



UYGHUR GENOCIDE REMEMBRANCE DAY



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UYGHUR GENOCIDE REMEMBRANCE DAY

The Uyghur Genocide in East Turkistan, which is under Chinese occupation, continues brutally in front of the modern world.

While 3 to 5 million Uyghurs and other Muslim Turkic peoples are being massacred in the prisons and concentration camps of the CCP regime with all kinds of torture, rape, forced labor, and forced marriage, the world is silently watching what is happening.

On December 10 (today), on the occasion of World Human Rights Day, the “2024 East Turkistan Human Rights Index Report” launch and a panel were held at the Istanbul Rami Library, organized by the International East Turkistan NGOs and the East Turkistan Human Rights Monitoring Association.

While students, NGO and political party representatives also attended the opening, the painting exhibition on Uyghur culture and civilization was also the center of attention of visitors.

**GENEVA UYGHUR GENOCIDE
REMEMBERING DAY**

In other news, on the occasion of December 9th Uyghur Genocide Remembrance Day, the Uyghur Movement, the Global Center

for the Responsibility to Protect, the International Service for Human Rights, and the U.S. International Organizations Mission in Geneva organized an event titled Stories of the Disappeared. A film screening and panel on Uyghur Human Rights was held in Geneva to shed light on the plight of the Uyghur people, to give voice to the victims and their families, and to initiate a global dialogue on justice and accountability.

**ANKARA UYGHUR GENOCIDE
REMEMBERING DAY**

Also on Monday, December 9th, a panel titled “East Turkistan in the 21st Century: China’s Genocide Policies and Religious Repression” was organized in collaboration with the Galatasaray University Civilization Club and the International East Turkistan NGO Association.

In addition, the Uyghur Academy Foundation, World Uyghur Congress Foundation, East Turkistan Research Foundation and Turkish Hearths organized a panel on China’s Genocide Crimes in East Turkistan in Ankara on the occasion of Uyghur Genocide Day. The meeting was attended by many people, including journalists, researchers, various NGO officials, and higher education students.



US RENEWS UYGHUR SANCTIONS

The American-Uyghur community received a parting present from President Joe Biden: a renewal of Global Magnitsky human rights sanctions that ensures that the Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act, which was due to sunset next year, stays in place till at least mid-2030.

“It’s a gift of hope for Uyghurs,” Omer Kanat, executive director of the Uyghur Human Rights Project, an advocacy organization in Washington, D.C., said in a statement. “Congressional leaders stand with the Uyghur people to dial up the pressure to end the atrocities in our homeland.”

The National Defense Authorization Act passed by Congress on Dec. 19, then signed by Biden three days later, incorporates the Uyghur Human Rights Policy Reauthorization Act of 2024, as introduced by Senators Marco Rubio (R-Fla.) and Jeff Merkley (D-Ore.) and Representative Chris Smith (R-N.J.) and James McGovern (D-Mass.) in their respective chambers in May to “extend authorities to impose sanctions under certain laws” relating to Hong Kong, Tibet and Xinjiang.

“The United States must continue to send a clear message that we will not be complicit in the Chinese government’s

persecution and genocide of Uyghur Muslims. Uyghurs and other ethnic groups in Xinjiang are being tortured, imprisoned, enslaved, forced into labor, and pressured to abandon their religious and cultural practices by the Chinese government,” Merkley said at the time. “Passing this bill is vital to holding China accountable for these grave human rights violations while protecting the victims of this genocide.”

Lawmakers also greenlit, for the first time, two extensions of the ban on Uyghur forced-labor-made imports in the United States to goods used by the Department of Defense elsewhere in the

world: A procurement ban on the use of federal funds to “buy any solar energy products made in the Uyghur region or any other place in China, which are known to be produced with forced labor” and a requirement that the agency report to Congress about the policies and procedures it has to verify that it isn’t buying seafood originating from China, where several fishing companies

were found to be working with authorities to recruit and employ Uyghurs under coercive conditions.

“We thank the Republicans and Democrats who came together in the House and the Senate to re-authorize the Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act of 2020, to ensure that sanctions continue,” Kanat said.

ILLEGAL WELLS IN XINJIANG SPARK TENSION AND DRY UP THE LAND



Workers maintain a cotton field of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps, in Alar, Xinjiang region, March 26, 2021. (China Daily via Reuters)

Fighting over water resources has been a source of friction between Uyghurs and Han Chinese.

The discovery of 46 illegal wells dug by Chinese migrants in Xinjiang has intensified tension with Uyghur residents and disrupted the ecological balance of the region, people with knowledge of the situation told Radio Free Asia.

Fighting over water resources has been a source of friction for years between native Uyghurs and Chinese settlers in areas under the control of the state-run Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps, or XPCC, called Bingtuan in Chinese.

Authorities investigated after residents in Korla, or Kuerle in Chinese, the second-largest city in Xinjiang, complained about the proliferation of wells on the outskirts of the city, a source in Xinjiang said, asking not to be identified for security reasons.

The wells, dug to grow cotton and vegetables, have drained vital underground reserves, he said.

As a result, authorities discovered 46 illegally drilled holes this year alone in Korla, a policeman in Bayingholin prefecture's Public Security Bureau who had participated in this case in its early phase told Radio Free Asia.

The residents accused of drilling the

holes without a permit are from the 29th Battalion of the Bingtuan's 2nd Division and Chinese settlers living in an economic development region on the outskirts of Korla, the officer said.

"We have been working on water management, water control, and identifying water wells since February, and we continue to work on those issues," the police officer said.

LITTLE ACCOUNTABILITY

But legal authorities have slowed down reviewing the cases, and the suspects were released after brief questioning, the Uyghur source said, with officials using "stability" and "unity" as excuses to let them go.

Authorities could not hold all perpetrators accountable because the activities likely involved Han Chinese, he said.

The Bingtuan is a state-run economic and paramilitary organization of mostly Han Chinese who develop the land, secure borders and maintain stability in Xinjiang, where about 12 million mostly Muslim Uyghurs live.

Made up of 14 divisions, the Bingtuan

is one of the foremost institutions of Han dominance and marginalization of Uyghurs and other indigenous ethnic groups in the region, according to the Uyghur Human Rights Project.

The well-drilling began in 2012 when demand for cotton surged, the Uyghur source told RFA.

Those who stole the water conducted their activities at night using advanced technology to pump it from a depth of 200 meters, or about 660 feet, he said.

“Since they drill these wells in a forested area, a place that people hardly go, it was hard to discover their illegal activities,” the Uyghur source said.

It costs about 150,000 yuan (US\$20,600) to drill a well and make it operational, he

said, an amount that Uyghurs would not likely be able to come up with.

Though the issue has sparked friction many times before, the government has protected the Han Chinese residents, he said.

The policeman initially said there were some Uyghurs among those held responsible, but when pressed for further information, he said most of those who drilled the illegal wells were Chinese who had settled in the area, including Bingtuan workers.

Staff at relevant government organization in Korla contacted by RFA declined to answer questions, but did not deny that Chinese settlers there had stolen water.

DRYING UP THE LAND



A view of Korla, capital of the Bayingolin Mongol Autonomous Prefecture in Xinjiang, in an undated photo. (AFP)

The growing dependence on groundwater in the Korla area since the 1990s has reached a level that is disrupting the ecological balance, said the source familiar with the situation.

“We must control this or it will lead to a further decline in groundwater levels,” he said. “In some areas of our protective forests, the Euphrates poplars are withering and drying up.”

Peyzulla Zeydin, an ecological devastation researcher from Korla who now lives in the United States, told RFA that the misuse of water resources, including underground

water, has severely impacted the region’s protective forests over time.

“In the 1990s, when we dug water wells, we could find water at just 10 meters,” he said. “Now, even at 30 meters, we can’t find water.”

“It’s getting worse because the underground water recycling system has been disrupted,” Zeydin said. “One of the main causes of the declining water levels is the growing population and the over-expansion of farmland. This has interrupted the natural underground water replenishment cycle.”



Sun Jinlong, Communist Party secretary of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps, attends a meeting of the Xinjiang delegation on the sidelines of the National People’s Congress in Beijing, March 12, 2019. (Jason Lee/Reuters)

Zeydin said research indicates that the Bingtuan's 1st Division battalions in the Korla area have overused and controlled the water resources there, leading to the drying up of Euphrates poplar trees along

the lower streams of the Tarim River.

"The water level is dropping every day, and it has now reached a depth of 100 meters [330 feet]," he said.



Water drips from a leaking pipe on a hilltop overlooking Korla, an oil town on the edge of the Tarim Basin and the Taklamakan Desert in Xinjiang, Oct. 10, 2006. (Frederick J. Brown/AFP)

Canada sanctions 8 Chinese officials for human rights violations



THE MEASURE
COMES AT A TIME
WHEN WESTERN
GOVERNMENTS
ARE INCREASINGLY
USING SANCTIONS
TO HOLD
VIOLATORS TO
ACCOUNT.

Canada imposed sanctions on eight former and current senior Chinese officials on Tuesday, citing their involvement in grave human rights violations in Tibet and Xinjiang and against Falun Gong followers.

The sanctions attempt to freeze the assets of the individuals by prohibiting Canadians living inside and outside the country from providing financial services to them or engaging in activities related to their property.

“Canada is deeply concerned by the human rights violations in Xinjiang and Tibet and against those who practice Falun Gong,” Foreign Minister Mélanie Joly said in a statement. “We call on the

Chinese government to put an end to this systematic campaign of repression and uphold its international human rights obligations.”

Joly visited China in July and met with her Chinese counterpart, Wang Yi, to discuss relations, human rights and global and regional security issues.

The announcement comes at a time when Western governments — particularly Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom and the European Union — are increasingly turning to sanctioning individuals in China involved in the persecution of Tibetans in Tibet, Muslim Uyghurs in Xinjiang and practitioners of Falun Gong, a religious group banned in

Canadian Foreign Minister Melanie Joly speaks during a press conference in Kyiv, Ukraine, Feb. 2, 2024. (Valentyn Ogirenko/Reuters)



China.

Probably the most prominent of those sanctioned is Chen Quanguo, Chinese Communist Party Committee Secretary of Tibet Autonomous Region from 2011 to 2016 and of ~~Xinjiang~~ from 2016 to 2021.

Also sanctioned was Wu Yingjie, Communist Party Secretary of Tibet from 2016 to 2021.

Wu, 67, was expelled from the Chinese Communist Party and removed from other public positions for disciplinary violations following a corruption probe, Chinese officials announced Tuesday. They said he failed to implement the Central Committee's strategy for governing Tibet, and intervened in engineering projects allegedly for personal gain, according to an article in the state-run China Daily.

OTHERS WHO WERE SANCTIONED INCLUDE:

Erkin Tuniyaz, deputy secretary of the Chinese Communist Party ~~Xinjiang~~ Committee and chairman of ~~Xinjiang~~.

Shohrat Zakir, chairman of ~~Xinjiang~~ and deputy secretary of the Chinese Communist Party ~~Xinjiang~~ Committee from 2014 to 2021

Peng Jiarui, vice chairman of ~~Xinjiang~~ and vice chairman of the ~~Xinjiang~~ Regional Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, who previously served as commander of ~~Xinjiang~~ Production and Construction Corps, a paramilitary organization

Huo Liujun, party secretary of ~~Xinjiang's~~

Public Security Department since March 2017

Zhang Hongbo, former director of Tibet's Public Security Bureau

You Quan, former director of the United Front Work Department and a former secretary of the Secretariat of the Chinese Communist Party

'ONGOING ATROCITIES'

The Uyghur Rights Advocacy Project based in Canada submitted the names of six of the individuals to the Canadian government for sanctions consideration in December 2022, said Mehmet Tohti, the group's executive director.

Tibetan and Falun Gong organizations provided the other two names, he said.

Adrian Zenz, senior fellow at the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation in Washington, said the measure was long overdue.

"Great to see Canada do this," he said. "The Europeans are now far behind; they have not even sanctioned Chen Quanguo yet."

"Sanctioning Tuniyaz is very important in terms of showing to the world that the atrocities in the Uyghur homeland are ongoing," said Zenz, who is an expert on ~~Xinjiang~~.

The most prominent individual is Chen Quanguo because he was the person behind China's suppression of Uyghurs and other Turkic minorities in ~~Xinjiang~~ that first drew international attention

in 2017, said Charles Burton, a former Canadian diplomat who worked in China.

Wang, who is retired, has said he no foreign assets, family abroad or desire to travel, so the sanctions are symbolic but not substantive, Burton said.

The same likely applies to the others who played a part in the repression of Uyghurs in Xinjiang, including Erkin Tuniyaz, Peng Jiarui, Huo Liujun and Shohrat Zakir, he said.

“But Canada’s action sends out a clear signal of support for Uyghurs in the PRC and their families in Canada and elsewhere,” Burton added, referring to

the People’s Republic of China. “It also makes clear to Chinese Communist Party officials that they will be held accountable for their complicity in violations of international law.”

On Wednesday, Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said the Canada government “made false allegations against China in the name of human rights and imposed illicit sanctions on Chinese personnel.”

“This is gross interference in China’s internal affairs and a serious violation of international law and the basic norms governing international relations,” she said. “China firmly opposes and strongly



Wu Yingjie, Communist Party secretary of the Tibet Autonomous Region, attends the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in Beijing, Oct. 19, 2017. (Aly Song/Reuters)

condemns this.”

In response, Canadian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Charlotte MacLeod told RFA that the country has a rigorous due diligence process to evaluate possible cases of human rights violations.

“Based on information that Canada considers to be credible and reliable, Canada assessed there are reasonable grounds to believe these eight individuals have participated in gross and systematic human rights violations against ethnic and religious minorities, including in Xinjiang and Tibet and against Falun Gong practitioners.”

The United States previously imposed

sanctions on all eight officials for their connections to serious human rights violations.

The Washington-based Uyghur Human Rights Project welcomed the move.

“This decision by Canada is a significant step toward accountability for the architects of mass repression in East Turkistan,” Omer Kanat, the group’s executive director, said in a statement, using Uyghurs’ preferred name for Xinjiang.

“Targeted sanctions send a clear message that perpetrators of atrocity crimes cannot act with impunity.”

UK REGULATOR'S SHEIN IPO DECISION SLOWED BY CHALLENGE FROM UYGHUR GROUP



Britain's Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner, a monitoring body of the interior ministry, has also raised concerns within government over a Shein IPO because of allegations about labour practices at its suppliers.

Singapore-headquartered Shein, which sells \$5 tops and \$10 dresses mostly made in China in 150 markets worldwide, filed confidentially with the Financial Conduct Authority in early June for a London listing.

Shein is also awaiting approval from China's securities regulator for its London IPO, two separate sources said, adding that the approval would likely come after the FCA's decision.

The advocacy group, Stop Uyghur Genocide (SUG), announced a legal challenge in June and sent the FCA a dossier in August alleging that Shein uses cotton from Xinjiang.

The U.S. and NGOs have long accused China of human rights abuses in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, where they say Uyghurs are forced to work producing cotton and other goods.

Beijing has denied any abuses.

Shein declined to reply to Reuters' questions about the FCA process. Shein has a zero-tolerance policy for forced labour and is committed to respecting human rights, a spokesperson for the company has said.

The company last week announced a global external ESG advisory board, opens new tab to bolster its governance.

In a sustainability report published in August, Shein said it found two cases of child labour in its supply chain in 2023, and no cases of forced labour. Like Primark and other apparel retailers, Shein uses isotopic testing service Oritain, opens new tab to verify the origin of its cotton, which accounts for 9.9% of the textiles in Shein-branded products, opens new tab.

Pie chart showing that polyester accounts for 75.7% of the textiles used in Shein clothes, with cotton at 9.9% and viscose at 8%, according to the company's 2023 sustainability report

The FCA declined to comment on the listing and any delays. A spokesperson for the FCA said timelines for IPO approval depend on each individual case. Market experts say it usually takes several months to reach a decision.

The FCA is under no obligation to assess evidence presented by civil society groups, and will generally let investors take their own position, said Lorna Emson,

partner at law firm Macfarlanes. If it did find compliance concerns, it would tend to address these confidentially with the company itself.

But NGO pressure is unlikely to fade.

“Regulators are being given more to think about – and are required to do so under the watchful scrutiny of the increasingly well-funded and litigious NGO and activist community,” said Lucy Blake, partner at law firm Jenner & Block.

NGOs are not alone in raising concern over Shein’s IPO.

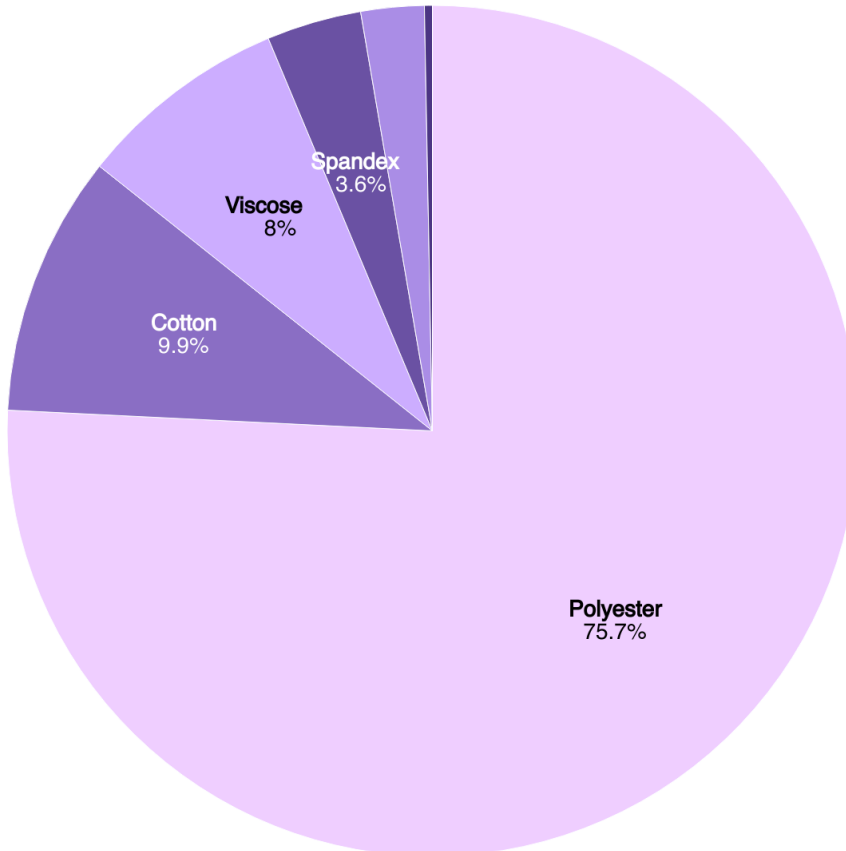
The Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner wrote to the Home Office and Department for Business in June about the IPO, according to previously unreported letters obtained by Reuters through a Freedom of Information request.

“Encouraging a company like Shein to float on the UK market inadvertently implies

Shein clothes are mostly made of polyester

Cotton accounts for 9.9% of the fibres Shein uses in its own-brand products

● Polyester ● Cotton ● Viscose ● Spandex ● Polyamide ● Others including linen and acrylic



Note: Materials breakdown is by weight, for textiles designated by Shein for use by contract manufacturers

• Source: Shein sustainability report 2023

endorsement of poor labour practices and the prioritisation of attracting business to the UK over human rights abuses,” Commissioner Eleanor Lyons wrote.

The Home Office and Department for Business jointly replied that the FCA decides independently on listings and the UK has rules to guard against modern slavery.

Like other retailers, Shein must comply with incoming European Union regulations on forced labour and the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act in the U.S., both of which are considered stronger than Britain’s Modern Slavery Act.

JUDICIAL REVIEW?

The FCA, which recently simplified its

listing rules, faces pressure from the five-month-old Labour government to end an IPO drought.

Britain’s finance minister Rachel Reeves in mid-November told the FCA in a letter, opens new tab that she wants to ensure “innovative new firms are supported to enter the market”. Reeves also said regulation should be less risk-averse and more focused on growth.

The FCA must assess Shein’s governance and ensure its disclosures are bulletproof in the likely event that SUG applies for a judicial review of an IPO approval, a regulatory lawyer told Reuters, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The FCA declined to comment on SUG’s



legal challenge or the likelihood of a judicial review application.

SUG executive director Rahima Mahmut told Reuters she was meeting with lawyers this week to discuss next steps.

ClientEarth, an NGO, last year applied for judicial review of the FCA's decision to approve the IPO of oil and gas producer Ithaca Energy, alleging its prospectus inadequately described climate risks, but the High Court refused the application.

In this case too, some lawyers think a judicial review application by SUG would fail.

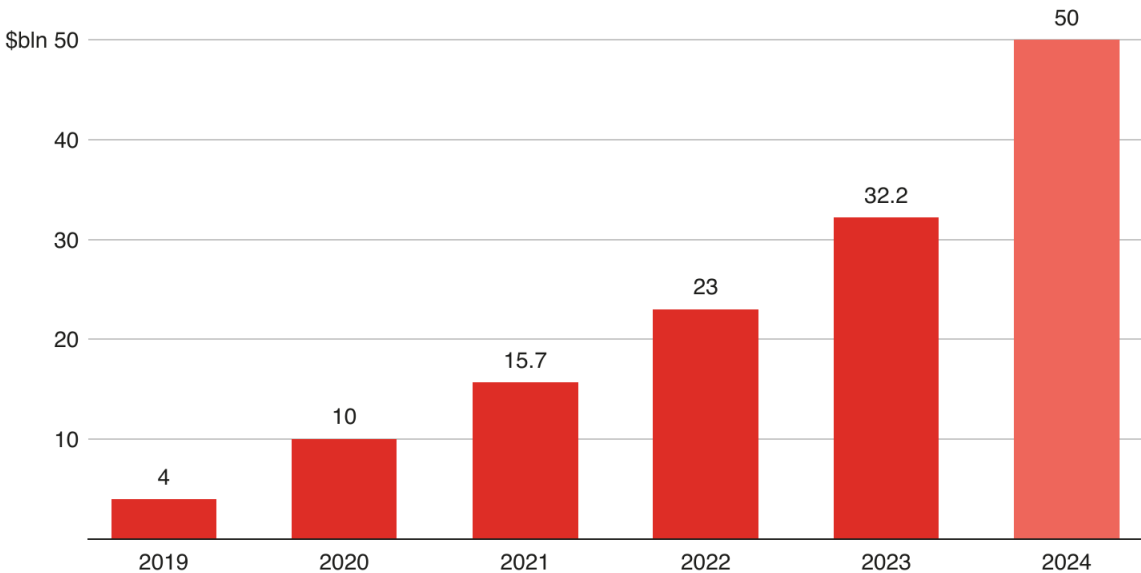
For Shein, valued at \$66 billion in a fundraising round last year, its IPO performance will partly hinge on what risks the FCA decides it must include in its prospectus, and how those are priced in.

Worker exploitation has been rife in supply chains of retailers and brands around the world, not just in low-cost fashion but also in luxury.

Shein's revenues are expected to hit \$50 billion this year, opens new tab, up 55% from 2023 according to Coresight Research.

Shein revenues expected to hit \$50 billion this year

Fast-fashion giant set for 55% surge in annual sales as it works towards London IPO



Note: Figure for 2024 is an estimate

• Source: Coresight Research

CHINA QUIETLY RAZES UYGHUR BUSINESS LANDMARK IN XINJIANG



Unannounced, China recently demolished a center for Uyghur culture and commerce, erasing the legacy of a prominent Uyghur rights dissident and sparking outrage among Uyghur rights groups.

The long-vacant Rebiya Kadeer Trade Center, located in the capital of ~~Xinjiang~~, had been empty since 2009 but was once a vibrant hub for more than 800 mostly Uyghur-owned businesses.

Local business owners near the site reported being ordered by authorities to close their shops for two days at the end of last month.

“When we returned, the buildings were already gone,” said a former perfume shop owner from the trade center, who spoke to VOA on condition of anonymity for fear of retaliation. “We were not allowed near the area during the demolition.”

Uyghur activists see the destruction of the trade center as part of Beijing’s sustained effort to suppress Uyghur identity and heritage.

MOUNTING CRITICISM

Since 2017, China has been facing mounting international condemnation for its actions in ~~Xinjiang~~, including allegations of mass detentions, forced labor, and the systematic erasure of Uyghur cultural and religious landmarks.

The U.S. government and other international bodies have designated these actions as crimes against humanity and genocide.

China has consistently denied these accusations, framing its policies as necessary measures to combat terrorism, extremism and separatism.

“The measures carried out in ~~Xinjiang~~ have effectively curbed the rising and frequent occurrences of violent terrorist activities, safeguarded national unity and security to the greatest extent possible, and protected the fundamental rights of the people of all ethnic groups in ~~Xinjiang~~, including their rights to life, health and development,” the Chinese foreign ministry said in June 2020.

However, critics argue that these justifications served as a facade for a campaign aimed at assimilating Uyghurs into a homogenized Chinese identity, effectively dismantling their distinct culture and historical presence.

SEALED OFF AND SHROUDED IN SECRECY

Zumret Dawut, a U.S.-based Uyghur rights activist, was the first to confirm the demolition after speaking with sources in Urumqi. She posted the news on her social media account on November 30, revealing that Chinese authorities had secretly demolished the trade center building the day before.

“They told me the area was sealed off, and no one could take pictures or videos,” Dawut told VOA in a phone interview. “The Chinese government treated it as a state secret. Sharing any evidence could lead to persecution.”

The trade center once drew international attention, including a visit by Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates in 1995. The building’s owner, Rebiya Kadeer, recalled preparing a warm reception for Gates, who toured the center as part of efforts to foster U.S.-China business ties.

Kadeer sees the demolition as a calculated move to erase her legacy. “They want to wipe out every trace of my contributions,” she said in an interview with VOA. “But I will not be silenced. My fight for Uyghur justice continues.”

FROM ENTREPRENEUR TO EXILE

The trade center’s destruction adds another chapter to the life of Kadeer, 78, a prominent Uyghur dissident now living in exile in northern Virginia in the United States. Once celebrated as the wealthiest woman in Xinjiang, Kadeer has become a lasting symbol of Uyghur resistance to Beijing’s policies.

Kadeer’s rise began during China’s economic reforms in the 1980s. Her business, Akida Industry and Trade Co., grew into a vast enterprise, spanning textiles, trade centers and factories. She built the Rebiya Kadeer Trade Center in 1991, and within four years it had housed up to 800 mostly Uyghur-owned businesses, making it a thriving cultural

and economic hub.

“The building was more than just a business space — it was a gathering place for Uyghur intellectuals,” Kadeer told VOA.

Her entrepreneurial success earned her a seat on the National Committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, where she was celebrated as an exemplary minority leader.

However, her growing advocacy for Uyghur rights, particularly her efforts to draw attention to the 1997 Ghulja massacre, or what China calls the Ghulja incident, marked the beginning of her fall from favor with Beijing.

On February 5, 1997, Chinese security forces brutally suppressed a peaceful demonstration in Ghulja, a city near Xinjiang’s border with Kazakhstan. The protests were sparked by Uyghurs calling for cultural rights, religious freedom and an end to repressive policies.

ARREST, SENTENCE

In 1999, Kadeer was arrested and accused of “illegally providing national intelligence to overseas organizations” after attempting to send evidence of China’s crackdown on peaceful protesters to visiting U.S. congressional staff in Urumqi.

Sentenced to eight years in prison, Kadeer said she endured harsh treatment.

“I witnessed young Uyghur prisoners being brutalized,” she recalled.

Released in 2005 through U.S. diplomatic

efforts, Kadeer moved to the United States.

Upon arrival in the U.S., Kadeer became a leading voice for Uyghur rights, detailing her ordeal and advocating for her people. In 2006, she was elected president of the World Uyghur Congress, a position that put her at odds with Beijing.

She said in retaliation for her activism, China imprisoned two of her sons who were living in Urumqi on charges including tax evasion. Kadeer said the charges are all false and her sons are being used against her in an attempt to keep her quiet.

“They used my children to punish me,” she said. “But I couldn’t abandon the

fight.”

Since her exile, Beijing has been telling a different story about Kadeer’s legacy. In 2009, Chinese authorities blamed her for inciting riots in Urumqi that killed nearly 200 people.

“I had no involvement in the violence,” Kadeer said.

The 2009 unrest marked the beginning of the end for Kadeer’s business empire. The businesses that rented space at the trade center were relocated to a nearby building. The trade center owned by Kadeer stayed vacant until last month’s demolition.

FILE - Uyghur leader Rebiya Kadeer delivers a speech in front of an East Turkistan flag at the fourth General Assembly of the World Uyghur Congress in Tokyo, May 14, 2012.

RELATIVES HELD

Since 2017, at least 20 of her relatives living in Xinjiang — including children, grandchildren and siblings — have been detained. Her children and grandchildren were released in late 2019 and early 2020 after pressure from the U.S. and international rights groups, according to Kadeer.

“My sister died in a detention camp,” Kadeer said. “The Chinese government made propaganda videos of my children speaking out against me, but I know they were coerced.”

In one video on Chinese state media outlet Global Times, Kadeer’s grandchildren and son praised Beijing’s policies and denounced her. “Grandma, we are living

well,” one granddaughter claimed. “Don’t be deceived by bad people abroad.”

Kadeer dismissed the videos as propaganda. “The truth is hidden behind the cameras,” she said, expressing her heartbreak over her family’s forced participation.

VOA sought comment from the Chinese Embassy in Washington, asking whether the demolition followed legal procedures, including notification and compensation. Embassy spokesperson Liu Pengyu did not respond.

Kadeer confirmed she was neither informed nor compensated. “They might claim my children consented, but they have no rights to the property. Only I do,” she said.



UK PARLIAMENT CONFRONTS 'ITALIAN' TOMATO PUREE MADE WITH UYGHUR FORCED LABOR



Tomatoes are harvested in Bole, capital of Bortala Mongol Autonomous Prefecture, in Xinjiang, Sept. 12, 2024. (Gou Lifeng/Xinhua via Getty Images)

The U.K. Parliament is discussing possible steps of action after an investigative report found that “Italian” tomato purees sold in British supermarkets are actually often made with Uyghur forced labor in China.

The report published by the BBC on Sunday found that 17 products, mostly store-name brands sold by British and German retailers, likely contain Chinese tomatoes. Some have “Italian” in their name, such as Tesco’s Italian Tomato Purée, while others list “Italian” in their product description.

“Yesterday’s ‘blood-on-the-shelves’ BBC investigation has rightly shocked the British public,” said Sarah Champion, a Labour Party member of parliament who is also a member of the Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China, during a House of Commons session on Monday.

“Tomato products sold in U.K. supermarkets with labels informing British customers that the purees were Italian-made or produced in Italy were actually linked to slave labor in Xinjiang,” she said about the links between the U.K.’s supermarket supply chains and Uyghur forced labor.

The news came days after Tadashi Yanai, president and chief executive officer of

Japan’s Fast Retailing, parent company of apparel retailer Uniqlo, said his company did not use cotton from Xinjiang.

Companies around the world are being scrutinized to ensure their supply chains don’t include products made with Uyghur forced labor.

China reacted immediately to the report, saying, “This almost equates Xinjiang with ‘forced labor,’ which is a blatant smear campaign against China,” in an editorial in the state-run Global Times.

“The BBC’s latest attempt at ‘fabricating a story’ is rather clumsy,” it said. “In Xinjiang, whether it’s cotton or tomatoes, mechanization has largely replaced manual labor from planting to harvesting.”

‘GENOCIDE’

In 2021, the U.K.’s Lower House of Parliament voted unanimously to designate the Chinese government’s abuses against Uyghurs in Xinjiang, including mass detentions, torture and forced labor, as part of a policy of

genocide and crimes against humanity.

However, unlike the United States, which has legislation banning exports from Xinjiang under the assumption that they are made with forced labor, U.K. companies are allowed to regulate themselves to ensure such labor is not a part of their supply chains.

Champion went on to blame the United Kingdom's "weak and confusing product labeling regulation" for allowing "a linguistic sleight of hand to occur with, one can only assume, the aim of misleading consumers."

Directing her comments to Douglas Alexander, the UK's minister for trade policy and economic security, Champion asked, "What more evidence is required to prove that we need stronger labeling standards that give consumers more information on the sourcing countries of pre-packed products?"

"In the Uyghur region, egregious human rights abuses are taking place every single day, all underpinned by a system of state-imposed forced labor," she said, adding that an estimated 700,000 people are involved in the production of tomatoes against their will.

Conservative MP Iain Duncan Smith, who co-chairs the Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China, said the U.K.'s 2015 Modern Slavery Act, which calls for the prevention and mitigation of instances of modern slavery across supply chains, needs an overhaul.

"Right now, we have polysilicon arrays

coming in from Xinjiang in massive quantities, and nothing is being done about it," he said. "This is not just about Xinjiang; there are a quarter of a million people from Tibet in forced labor."

FIRSTHAND ACCOUNTS

The BBC said it spoke to 14 people who endured or witnessed forced labor in Xinjiang's tomato fields over the past 16 years, one of whom said that if workers failed to meet their daily production quotas of tomatoes for overseas export, they would be shocked with electric prods.

The news organization researched shipping data to determine that most Xinjiang tomatoes are transported by train through Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and into Georgia, and finally to Italy.

In June, rights lawyers acting on behalf of Uyghur advocacy groups filed domestic and international complaints alleging that dozens of containers of tomato paste shipped by rail from Xinjiang to Italy two months earlier were produced using Uyghur forced labor.

Adrian Zenz, senior fellow at the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation in Washington and an expert on Xinjiang, said Xinjiang Guannong, a company that produces tomatoes using forced labor, created a shell company to export its produce under a different name to Italy and other locations.

Zenz cited legislation passed by the European Parliament in April that aims to prevent the import and distribution of goods made with forced labor, but must

be passed by the EU's 27 countries, which will have three years to implement the law. "The danger is that with the European Union having enacted legislation — a forced labor regulation that will go into effect in three years — the U.K. will become an even greater dumping ground for these kind of tomatoes," he said.

HIDING ORIGINS?

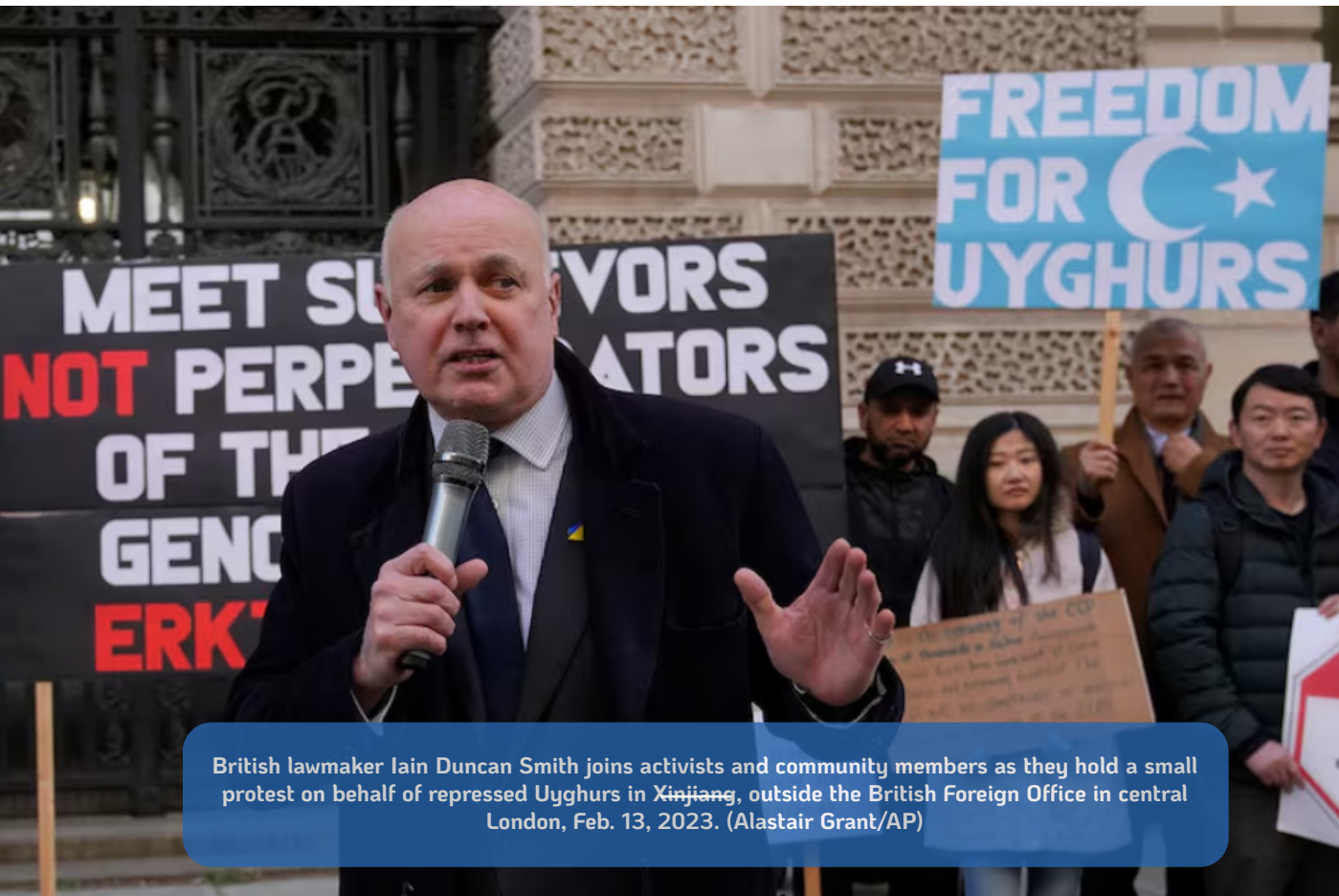
Oana Burcu, who specializes in Chinese foreign policy at the University of Nottingham, said it should come as no surprise that tomato paste originating from China, and potentially from Xinjiang, has reached U.K. supermarket shelves.

Italy, which imports large quantities of tomato paste largely from China and the U.S., is one of the world's largest exporters of tomato paste. It imports tomato paste it, repackages it, relabels it and exports it to other nations in Europe and elsewhere.

The EU has discussed implementing mandatory origin labeling for tomato products in recent years, though the measure has yet to be considered.

"A country could use the label made in or packaged in, let's say, Italy, even if no products from Italy were used as such, and Italy was simply used as a manufacturing or processing base," Burcu said.

Sophie Richardson, longtime activist



British lawmaker Iain Duncan Smith joins activists and community members as they hold a small protest on behalf of repressed Uyghurs in Xinjiang, outside the British Foreign Office in central London, Feb. 13, 2023. (Alastair Grant/AP)



UYGHURS AMONG FOREIGN MILITANTS GIVEN RANKS IN SYRIAN MILITARY

Syria's new rulers have inducted foreign Islamist fighters, including Uyghurs, a Jordanian and a Turk, into the country's military in the aftermath of president Bashar al-Assad's ouster.

The new leadership under Abu Mohammed al Golani, chief of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, a former Al Qaeda and Isis affiliate that led the rebellion against Mr Assad, last week unveiled an accord to dissolve the armed militias operating in the country and integrate them into the military.

Mr Golani, the de facto leader, has since tapped dozens of former militants, including foreigners, for high-ranking positions in the army. At least six of the nearly 50 military roles announced by the defence ministry have gone to foreigners, Reuters reported on Sunday.

The new regime said the appointments were aimed at modernising the military “in order to guarantee security and stability”, AFP reported.

The decision to install Islamist fighters in senior military roles could alarm foreign governments as well as Syrian citizens fearful of the new regime’s intentions, particularly towards minority groups. The concerns remain despite the de facto government pledging not to export Islamic revolution and to rule with tolerance towards Syria’s large minority groups.

The fighters named to military positions on Sunday included members of Mr Golani’s HTS as well as former army officers who had joined the opposition in the early days of the civil war. The foreign fighters are either from the HTS or aligned with the rebel group, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a war monitor based in the UK.

Abdulaziz Dawood Khudaberdi, a Uyghur from Xinjiang, was made a brigadier general, his Turkistan Islamic Party said.

Fellow Uyghur fighters Mawlan Tarsoun Abdussamad and Abdulsalam Yasin Ahmad were given the rank of colonel, the party said in a statement congratulating them and the Uyghur community on the appointments.

Thousands of Sunni Muslim insurgents from abroad joined Syria’s rebel groups early in the 13-year civil war to fight Mr Assad and the Shia militias supporting him, giving the conflict a sectarian overtone.

Some foreign fighters launched their own armed groups, while many joined Isis as it rampaged through Iraq and Syria, briefly declaring a so-called caliphate before being routed by forces backed by the US and Iran.

In remarks broadcast on Sunday, Mr Golani said the new Syria “cannot be run by the mentality of groups and militias”. The new regime has indicated that foreign fighters and their families could be granted Syrian citizenship owing to their contributions in overthrowing Mr Assad.

“This is a small token of recognition for the sacrifices Islamist jihadists gave to our struggle for freedom from Assad’s oppression,” an HTS source told Reuters.

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One day East Turkistan will be liberated as Syria.



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