companies have been added to its blacklist as part of its ongoing efforts to eliminate goods made with forced labour from the U.S. supply chain.

The Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act Entity List is a designation created under the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act

(UFLPA), a piece of US legislation aimed at addressing and curbing the use of forced labour involving Uyghur Muslims and other ethnic minorities in Xinjiang region.

The Uyghur people, a largely Muslim ethnic group, have historically sought either independence or increased autonomy from China.

The region, officially called the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, has attracted significant international attention due to allegations of human rights violations, including widespread detentions in what are termed as “re-education camps” and instances of forced labour. (ANI)



TURKISH JOURNALISTS ON CHINA-SPONSORED XINJIANG TOUR GIVE POSITIVE REPORTS

Turkish journalist Erdal Emre shared his impressions about a recent media tour of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in northwestern China.

“Our #Xinjiang trip with journalist friends from 8 media outlets has concluded. It was a trip where we learned a lot. We will be writing about our impressions. We extend our sincere thanks to our Chinese colleagues for their hospitality,” Emre wrote on the social media platform X on Wednesday.

Emre was part of a group of 11 Turkish journalists who participated in the “Media Trip in Xinjiang: Always More to Discover,” a nine-day event co-sponsored by Guangming Online and the Xinjiang Cyberspace Affairs Commission.

The tour covered Urumqi, Ili, Aksu and Kashgar, cities in the north and south of Xinjiang, with the journalists closely monitored by Chinese authorities.

IMAGE CAMPAIGN

Guangming Daily reported that the initiative aimed to “vividly showcase a beautiful Xinjiang” marked by “unity, harmony, prosperity, progress, security and ecological well-being.”

Zhang Jun, director of the Xinjiang Cyberspace Affairs Commission, said in the news report that the goal was to counter criticism and promote a positive image of the region.

“We hope that everyone will come to understand Xinjiang through seeing it with their own eyes, tell the story of Xinjiang in different languages, and share a true Xinjiang with the world,” Zhang said in the report.

China’s efforts to host international journalists in Xinjiang are part of its

response to allegations of human rights abuses. These allegations include mass detentions, which the U.S. has labeled as genocide and the U.N. as crimes against humanity. Reports indicate that Uyghurs and Turkic Muslims face forced indoctrination, abuse, labor and sterilization in these facilities.

This strategy aligns with Chinese President Xi Jinping’s directive from July 2022 to enhance external propaganda efforts. Xi stressed the importance of using various platforms to “tell the story of Xinjiang” and present the region in a favorable light, advocating a multifaceted approach to bolster China’s global influence and shape perceptions of Xinjiang.

According to Abdürreşit Celil Karluk, professor of international relations at



FILE - Uyghur youths play outside their house, with Chinese lanterns and barbed wire visible, at Unity New Village in Hotan, China, Sept 20, 2018. Xinjiang authorities have been replacing names of ethnic minorities’ villages to reflect Communist ideology.

Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli University and visiting fellow at the University of Sheffield's School of East Asian Studies, China strategically spends money to try to influence Turkish public opinion through media channels.

The campaigns target a country that hosts one of the largest and most politically active Uyghur diasporas in the world. Rights groups estimate there are 50,000 to 75,000 Uyghurs living in Turkey.

"Media giants such as CRI Türk and CGNT Türk, which are directly linked to China, broadcast in Turkish 24 hours a day," Karluk said. CRI Türk is owned by China Radio International, which is a

state-owned broadcaster controlled by the Chinese government.

DIVERGING NARRATIVES

In a video posted Tuesday by the Chinese Embassy in Turkey, Tunç Akkoç, founder of digital media organization Harici, expressed surprise at what he perceived as a stark contrast between his experience in Xinjiang and the reports from Western media.

"It is totally a different impression and a different reality from what we hear, especially from some Western media," Akkoç said.

Mustafa Birol Güger of the Cumhuriyet



FILE - Protesters chant slogans as they hold posters and pictures of victims during a protest against China's brutal crackdown on ethnic Uyghurs, in front of the Chinese Consulate in Istanbul, Turkey, Nov. 30, 2022.

daily newspaper remarked that the smiling faces he observed at an Urumqi bazaar suggested to him that the populace was content.

“If you want to check the level of stress in a country, you should go to public places and look at the face of the people,” Güger said. “In Urumqi, in the grand bazaar today, everyone was smiling, so that means they are happy, and if they are happy, we are happy, too. What I see is completely different from what is being told in the media.”

Asli Atasoy, host of the CGTN Turkish channel’s program “Chasing the Dragon,” on Monday shared a blog post on Turkish news site T24 detailing her visit and an interview with Muhterem Sherif, the imam of the Noghay mosque in Urumqi. CGTN, or China Global Television Network, is a Chinese state-owned media outlet.

Sherif is quoted as saying that Uyghurs “are very satisfied” with the Chinese government’s religious policies.

OPINION SHAPING

Karluk, the international relations professor, said that with sponsored trips like this, China aims to persuade nationalist and conservative groups in

Turkey, traditionally supportive of Uyghur rights, to change their stance.

“China is also attempting to influence more nationalist conservative groups in line with its own discourses by taking them to China as part of packaged programs, particularly given the growing anti-Westernism, especially anti-Americanism, in Türkiye most since 2016,” he said in an email.

ECONOMIC COMPROMISE

Yalkun Uluyol, a Uyghur rights advocate, views the Chinese sponsorship of Turkish journalists as part of China’s strategy to present a favorable narrative and obscure human rights abuses.

“Similar to previous efforts, China tries to whitewash ongoing abuses and gain international legitimacy,” Uluyol said.

Uluyol argues that Turkey’s concerns for Uyghurs are being overshadowed by economic interests, citing a \$1 billion deal with China’s electric carmaker BYD and the resumption of direct flights between Istanbul and Urumqi after an eight-year hiatus as emerging evidence of Turkey’s shift from criticism to accommodation of China’s Uyghur policy.

UYGHUR PRISON SENTENCES TOTAL 4.4 MILLION YEARS

A guard watchtower along the perimeter fence of what is officially known as a “vocational skills education center” in Dabancheng, Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, September 4, 2018. (Thomas Peter/Reuters)

A new analysis from Yale University attempts to put a number on the staggering cost of the Chinese Communist Party’s campaign against Uyghurs and other Turkic minorities in Xinjiang.

As Beijing has modified its campaign from that of a program of mass arbitrary detentions to one where it comes up with a bogus legal basis for imprisoning individuals, Chinese courts have sentenced residents of Xinjiang to a cumulative 4.4 million years in prison, the report, released this week, found.

“This type of legalized form of repression is profoundly alarming — it is no less widespread nor humane than the former,” stated the report, from Yale’s Macmillan Center for Genocide Studies.

“In fact, one might consider it even more harmful precisely because its veil of legal legitimacy renders it elusive to international scrutiny and legalizes human rights abuses.”

The anti-Uyghur program was brought to public attention in the late 2010s — culminating in the U.S. State Department’s designation in 2021 of the abuses as genocide. Since then, international scrutiny has lagged as Beijing has sought to reframe foreign perceptions of its rule over Xinjiang.

With the completion of campaigns to raze mosques, or otherwise convert them in such a way for access by Han Chinese, and other efforts to turn the region’s cities into tourist destinations, Beijing has welcomed visitors to the region. The party’s broader effort to add the perception of legal legitimacy to the mass detentions is part of this overhaul.

To reach the 4.4 million estimate, researchers — led by Rayhan Asat, a human-rights lawyer who campaigns for the release of her brother, Ekpar, from the

camp — consulted data from the Xinjiang Victims Database, an initiative that pulls together information on over 62,000 specific victims from multiple sources including leaked Chinese law-enforcement documents.

They looked at 13,000 cases that listed a prison sentence, finding that the average sentence was 8.8 years, then multiplied that number by the 540,000 individuals the Xinjiang High People’s Procuratorate said it prosecuted from 2017 to 2021.

The report says the Xinjiang victims dataset reflects only a fraction of the true size of the prison program and that the “actual numbers are far more significant.” And while the Chinese authorities make public criminal records in other parts of the country, records from almost 90 percent of cases in Xinjiang are not public, it said.

The existence of this mass detention program, of course, is already widely known, if attention to the ongoing atrocities has flagged in the years that have followed the U.S. genocide determination. But the 4.4 million figure is new and noteworthy because it helps to measure the party’s employment of a legalistic charade, which is one less-known detail of the crackdown.

Like other aspects of the atrocities against Uyghurs, this advances Beijing’s effort to eliminate a people. “If the Uyghur population continues to be barred from maintaining their communities, it is only a matter of time before full ethnic incapacitation is realized and the damage is irreversible,” the report concluded.

7 BROTHERS FROM PROMINENT UYGHUR FAMILY CONFIRMED JAILED IN XINJIANG

A man walks towards the entrance of a vocational and technical school believed to be a detention facility in Jiashi county, Kashgar Prefecture, Xinjiang region, July 15, 2023. Pedro Pardo/AFP



Seven brothers from a prominent Uyghur family in Kashgar have been sentenced to terms ranging from nine to 17 years for charitable work “supporting Uyghurs” and overseas trips.

as part of the ongoing mass incarceration campaign against the mostly Muslim group that started in 2017, three people with knowledge of the situation said.

The Obulqasim brothers — Abdusalam, 45; Abduhelil, 47; Mametsidiq, 49; Yusupjan, 51; Memmettursun, 54; Pazil, 56; and Sabir, 62 — were businessmen active in construction materials, electrical appliances and other products.

They were detained and imprisoned amid mass arrests of Uyghurs and are serving their sentences in prisons in Kashgar and Urumqi, the sources said.

“They are one of the richest families in Kashgar,” said Abduweli Ayup, founder Uyghur Hjelp, also known as Uyghuryar, a Norway-based nonprofit organization that documents Uyghurs who have been arrested and imprisoned. He said he confirmed through his information network that the seven brothers were all jailed.

They are among the estimated 1.8 million Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims detained under flimsy pretexts during mass detentions that began more than seven years ago, as Chinese authorities rounded up businesspeople, clerics, intellectuals and those who had traveled abroad years before or who taught the Quran to youngsters.

Claiming they were fighting separatism and terrorism, China has clamped down harshly on Uyghurs, penalizing those who communicated with Uyghurs outside of Xinjiang or offered financial support.

Though Chinese authorities long prohibited Uyghurs from traveling abroad, there was a brief period after 2010 when they were encouraged to obtain passports after international pressure.

But later, authorities deemed suspicious those who did obtain passports or merely applied for them and subsequently detained in camps and prisons.

ACTIVE BUSINESSMEN

Their father, Obulqasim, now deceased, sold and repaired watches in Kashgar. The brothers started businesses selling various goods at the city’s Id Kah Market, a prime business district.

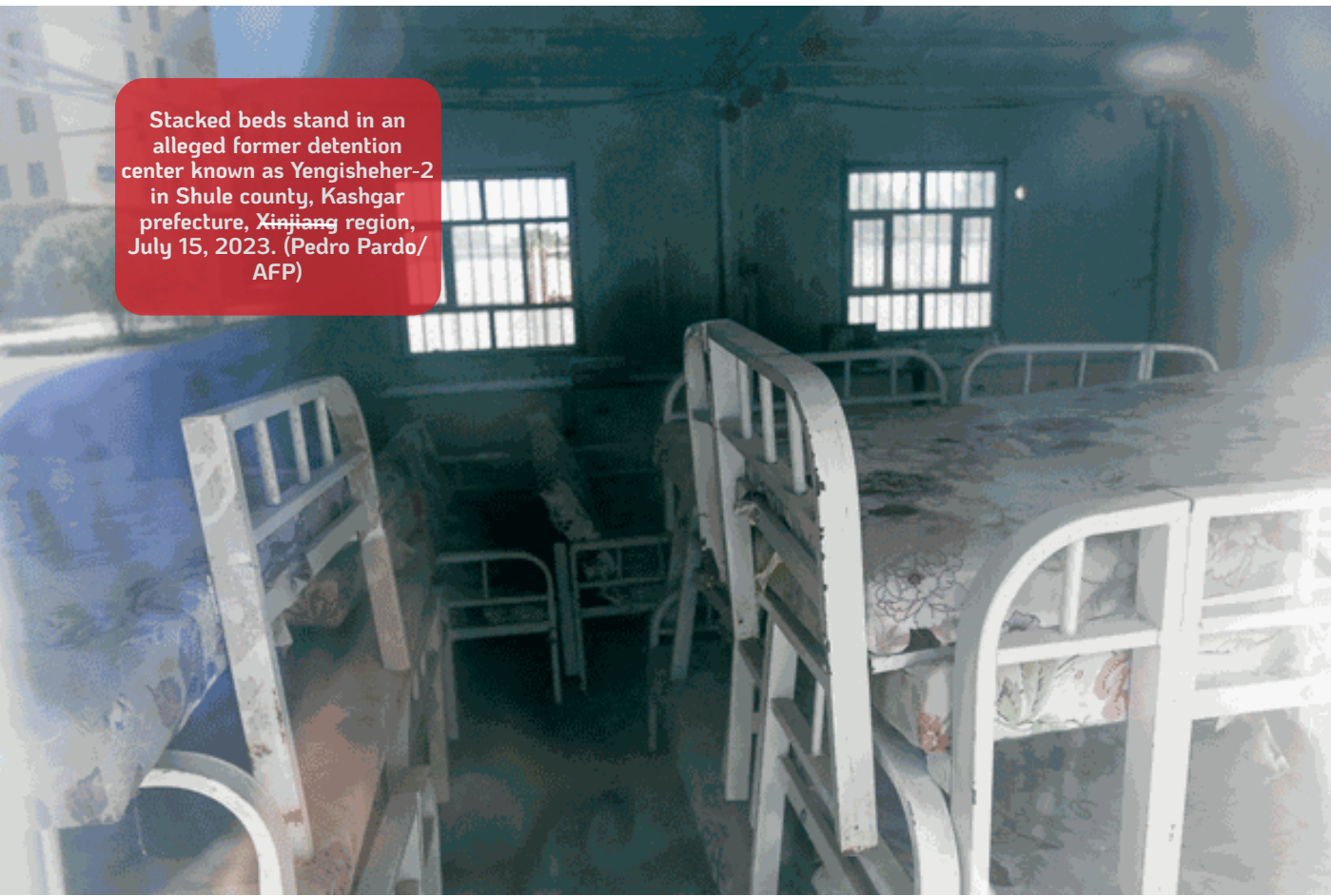
Over the years they established the Aq Orda Trade Center, selling construction materials and electrical appliances, according to Ayup. They also owned stores in Kashgar.

Pazil expanded the family business into cargo shipping, establishing a presence in Central Asia and Turkey, and became a leading Uyghur businessman. The brothers were also involved in the hotel industry.

The seven brothers were sentenced in May 2019 and received prison terms of 17, 13, 11 or nine years, said a security guard from Kashgar Prison’s employee residence building.

Five of the brothers, including Abduhelil and Pazil, are serving their sentences at Kashgar Prison, also known as Yerken Peylu Prison. The other two are in jail in Urumqi, Xinjiang’s capital, he said.

Stacked beds stand in an alleged former detention center known as Yengisheher-2 in Shule county, Kashgar prefecture, Xinjiang region, July 15, 2023. (Pedro Pardo/AFP)



TARGETED FOR SUPPORTING UYGHURS

Pazil and Yusupjan were accused of “supporting Uyghurs” through charitable work, while the others either traveled abroad or displayed “ethnic hatred and discrimination,” the security guard said, referring to discrimination against Han Chinese.

Their arrests came at a time when many Uyghur businessmen were targeted for their charitable activities, Ayup added.

“I heard they were collecting money for people,” the prison security guard said. “Starting from 2000, they had been a key

family to be under watch.”

The brothers helped other Uyghurs get jobs in Kashgar, performed charity work to benefit orphans and the poor, and contributed to children’s education, Ayup said.

Pazil and Yusupjan were detained for their charity work and for their connections with Uyghur expatriates during their business operations in the cargo shipping business, he said, citing people with knowledge of the situation.

Their financial assistance to expatriate Uyghurs in need while doing business abroad was later labeled as “supporting”

Uyghurs, said another source with knowledge of the situation, who did not want to be identified for fear of retribution by authorities.

They were accused of supporting Uyghurs abroad, and three other brothers were accused of ethnic hatred and discrimination, the guard said.

Authorities disclosed the details of their sentences to their families after their arrest, as there were no prior announcements or notifications about their detention,” said the security guard.

Another brother, Abduhelil, a filmmaker and entrepreneur, was first arrested in October 2017, held in a pretrial detention for more than 18 months and sent to a “re-education” camp, RFA reported this July. His films promoted Uyghur culture.

Authorities released Abduhelil in December 2019, but rearrested him in September 2023 for “inciting separatism” for promoting Uyghur culture in his films. He is serving a 15-year sentence in Kashgar Prison.

UYGHUR ENTREPRENEUR SERVING 18 YEARS FOR CHARITABLE CONTRIBUTIONS



Uyghur entrepreneur Elijan Ismail in a screenshot from a **Xinjiang** satellite television broadcast on Dec.28, 2014.
RFA

Chinese authorities use bogus charges of separatism to supposedly prevent terrorism, groups say.

Elijan Ismail made a name for himself as a prominent Uyghur entrepreneur in the 2000s. He founded Xinjiang Sadaqet Bio-Technology Co., Ltd., in his hometown of Maralbexi in southern Xinjiang, and in 2008 moved it to Xinjiang's capital Urumqi.

It was there that Ismail joined a group of young businessmen who began making charitable donations, particularly to those who needed medical treatment in city hospitals, according to Abduweli Ayup, founder Uyghur Hjelp, or Uyghuryar, a Norway-based nonprofit organization that documents Uyghurs who have been arrested and imprisoned.

But because China had forbidden the practice of zakat — a religious obligation for Muslims to donate a portion of their wealth each year to charitable causes — in Xinjiang since 2016, with few exceptions, police branded them an “ethnic separatist group,” Ayup said.

After investigating their charitable activities as well as those they helped, authorities arrested Ismail and the others.

Ismail, now 49, was picked up in Urumqi in 2017 and sentenced the following year to 18 years in prison for “inciting separatism” because the recipients of his donations included families of political prisoners, said an officer at the Maralbexi market police station in Kashgar prefecture.

BOGUS CHARGES

His case illustrates how Chinese authorities have targeted and arrested numerous Uyghur businessmen as part of a campaign to monitor, control and assimilate members of the over 11 million-strong ethnic group in Xinjiang.

Authorities have used bogus charges of separatism and terrorism as an excuse to target the Uyghurs purportedly to prevent religious extremism and terrorist activities, rights groups say.

Many Uyghur entrepreneurs were arrested during the period of mass detentions that began in 2017. Radio Free Asia has brought to light details about their sentences and jailing after probing

their backgrounds.

Ismail and the other entrepreneurs “provided financial support to the poor and promoted the care of the wives and children of those who were arrested,” the police officer said.

They had collected and distributed money and in-kind goods to more than 10,000 people since 2014, he said.

“I’m not exactly sure what the issue is with distributing money,” the policeman said. “Under my division, there might be 12 families he helped who are families of political prisoners.”

More than 20 people have been arrested in connection with Ismail’s case, and none of them have been released, he added. The length of their sentences is unknown, however.

GIVING TO THE POOR

A security director in Maralbexi, called Bachu in Chinese, told RFA that Ismail had been sentenced to 18 years for leading the businessmen in “distributing illegally collected money.”

“He would drop money into the baskets of people walking on the street if he knew they were poor,” he said, adding that Ismail’s activities came to light after 2017 when investigators questioned recipients about who had given them money.

“We don’t know whether he acted under the encouragement of people in the county or under the influence of foreign forces — the law has the answer,” he said.

Ismail gained his business acumen from

his father, who had been involved since the 1980s in various business ventures, including real estate, metals, textiles and medicine in the southern Xinjiang town of Maralbexi, said a source familiar with Ismail’s background.

After studying medicine in Lanzhou, capital of western China’s Gansu province, Ismail returned to Xinjiang and expanded and internationalized the businesses.

Ismail then set up his biotech company, which imported medicine from Pakistan and exported Uyghur medicine to the Central Asian republics, including Kazakhstan, where he traveled to in 2017, the source said.

Like most prosperous Muslims, Ismail the other Uyghur entrepreneurs he had befriended dutifully performed zakat, despite the ban on the practice.

“Elijan Ismail was among the first group of influential wealthy people to be arrested,” according to information in the Uyghur Hjelp’s database, Abduweli Ayup said.

Blacklisted

While studying in China in the late 1990s, Ismail had been accused of ethnic separatism.

“This history, combined with his 2017 travel to Kazakhstan, led to further suspicion by authorities, right when he was placed on a blacklist,” Ayup said.

“Although initially cleared during interrogation about his foreign trip, his involvement in charity distribution, particularly in Kashgar and Urumqi, drew

additional scrutiny,” he said.

As a successful entrepreneur, Ismail also gave talks at universities, but those who invited him or attended his lectures were scrutinized by authorities, said the person familiar with his background.

This June, authorities arrested seven or

eight people who had downloaded videos of the talks, saved them and later watched them, the police officer in Maralbexi said.

“We are still investigating,” he added.

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**Address Kartaltepe Mah. Geçit Sok. No: 6 Dükkan 2
Sefaköy K.çekmece İSTANBUL**

info@istiqlalmedia.com

www.turkistantimes.com/en

www.istiqlalhaber.com

www.istiqlalmedia.com

+90 212 540 31 15

+90 553 895 19 33

+90 541 797 77 00