

UYGHUR KIDS RECALL PHYSICAL AND MENTAL TORMENT AT CHINESE BOARDING SCHOOLS



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A UYGHUR GETS DEATH SENTENCE, AS CHINA BANS ONCE OK'D BOOKS

As the Chinese government tightened its grip over its ethnic Uyghur population, it sentenced one man to death and three others to life in prison last year for textbooks drawn in part from historical resistance movements that had once been sanctioned by the ruling Communist Party.

An AP review of images and stories presented as problematic in a state media documentary, and interviews with people involved in editing the textbooks, found they were rooted in previously accepted narratives — two drawings are based on a 1940s movement praised by Mao Zedong, who founded the communist state in 1949. Now, as the party's imperatives have changed, it has partially reinterpreted them with devastating consequences for individuals, while also depriving students of ready access to a part of their heritage.

It is a less publicized chapter in a wide-ranging crackdown on Uyghurs and other largely Muslim groups, which has prompted the U.S. and others to stage a diplomatic boycott of the Beijing Olympics that open Friday. Foreign experts, governments and media have documented the detention of an estimated 1 million or more people, the demolition of mosques and forced sterilization and abortion. The Chinese government denies human rights violations and says it has taken steps to eliminate separatism and extremism in its western Xinjiang region.

The attack on textbooks and the officials responsible for them shows how far the Communist Party is going to control and reshape the Uyghur community. It comes as President Xi Jinping, in the name of ethnic unity, pushes a more assimilationist policy on Tibetans, Mongolians and other ethnic groups that scales back bilingual education. Scholars and activists fear the disappearance of Uyghur cultural history, handed down in stories of heroes and villains across generations.



Sattar Sawut, a Uyghur official who headed the Xinjiang Education Department, was sentenced to death, a court announced last April, saying he led a separatist group to create textbooks filled with ethnic hatred, violence and religious extremism that caused people to carry out violent acts in ethnic clashes in 2009.

He may not be executed, as such death sentences are often commuted to life in prison after two years with good behavior.

Details about the textbooks were then presented in a documentary by CGTN, the overseas arm of state broadcaster CCTV, on what it called hidden threats in Xinjiang in a 10-minute segment. It included what amounted to on-camera confessions by Sawut and another former education official, Alimjan Memtimin, who got a life sentence.

The Xinjiang government and CGTN did not respond to written questions about the material.

Drawings from the textbooks are presented as evidence Sawut led others to incite hatred between Uyghurs and China's majority Han population.

In one, a man points a pistol at another. The image is flashed over an on-camera statement by Memtimin, who says they wanted to "incite ethnic hatred and such thoughts."

But both men in the drawing are Uyghurs. One, named Gheni Batur, holds up a gun to a traitor who had been sent to assassi-



nate him. Batur was seen as a “people’s hero” in a 1940s uprising against China’s then-ruling Nationalist Party over its repression and discrimination against ethnic groups, said Nabijan Tursun, a Uyghur American historian and a senior editor at Radio Free Asia.

The Communists toppled the Nationalists and took power in 1949. Mao invited then-Uyghur leader Ehmeltjan Qasimi to the first meeting of a national advisory body and said, “Your years of struggle are a part of our entire Chinese nation’s democratic revolution movement.” However, Qasimi died in a plane crash en route to the meeting.

Despite Mao’s approval, this period of history has always been debated by Chinese academics, Brophy said, and the attitude has shifted more and more toward hostility.

Another element in the story came to the fore after a series of knifings and bombings in 2013-14 by Uyghur extremists, who were angered by harsh treatment by the authorities.

The Uyghur movement had briefly carved out a nominally independent state, the second East Turkistan Republic, in northern Xinjiang in 1944. It had the backing of the Soviet Union, which had real control.

A recently leaked 2017 document, one of a trove given to an unofficial Uyghur Tribunal in Britain last September, shows that a Communist Party working group dealing with Xinjiang criticized elements of the uprising.

“The Three District Revolution is a part of our people’s democratic revolution, but there were serious mistakes made in the early stages,” the notice said.

Blaming interference by the Soviet Union, it said that ethnic separatists infiltrated the revolutionary ranks and “stole the right to lead, established a splitting regime, ... and committed the grave mistake of ethnic division.”

The document still said that Qasimi should be respected for his role in history.



The CGTN documentary, though, singles out a photo of Qasimi wearing a medal that was the symbol of the second East Turkistan Republic. “It shouldn’t appear in this textbook at all,” Shehide Yusup, an art editor at Xinjiang Education Publishing House, said in the documentary.

Another textbook illustration, drawn from the same period, shows what appears to be Nationalist soldier pointing a knife at a Uyghur rebel sprawled on the ground.

Both stories come from novels by Uyghur writers published by government publishing houses. One of the writers, Zordun Sabir, is a member of the state-backed Chinese Writer’s Association. The text-

books themselves were published only after high-level approval, said Kündüz, a former editor at the Xinjiang University newspaper who uses only one name.

When the textbooks were reviewed in 2001, the Uyghur stories hardly got any attention, said Abduweli Ayup, a Uyghur linguist who as a then-graduate student translated some of the stories into Chinese for the review.

Stories that portrayed the Nationalists as the enemy were not considered controversial. Instead, the Uyghur editors worried about foreign stories, said Ayup, an activist who now lives in Norway, such as a line from a Tolstoy story and a Hungarian poem.



Another story cited by CGTN goes back to the Qing Dynasty, which ruled China until 1912. Yusup, the art editor tells CGTN: “This is the legend of seven heroic Uyghur girls. It’s all fabricated. Han Chinese soldiers trapped them at a cliff and they jumped to their death to defend their homeland. It’s meant to incite ethnic hatred.”

But the soldiers were not Han, they were ethnic Manchu who founded the Qing Dynasty in 1644. The text of the story visible in the CGTN documentary says so, reading in part, “The Manchu soldiers started to climb Mount Möljer from all

sides. Maysikhan (a leader of the Uyghur girls) saw the Manchus clambering up the mountain and told the girls to roll rocks down at them.”

Full Coverage: China

The story is based on a local rebellion against the Qing Dynasty. A shrine dedicated to the seven girls stands in the Xinjiang city of Uchturpan, which partially funded it. Epics, articles and dramas about the story are popular.

“For the Chinese government to praise the uprising and then criminalize the inclusion of the story in textbooks is shocking,” Tursun, the historian said.

From even earlier, officials have been increasing the amount of instruction in Chinese in Xinjiang, especially after ethnic clashes in 2009 in Urumqi, the regional capital, said Minglang Zhou, an expert on China’s bilingual education policies at the University of Maryland.

Xi, as China’s leader, has stressed the consolidation of the nation, a move away from the “one unified nation with diversity” promoted by his predecessors, Zhou said. “He sees diversity as a threat to a unified nation.”

Kündüz lamented that her son, growing up in Urumqi, studied more in Chinese than in Uyghur. “They want to assimilate us, they want us to erase us,” she said from Sweden, where she now lives.

To this day, her son speaks Chinese better than Uyghur.

By HUIZHONG WU



JAPAN PARLIAMENT ADOPTS RESOLUTION ON HUMAN RIGHTS IN CHINA

Japan's parliament adopted a rare resolution on Tuesday on what it called the "serious human rights situation" in China, and asked the government to take steps to relieve the situation.

Japan has already announced it will not send a government delegation to the upcoming Beijing Winter Olympics, following a US-led diplomatic boycott over concerns about China's human rights condition, although Tokyo avoided explicitly labeling its move as such.

Since taking office in October, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida has said on multiple occasions that Japan would not mince words with China when necessary, and in November appointed former defense minister Gen Nakatani as his aide on human rights.

The resolution, adopted by the lower chamber, said the international community has expressed concerns over such issues as internment and the violation of religious freedom in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, Tibet and Hong Kong.

"Human rights issues cannot just be domestic issues, because human rights hold universal values and are a rightful matter of concern for the international community," the resolution said.

"This chamber recognizes changes to the status quo with force, which are symbolized by the serious human rights situation, as a threat to the international community," it said.

China's foreign ministry said in a statement on Tuesday that the resolution "ignores the facts, maliciously slanders China's human rights situation, seriously



violates international law and basic norms governing international relations, grossly interferes in China's internal affairs, and is extremely egregious in nature."

When Japan launched a war against other countries, it committed countless crimes, the statement added.

US President Joe Biden in December signed into law legislation that bans imports from China's Xinjiang region over concerns about forced labor. Washington has labeled Beijing's treatment of the Uyghur Muslim minority genocide.

China denies abuses in Xinjiang, a major cotton producer that also supplies much of the world's materials for solar panels.

The conservative wing of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) sought the adoption of the resolution ahead of the Feb. 4 opening of the Beijing Winter Olympics although there were worries in the government about a potential economic impact, Jiji news agency has said.

There have long been competing views within the LDP about the approach to China. The party's more conservative wing is hawkish on China policy and seen as

concerned primarily with defense issues. Other members of the party have pushed to preserve Japan's deep economic ties with its neighbor.

The parliamentary resolution called on the Japanese government to work with the international community in addressing the issue.

"The government should collect information to grasp the whole picture ... , monitor the serious human right situation in cooperation with the international community, and implement comprehensive relieving measures," it said.

The resolution did not directly use the word "China" anywhere in the text, and steered clear of such expression as "human rights violation", saying, instead, "human rights situation", in a possible nod to close bilateral economic ties.

Japan relies on China not only as a manufacturing hub, but also as a market for items from automobiles to construction equipment.

Story by Reuters



UYGHUR KIDS RECALL PHYSICAL AND MENTAL TORMENT AT CHINESE BOARDING SCHOOLS IN XINJIANG

In quiet, polite voices, Aysu and Lütfullah Kuçar describe the nearly 20 months they spent in state boarding schools in China's western region of Xinjiang, forcibly separated from their family.

Under the watchful gaze of their father, the two ethnically Uyghur children say that their heads were shaved and that class monitors and teachers frequently hit them, locked them in dark rooms and forced them to hold stress positions as punishment for perceived transgressions.

By the time they were able to return home to Turkey in December 2019, they had become malnourished and traumatized. They had also forgotten how to speak their mother tongues, Uyghur and Turkish. (The children were being raised in Turkey but got forcibly sent to boarding school during a family visit to China.)

"That was the heaviest moment in my life. Standing in front of my two Chinese-speaking children, I felt as if they had killed me," says Abdüllatif Kuçar, their father.

“Since 2017, authorities in Xinjiang have rounded up hundreds of thousands of Uyghurs, a largely Muslim ethnic minority group, and sent them to detention centers where they are taught Mandarin Chinese and Chinese political ideology. Camp detainees have reported being forced to work in factories during their detention or after they are released. The children of those detained or arrested are often sent to state boarding schools, even when relatives are willing to take them in.



Experts say this is part of Chinese authorities' efforts to mold minority children into speaking and acting like the country's dominant Han ethnic group.

"This ideological impulse of trying to assimilate non-Han people corresponded with this punitive approach of putting adults in camps, and therefore lots of young children ended up in boarding kindergartens and boarding schools or orphanages," says James Millward, a professor at Georgetown University who studies Chinese and Central Asian history. "It really is an effort to try to make everyone Chinese and see themselves as Chinese and have a single cultural background."

These family separations have contributed to a slow erasure of the Uyghur language and culture in China, experts say — one of the reasons officials in the U.S., Canada, France, the Netherlands and other countries have declared that China's policies in Xinjiang amount to genocide.

China rejects the widespread accusations of wrongful discrimination against Uyghurs and other minorities in the region — but Uyghurs, rights advocates and reporters have documented numerous accounts of systematic abuse.

The Chinese government closely guards information about Xinjiang's treatment of

ethnic minorities by refusing to issue Uyghurs passports, arresting those who leak documents or give interviews to journalists and threatening loved ones who remain in China.

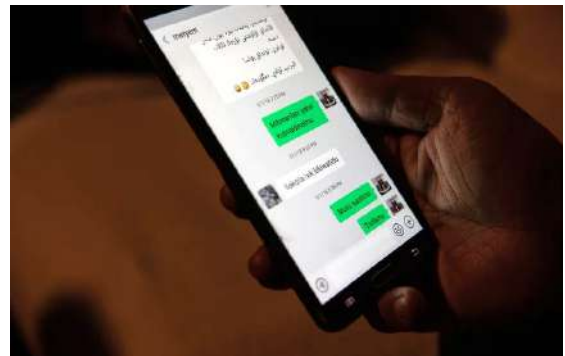
Despite these dangers, the Kuçar family is sharing its story publicly for the first time.

Lütfullah was only 4 years old when he was sent to a boarding school just south of downtown Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang, in February 2018. His older sister, Aysu, then 6, was sent to a separate school in the same city. When they were reunited with family members the next year, the two children were nearly unrecognizable to their loved ones.

"They were like living corpses," says Neri-man Kuçar, their stepmother. "They had become entirely different children."

He was right to have misgivings about going back to China

Abdüllatif Kuçar is originally from Xinjiang but had been living in Turkey for about 30 years. He returned to China with his family for a visit in 2015, with misgivings.



Chinese authorities had been disproportionately arresting Uyghurs for years following deadly ethnic violence between the minority group and Han people in Xinji-

ang in 2009. Sporadic terrorist attacks in the region also picked up, violence that Beijing blamed on Uyghur separatist fighters and that authorities used to justify tightening scrutiny of Uyghur residents. China also became increasingly concerned that Uyghur separatist fighters were smuggling themselves out of the country to train with militant groups such as al-Qaida.

Still, Kuçar was unable to stay away from China. Despite having moved to Turkey in 1986, he regularly shuttled between Istanbul and Urumqi to visit relatives and keep a lucrative textile and leather business there running.

Kuçar's misgivings proved correct. His Turkish citizenship put him under suspicion, and Chinese authorities seized the family's passports in late 2015, trapping him and his two children in the country. When his documents were finally returned in 2017, Kuçar was deported back to Turkey and barred from reentering China.

That same year, Chinese leader Xi Jinping personally ordered a massive security campaign to extinguish terrorist threats by targeting the entire Uyghur ethnic group.

Xinjiang quickly began constructing a sprawling network of detention camps and started expanding existing prisons. At least hundreds of thousands of Uyghurs and other historically Muslim ethnic minorities were sent to such "transformation through education" camps to study Chinese political ideology and the Chinese language, despite having no criminal record. In some of these facilities, Uyghurs also reported being mentally and physically tortured and the women sterilized. Uyghurs with a religious background or

a history of international travel — people like the Kuçars — were sentenced to lengthy prison terms.

Because Chinese authorities had not returned his children's passports, Kuçar was forced to leave Aysu and Lütfullah behind with their mother, Meryem Aimati, in Urumqi. Kuçar thought their separation would only be temporary.

But Aimati was growing increasingly fearful. She was soon required to attend a daily flag-raising ceremony to show allegiance to China's ruling Communist Party. Local officials often dropped by her Urumqi apartment unannounced, part of a series of campaigns in which more than 1 million civilians and Communist Party officials were dispatched to live with and educate Uyghur families in their own homes.

"Three officials came by today. I did a lot of talking, and they took pictures of me raising the Chinese flag," Aimati said in a voice message to Kuçar in 2017, which he played for NPR. "I am exhausted."

One night, Kuçar was talking on the phone with Aimati when police started banging on her Urumqi apartment door. Terrified, she told him she was going to let them in, before hanging up on him.

Relatives in Urumqi came to check on Aimati the next morning. They found her



apartment turned upside down and the two children in shock — and Aimati was gone.

Aimati's cousins took in the children, but in February 2018, they were arrested as well. There was no news about the children. It was as if they had disappeared.



The kids were sent off to boarding schools and describe tough punishments

Unbeknownst to Kuçar, Aysu and Lütfullah had been sent off to two separate state schools in Urumqi.

Every school day began the same way, as the children describe it to NPR. Kids were roused from the dormitory rooms where they bunked with multiple other Uyghur children of various ages. Teachers came by for a mandatory bed inspection before the children could line up for breakfast, usually corn or rice porridge.

Then came a Chinese flag-raising ceremony for which they were taught to chant Chinese political slogans and sing patriotic songs. Years later, the children would still calm themselves down by singing Chinese songs about “Grandfather” Xi Jinping and “Father” Wang Junzheng. The latter is the former security chief of

Xinjiang, who has been sanctioned by numerous governments, including the U.S. government, for human rights abuses.

“My two children spoke Chinese as well as birds sing,” says Kuçar.

In interviews from their Istanbul home, both children independently describe routine physical and emotional punishment. An older class monitor assigned to each dorm room was given permission to bully the younger students.

“The ‘older sisters’ pulled my hair and beat me. All my hair fell out when I was at school,” says Aysu, now 10.

“If we cried, the ‘older brother’ made us stand still facing the wall or hit us,” says Lütfullah, now 8.

When children didn’t follow orders or learn quickly enough, their teacher would put them into a stress position they call “the motorcycle,” the children say. Aysu and Lütfullah demonstrate: two arms stretched out front, knees bent in a half-squat, which they held for several minutes.

But they say the worst punishment was being sent to the school’s basement. Lütfullah says the teachers told him ghosts lived there, and children including him were locked there in the dark, alone, for hours at a time.

In class, the children say, they were taught in only Mandarin for six days a week, and students who spoke without permission or spoke in Uyghur were hit with rulers.

After class each day, the children finished their homework in silence before returning to their dormitories and watching television. Terrified to speak to other children, Aysu says she spent much of her

waking time alone. “I would just stare at the ceiling in a daze if I could not sleep,” she remembers.



China is building out boarding schools

NPR was able to identify the school Lütfullah was sent to. It had been previously called the Urumqi Folk Art School and is located in the densely populated, predominantly Uyghur neighborhood of Sandunbei in the region’s capital.

The school is among at least 1,300 boarding schools set up across the Xinjiang region, according to Education Ministry documents. Xinjiang local governments have been scrubbing their websites of all references to the boarding schools, but an official education report from 2017 — the year before the Kuçar children were sent to the schools — says nearly half a million children had already been enrolled by the start of that year.

China has placed more central control over education after regional authorities blamed seditious textbooks and faulty curricula for radicalizing Uyghur students toward violent extremism. Last April, a Xinjiang court sentenced to death one of the region’s former top education officials, Sattar Sawut, for allegedly inserting separatist material into Uyghur

textbooks. Uyghurs and researchers say the accusation about radicalization in schools is false.

“[The textbooks] were approved at the time. What happened is the standards were changed from the top down, and therefore these people were made scapegoats,” says Millward, the Georgetown professor.

China says it is expanding the number of boarding schools to improve educational access, especially in remote rural communities.

“Boarding schools make it easier for students of all ethnic groups to attend school. ... All choices are made by the students and their parents, who can visit anytime they want to see their children,” Mierguli Maimaitimin, a Xinjiang boarding school teacher, said at a news conference organized by the Xinjiang regional government last July.

But Uyghur families say such schools are also where children with both parents detained or imprisoned are sent, against family wishes.

“My relatives would rather take care of the children themselves, but they are forced to send the kids to boarding schools,” says Mukerrem Mahmud, a Uyghur student in Turkey.

Her four younger siblings were sent to state boarding schools in Hami, an eastern Xinjiang city, after her mother was sentenced to six years in prison for wiring Mahmud money. Their father was given a 15-year sentence for an unknown reason. In 2019, her 15-year-old brother, Abdullah, died of an untreated tumor while living at his school.

“I am quite sure that if my parents had

been able to take him to Shanghai [for medical treatment] as they had planned, he would have survived,” says Mahmud.



In 2018, a U.N. human rights panel said it had “credible reports” that at least 1 million Uyghur adults had been interned without due process in Xinjiang. As the scale of mass incarcerations picked up across the region, the number of temporarily orphaned children also grew.

A 2018 state-compiled list from Xinjiang’s Karakax (Moyu, in Chinese) County lists the names and identification numbers of more than 1,700 Uyghur children receiving welfare payments because both parents were in detention or prison. “No ability to work, mother detained under ‘Strike Hard Campaign,’ father being trained [in a reeducation camp],” county officials wrote next to the entry for an 8-year-old girl. She received 151 yuan (\$24) a month.

The Xinjiang Victims Database, a website run by rights advocates compiling names and personal details of people believed to be held in camps in the region, lists more than 2,400 people under age 18 in detention or separated from their parents in Xinjiang.

Desperate and grasping for answers, some Uyghur parents have turned to Chinese social media to look for their missing children.

One Uyghur shopkeeper in Istanbul has been searching for five of his children back in China. He left China in 2016 to send three of his other kids to Turkish school. Two years later, he found one clue: a picture of his daughter Fatima, then age 7, with her head shaved and hands clasped, celebrating Chinese Lunar New Year with her elementary school class.

The picture had been posted by the government of Yopurga County, in northern Xinjiang, but it had not been taken at the same school where Fatima had been enrolled when the shopkeeper left for Turkey. There was no sign of Fatima’s twin brother.

“I am worried that they will forget their culture and language and they will not be able to communicate,” says the man, who did not want to be identified because he believes he has been targeted for deportation back to China.

Kuçar managed to reunite with his kids

Meanwhile, anguished and stuck in Turkey, Abdullatif Kuçar had been petitioning Turkish government ministries and protesting outside the Chinese Embassy for help with extricating Aysu and Lütfullah from China. “I averaged one minister a month,” Kuçar remembers.

His activism paid off. In 2019, the Turkish Foreign Ministry informed him it had negotiated with China to allow Kuçar a single-entry visa to enter China and pick up his two children.

Kuçar landed in Urumqi, Xinjiang’s capital, in late November 2019. He described what unfolded in a series of interviews with NPR. He immediately began dialing relatives’ phone numbers. Every single



one hung up on him, then shut off their phone, he says. Walking the streets of his old neighborhood, Kuçar passed by several acquaintances and former neighbors. They crossed the street to avoid talking to him.

Police booked both hotel rooms adjacent to his. He was not allowed to close his hotel door. Security officers tailed him in two vehicles whenever he stepped out for a meal. Each day, he had to check in at a local government office to debrief the police on his whereabouts. For 10 days, he waited for authorities to bring him Aysu and Lütfullah.

“When the Chinese police brought my two children out, they ran to me as fast as a bullet from a gun,” Kuçar remembers. He fainted in the December snow as his children began hugging him.

When he came to, he realized his children no longer seemed to react to Turkish or Uyghur. “Even though they did not un-

derstand me, I did not think there was a language barrier. We could communicate with our expressions,” says Kuçar. “I kissed them, I held them, and they could not stop smiling at me.”

NPR verified that Kuçar traveled from Turkey to China in both 2015 and briefly in 2019 through visa stamps and Chinese and Turkish identification documents. Details of the children’s account were corroborated by Turkish medical and education professionals who are treating the children. The Turkish Embassy in Beijing declined to comment on the story and referred all questions back to the Kuçar family.

But what about their mother?

Before leaving China in December 2019, the Kuçars made one last stop. It was to see the children’s mother, Meryem Aimati. Kuçar learned she had been sentenced to a 20-year prison term in her hometown of Kucha, but Chinese authorities arranged

for her to be transported to a nearby hospital for a last visit with her family.

“She was thin to the bone and had lost all her hair,” he remembers. “I grabbed her skeletal hand and saw the dark scars the handcuffs had left on her wrists.”

After 15 minutes, Kuçar was told his visit was over. Despite prohibitions on touching her or even crying, he says, he wrapped Aimati in a bear hug, lifting her off the bed. When he set her down, he noticed she was too weak to stand.

“I thought to myself, ‘What is the point of living anymore?’” he says. “But I saw Meryem sitting on the bed crying, and our children grabbed my hand. I decided: I must live for the children.”

Both China’s Foreign Ministry and the Xinjiang regional government did not respond to requests for comment.

The kids are home, but there’s a road to recovery

Just over two years after returning to Turkey, the Kuçar children are still in the middle of a long recovery process.

Both lost weight during their time in boarding school. A pediatric doctor in Istanbul diagnosed them with calcium and iron deficiencies, and the family put them on a special diet.

“On her second day back home, I made Aysu laghman, Uyghur-style noodles,” says Neriman Kuçar, their stepmother. “Aysu started crying when she saw the dish. They had only been served Uyghur food twice while she was at the school, but older classmates had eaten it all before she got a bite.”

For both children, the mental trauma

stemming from their time in Urumqi runs far deeper than the physical impact. For months, Aysu and Lütfullah hid whenever guests came over. They asked for permission before going to the bathroom and before eating.

“Lütfullah could not speak or express himself until the end of first grade. I did not have this problem with other Uyghur children from Xinjiang,” says the child’s Turkish elementary class teacher. The teacher did not want to be named because discussing China’s policies in Xinjiang is politically sensitive in Turkey.

The two children also work with a psychiatrist who specializes in treating Uyghur children with art therapy, and they attend Uyghur-language classes after school.

For the first four months the children were back in Turkey, Kuçar says, he sat by their bedside every night because of their frequent and intense nightmares. “The children gnashed their teeth, kicked in bed and would shout, ‘No, I will not do that!’ in their sleep,” Kuçar says.

He still keeps the lights on 24 hours a day inside the house to chase away Lütfullah’s memories of being locked in the dark school basement.

Kuçar says what keeps him going is prayer and a sense of duty to keep the family together. He knows that despite their scars, in partially reuniting, they are one of the luckier Uyghur families.

Abduweli Ayup contributed reporting from Istanbul.

By Emily Feng



UYGHURS IN TURKEY CALL FOR BOYCOTT AS BEIJING GAMES BEGIN

Feb 4 (Reuters) - Hundreds of protesters from China's Muslim Uyghur community rallied in Istanbul on Friday to call for a boycott of the Winter Olympics opening in Beijing and to urge participants to speak out against China's treatment of the ethnic minority.

The Beijing Olympics opened on Friday in the shadow of a diplomatic boycott over China's human rights record and devoid of most spectators due to the coronavirus pandemic.

"China stop the genocide", "Muslims don't sleep, stand up for your brothers", chanted the protesters, who briefly blocked a road and scuffled with lines of Turkish riot police as they tried to march up a hill towards the Chinese consulate.

"These Olympics are being held not on snow, but on blood," said one protester,

26-year-old student Abdullah Mudinoglu.

Many protesters, gathered on Istanbul's waterfront, waved the blue-and-white flags of the independence movement of East Turkistan, a group Beijing says threatens the stability of its far western region of Xinjiang.

Some 50,000 Uyghurs are estimated to live in Turkey, the largest Uyghur diaspora outside Central Asia. Turks have close ethnic, religious and linguistic ties to the Uyghurs.





‘BLOODY GAMES’

“We call on all humanity to boycott and not watch the Winter Olympics, and for sports people and participants not to take part in these bloody games,” Hidayet Oguzhan, head of the East Turkistan Education and Solidarity Association, told the crowd.

U.N. experts and rights groups estimate more than a million people, mainly from the Uyghur and other Muslim minorities, have been detained in forced labour camps in Xinjiang since 2016.

China initially denied such camps existed, but has since said they are vocational centres and are designed to combat extremism. It denies all accusations of abuse.

“We are completely against the Olympics being held there with such genocide being perpetrated against the Uyghurs,” said 28-year-old Sufinur Omercan at Friday’s protest.

“My father... was a historian and was thrown in prison because of the columns and books which he wrote. I can’t get any news on him since 2017.”

Last month, 19 Uyghurs filed a criminal complaint with a Turkish prosecutor against Chinese officials, accusing them of committing genocide, torture, rape and crimes against humanity.

The United States, Britain, Canada, Australia, Japan and Denmark have said they will not send official diplomatic delegations to the Games to protest China’s rights record.

By Daren Butler



UYGHUR TORCH LIGHTING MADE BEIJING WINTER OLYMPICS THE MOST POLITICAL GAMES EVER

Viewers of the Winter Olympics' opening ceremony in Beijing were treated to what will be remembered as one of the most overt political statements in Olympic history.

China and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) claim that ethnicity was not a factor in Beijing's selection of a cross-country skier from Xinjiang as one of the final torchbearers at the ceremony, but this was a crass and insensitive political ploy seemingly designed to show open defiance of Western charges of ethnic genocide committed by China against the Uyghurs and other Muslim minority groups.

The IOC — which calls itself the guardian of the Olympic Games and the leader of the Olympic movement — became complicit by allowing this, while at the same time reiterating assertions that politics should be divorced from sport. This can't continue, and the international community must stand firm against China's human rights atrocities.

The Chinese government has arbitrarily detained more than 1 million Uyghurs, a Muslim Turkic-speaking minority of about 11 million in the northwest region of Xinjiang, as part of a broader "sinicization" campaign to eradicate the identities of non-Han Chinese ethnic populations.

Actions against detainees and the broader population reportedly include forced

labor, renunciation of Islam, family separation, torture and sterilization. The Trump administration charged China with genocide and crimes against humanity against the Uyghurs in 2021, a designation with which the Biden administration concurred. President Joe Biden imposed a diplomatic boycott of the 2022 Games, primarily citing atrocities in Xinjiang. About a dozen other countries followed suit.

But China defiantly rejects all charges from the international human rights community as Western propaganda and defends the internment camps as “vocational training” centers — and it doesn’t allow international access.

Against this backdrop, Beijing’s choice of a Uyghur athlete as the final torchbearer is hardly a sign of Chinese magnanimity toward its ethnic minorities. As Washington Post columnist Isaac Stone Fish tweeted, the historical equivalent would be Nazi Germany choosing a Jewish athlete to light the torch at the 1936 Olympic Games.

This isn’t the first time that statements

have been made with the Olympic torch lighting ceremony, but the previous messages have been poignant, uplifting and fully fluent with the spirit of the games, such as Muhammed Ali at the 1996 Atlanta Games.

In Asia, the 1988 Seoul Olympics featured Sohn Kee-Chung, a Korean gold medalist in the 1936 Olympics who was forced to accept the medal under the Japanese flag because Korea was a colony at the time. The 1964 Tokyo Olympics featured the track athlete Yoshinori Sakai, who was born the day of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima during World War II, and his presence signified Japan’s return to the world stage as an affluent democracy after an era of fascism, war and military occupation.

‘No blame should be levied at the Uyghur athlete (for this reason I have not included her name). On the contrary, she probably had little choice in the matter and would have faced untold difficulties had she resisted.





IOC President Thomas Bach has turned a deaf ear on all criticism of Chinese human rights abuses. His seemingly staged video call with former Olympian and tennis star Peng Shuai, who went missing after her charges of sexual abuse against a senior Chinese Communist Party official, are sad attempts to sweep the issue under the rug for the sake of the games.

And Chinese charges that Biden's boycott is politicizing the Olympics are also laughable.

No country has politicized sports more than China. It sanctioned the NBA's Houston Rockets in 2019 when one of the team's staff members retweeted a statement supporting democracy protestors in Hong Kong. It restricted citizens from traveling to the 2018 PyeongChang Winter Games in South Korea over a missile defense controversy. It boycotted the Olympics for nearly three decades, end-

ing with the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics, because of Taiwan's participation. And it will likely do retaliatory diplomatic boycotts of the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics and 2032 Brisbane Games.

China's actions are an unmistakable slap in the face to the U.S.-led boycott, but Biden never expected that the action would change China's policies in Xinjiang.

The use of the Uyghur athlete may have been Chinese leader Xi Jinping's effort to double down and to demonstrate China's unapologizing confidence and strength, defiant of Western criticism. But in doing so, Xi has likely done more to damage the Olympic spirit than any other leader in recent history, with the IOC as what seems a willing accomplice.

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By Victor Cha



PRO-CHINA TWITTER ACCOUNTS FLOOD CRITICAL BEIJING WINTER OLYMPICS HASHTAG

Pro-China accounts have flooded Twitter with posts including the #GenocideGames hashtag, in what researchers say is an effort to dilute the hashtag's power to galvanize criticism of the Winter Olympics host country.

Western human rights advocates and lawmakers have used the hashtag #GenocideGames to raise awareness in Xinjiang, a region in northwest China where authorities have carried out forced assimilation efforts against religious minorities, including Uyghur Muslims. Xinjiang has become a focal point for criticism of Chinese politics ahead of the Beijing Winter Olympics, which started last week.

China's cabinet, State Council and Cyberspace Administration of China did not respond to requests for comment on the hashtag flooding and the origin of these accounts.

““The Chinese propaganda apparatus has focused on defending its image regarding the treatment of Uyghurs, while promoting the Olympics.””

Such a tactic, known as hashtag flooding, is usually aimed at diluting the effectiveness of a popular hashtag so that other Twitter users searching for the term see swarms of unrelated content mixed in with announcements of protests at coming or calls for other organized actions.

“The Chinese propaganda apparatus has focused on defending its image regarding

the treatment of Uyghurs, while promoting the Olympics. This hashtag is at the intersection of those two things,” Linville said.

As well as making content from human rights defenders harder to find, the flooding could also aim to trigger Twitter’s monitoring systems as spam, in which case all related content would be removed, MM said. Linville and Warren.

More than 132,000 tweets posted from October 20 to January 20 used the hashtag #GenocideGames, according to MM. Linville and Warren. About 67% of tweets are no longer visible, the professors said. A Twitter spokesperson Inc.

said the company took action on some of those tweets, in accordance with the company’s rules against spam and platform manipulation.

The tweets are part of a network of China-backed accounts that Twitter first identified in December, the spokeswoman said.

One in 10 accounts followed by professors used the hashtag #GenocideGames in the first tweet of the account’s existence, indicating that they were created specifically to engage in hashtag flooding, Ms. Linville.

Researchers say Chinese authorities have detained hundreds of thousands of minorities, mostly Muslims, in a network of internment camps as part of its assimilation drive, which they say also includes mass surveillance and forced birth control.

The Olympic Games have been a revenue-generating endeavor for the IOC almost since their inception. WSJ’s Stu Woo unpacks the history of brand partnerships and the challenges sponsors face at the Beijing Games. Photo: Fabrice Bensch/Reuters

US officials, policymakers in other Western countries and some human rights activists have called Beijing’s treatment of minorities in Xinjiang a form of genocide. China rejects the allegations and called the camps vocational training centers to improve livelihoods and fight religious



extremism and terrorism. The International Olympic Committee has protested against attempts to politicize the Beijing Olympics. China said sport had nothing to do with politics and asked countries to practice the Olympic spirit of “unity” instead of undermining its cause.

The Chinese government maintains tight control over the country’s national internet, ordering social media companies to censor subversive views. The country’s authorities have also employed an army of pro-government netizens to bolster nationalist views.

Renée DiResta, head of technical research at Stanford’s Internet Observatory, which studies misinformation on the internet, said past social media campaigns that companies say were run by Chinese authorities have typically promoted content to create a positive perception of the country.

Typically, operations share and retweet certain views that the government wants to amplify. They use networks of accounts, often created in batches on the same day, as well as compromised accounts that once belonged to other users but are seized and used to post about matters important to the Chinese government, DiResta said.

“Topics change depending on what’s of interest in the news: Hong Kong protests, Taiwan 2020 elections, Covid, Xinjiang, now – according to this research – the Olympics,” Ms DiResta said.

Analysis by the Wall Street Journal showed that many accounts that appeared to be hanging on to the #Geno-

cideGames hashtag sought to give the impression that they belonged to users of non-Chinese descent, with names including Erin Lockett and Isaac. Churchill.

Often the accounts retweeted topics completely unrelated to Xinjiang or China, including romance and the National Football League, according to tweets seen by the Journal. Seventy percent of accounts tweeting the #GenocideGames hashtag had no followers, according to Clemson’s research.

Activists say the tactic is an effort by the Chinese government to confuse the issue and promote its own explanation of what is happening in Xinjiang.

It’s “one of the central strategies the Chinese government has used in recent years,” said Peter Irwin, senior program manager for the Uyghur Human Rights Project, a Washington, D.C.-based advocacy group that began using the hashtag in the run-up to the Beijing Games. “They’re not necessarily going to convince everyone in the West, but they’re trying to cover their tracks.”

By Georgia Wells and Liza Lin



WORLD BANK ARM WORKING WITH FIRMS PART OF CHINA'S ANTI-UYGHUR CAMPAIGN: REPORT

Report published by US-based think tank says IFC clients active in China's Xinjiang, Beijing says report 'full of lies'

The International Finance Corporation (IFC), the World Bank's private lending arm and a leading global development institution, has been accused of dealings with Chinese companies linked to forced labor and land expropriation in China's Xinjiang region.

The IFC has "several significant investments" in Xinjiang, "where indigenous peoples have been subjected to what international legislators, legal scholars, and advocates have determined to be a genocide," according to a report published on Wednesday by the Atlantic Council, a Washington-based think tank.

The report is based on a joint investiga-

tion by the Helena Kennedy Centre for International Justice at Sheffield Hallam University and US-based nonprofit research organization NomoGaia, published in coordination with the Atlantic Council's DFRLab.

"Significant evidence suggests that several of IFC's clients are active participants in the implementation of China's campaign of repression against the Uyghurs, including through forced labor, forced displacement, cultural erasure, and environmental destruction," the report said.

The UN and Western countries led by the US, along with global rights groups such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, have repeatedly accused Beijing of oppressing 12 million Uyghurs, most of whom are Muslims, in Xinjiang.

Beijing, however, has consistently denied any wrongdoing, denouncing the allegations as a “political virus” used by the West to malign China.

It also slammed the latest report, saying it is “full of lies” and “maliciously fabricated.”

According to the report, the IFC has approximately \$486 million in “direct loans and equity investment in four companies” operating in Xinjiang – Chenguang Biotech Group, Camel Group, Century Sunshine Group Holdings, and Jointown Pharmaceutical Group.

It accused the companies of directly participating in and benefiting from “state-sponsored forced labor programs” and “compulsory land expropriation.”

The firms “participated in programs that require minoritized citizens to take oaths to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and be subjected to indoctrination,” while also recruiting “workers through overtly racist/discriminatory hiring practices,” read the report.

It said the IFC’s “failure to adequately safeguard communities and the environment affected by its financing” in the region makes it “complicit in the repression of Uyghur, Kazakh, and other minoritized citizens.”

According to the report, the IFC and other development and infrastructure investment banks “cannot conduct the on-the-ground due diligence necessary ... to ensure that their clients are adhering to the Performance Standards.”

As of March 2021, the IFC had “closed its

investments in three Chinese companies engaged in or sourcing” from Xinjiang, but it “must divest from any companies that have proven to be complicit” in China’s “program of repression” in the region, the report added.

China rejects allegations

Rejecting the “false” report, the Chinese Foreign Ministry said it is “based on no evidence and maliciously fabricated.”

“As we have learned, the institution that wrote the report has no staff in Xinjiang. And before releasing the report, it did not conduct any field trips or carry out research in a real sense. The content, thus, lacks factual support and is full of lies and groundless accusations,” ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said at a news briefing on Thursday.

He asserted that Beijing “attaches great importance to protecting human rights and worker’s rights and interests.”

“For some time, certain countries have kept playing up Xinjiang-related lies, and extended their reach to multilateral development institutions,” said the official.

“China calls on relevant bodies to stick to multilateral rules, uphold the principle of objectivity, impartiality and non-politicization, and refrain from discriminating against any companies of the member countries based on false accusations that may undermine the reputation of the body itself and its members.”

By Aysu Bicer



UN CHIEF ‘DETERMINED’ HUMAN RIGHTS CHIEF VISIT XINJIANG

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said Friday he is “determined” that his human rights chief should conduct a “credible” visit to China’s semi-autonomous Xinjiang province, where ethnic Uyghur and Turkic Muslim minorities live.

“It is in the interest of China -- if they are convinced that they are not doing what people accuse them to do -- it is in the interest of China to have a credible visit of the high commissioner, and we will be doing everything we can to make sure that it happens,” Guterres said. “If it won’t happen, of course the high commissioner will take the decisions that correspond to her mandate.”

The U.N. chief made the remarks in Germany at the Munich Security Conference, in response to a question from the conference chairman, Ambassador Wolfgang Ischinger.

U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet has been trying to negotiate a visit to Xinjiang for the past three years. Chinese officials said recently that she would be allowed to come to have an exchange, but not an investigation. Beijing denies it violates the rights of Uyghurs and says it is combating terrorism.

Rights groups and the U.S. government accuse Beijing of serious abuses of Uyghur rights, including torture, forced sterilization, sexual violence and forced separation of children. They are subjected to widespread surveillance and more than a

million Uyghurs have been sent to detention camps.

China has dismissed the accusations as groundless and says Xinjiang enjoys stability, development and prosperity. Beijing has also lashed out at other nations for interfering in its internal affairs.

Guterres visited Beijing earlier this month as a guest of the International Olympic Committee for the opening ceremony of the Winter Games. He also had a meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping and Foreign Minister Wang Yi, during which his spokesman said he told them he expects the government to allow a “credible visit” for Bachelet.

“What I have been telling the Chinese authorities, and I’m telling publicly, is that in Xinjiang human rights must be fully respected, but not only human rights must be fully respected, policies must guarantee that the identity – the cultural and religious identity of minorities is respected -- and at the same time they have opportunities to be part of the society as a whole,” the secretary-general said in Munich.

Human Rights Watch welcomed the U.N. chief’s remarks.

“These are Guterres’ strongest remarks on the human rights crisis in Xinjiang to date,” Human Rights Watch U.N. Director Louis Charbonneau told VOA. “Obviously a “credible” visit by the high commissioner has to mean unfettered and unman-aged access in Xinjiang, which the secretary-general clearly recognizes.”

Charbonneau noted that the Chinese government has not yet been willing to grant that.

“The Chinese have said they’ve maintained a clear and consistent position, and there are no signs of change of heart in Beijing,” he said. “But whether or not the high commissioner visits China, she should publish her long-delayed report on Xinjiang immediately. There’s no reason to keep denying member states her office’s assessment of the massive and widespread human rights abuses in Xinjiang, which we at Human Rights Watch have determined amount to crimes against humanity.”

A report on the situation of the Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities has been expected from Bachelet’s office for some time, but so far it has not come out.



By Margaret Besheer



The World Bank's private lending arm, the International Finance Corporation (IFC), currently has hundreds of millions of dollars in direct loans and equity investment in several Chinese companies that participating in and benefiting from Uyghur forced labor.

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