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VOA Interview: Uyghur Emigre Describes Life in China's Xinjiang in 2022

By Asim Kashgarian, VOA, 2023.1.5

A Uyghur man who calls himself Jamal left China in recent weeks and talked to VOA about life in Xinjiang in 2022. Fearing retaliation from China for talking to the media, the Uyghur man is using an assumed name in order to protect relatives who still live in Xinjiang.

In a report released in August, the U.N. human rights office said China has committed serious human rights violations in Xinjiang. Human rights organizations have accused China of arbitrarily detaining Uyghurs and other Muslim ethnic minorities. There have also been accounts by former detainees of torture within the facilities.

Many Western countries, including the United States, have described China's treatment of the Uyghurs as genocide. China has repeatedly denied the accusations, calling

them lies and false information. Through the state news agency Xinhua, Beijing said the detention centers were "vocational education and training centers" to counter terrorism and extremism.

Over 11 million Uyghurs live in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in northwestern China, according to China's 2020 census, which is 45% of the total population of the region's 25 million inhabitants. More than 10 million Han Chinese, the country's majority ethnic population, live in the region. The others there are from majority Muslim ethnic groups, including Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Uzbeks and Hui (Chinese Muslims).

The interview has been edited for length and clarity.

VOA: In August, the U.N. report on Xinjiang



said China restricted the free movement of majority-Muslim populations in Xinjiang and confiscated passports of Uyghurs and other predominantly Muslim minorities. Is it true?

Jamal: Yes, it is a reality. For Uyghurs, they had started confiscating passports ... in 2016; we had to hand in our passports to the police bureau's national security division. They said they would keep our passports for safekeeping and would give [them back to] us if we needed to go abroad. The first priority of the Chinese policy on passports in Xinjiang is to not let anyone cross borders and to keep everyone intact inside the region. ... The government policy has been clear that they don't issue new passports to Uyghurs.

VOA: Then how were you able to go abroad with a valid Chinese passport if the government policy is to not return or issue passports to Uyghurs?

Jamal: My spouse is a foreign citizen. I had tried for years and gone through all the red tape in order to get my passport. Also, the authorities were pressured to return my passport since my spouse was a foreigner. That was, I think, the most important factor why the government returned my passport.

VOA: Can you tell us what procedure you have gone through to get your passport back and leave China?

Jamal: The first step is that [police] check your and each of your family members' background on the Integrated Joint Operations Platform. If you and your family member come clean on that system – I mean, if they don't find anyone who had been convicted, sentenced to prison or had any history of being sent to a reeducation camp – then they would ask you

to wait for a final decision from the head of the police bureau on whether to return your passport. At the end, if the decision was positive, they would return your passport.

But it does not mean that you can go abroad with that passport. Any Uyghur passport holder should be able to present a consent document from the Xinjiang authorities at any customs in China. If a Uyghur person has a valid Chinese passport and a visa to go to a certain country but doesn't have that government consent document, customs won't let them cross the border. When a Uyghur presents his Chinese ID, passport and consent document to the customs officers, they would take that person to a special designated place for Uyghurs and then call the police authorities in Xinjiang to authenticate the document. If the Xinjiang police corroborate, then customs would let you go.

VOA: What is it like to be a Uyghur in Xinjiang in 2022?

Jamal: In 2022, some Uyghurs who had been released from reeducation camps were transferred to work in factories either in Xinjiang or China's interior. The ones who were not transferred to factories couldn't easily find jobs because of their past history and government discrimination. Government employees who had gone to reeducation were not allowed to return to their old positions. In one example, a literature professor I knew now sits in a surveillance control room of his school campus as a guard. Some were never released from reeducation and instead sentenced to prison.

Another trend in 2022 in Xinjiang is that the Chinese government never stopped arbitrary arrests of Uyghurs and even started



rearresting Uyghurs who had gone through reeducation in the past. I had a friend who was a lecturer at a university. He had been arrested twice before 2022. In the spring of 2022, he was arrested for the third time, and his family never heard of him again. If I sum up life in 2022 for Uyghurs in Xinjiang, it's the normalization of the combination of fear and hopelessness.

VOA: You said the government continued arbitrary arrests. Did the government stop arresting people during COVID lockdowns in Xinjiang in 2022?

Jamal: Each time, average people would be forced to stay at home during COVID lockdowns. One difference of the COVID lockdown in Xinjiang from other parts of China is that the security apparatus [police] were more active during lockdowns in searching homes and arresting more people.

VOA: What else do you think the world should know about what happened to the Uyghurs in Xinjiang in 2022?

Jamal: One thing that the world should

know is that in May of 2022, when Michelle Bachelet [then the U.N. high commissioner for human rights] came to visit the region, I was in Urumqi, and I witnessed that the government sealed, closed the majority Uyghur district in the city during her visit under a pretext that there were some asymptomatic COVID cases in the district. They opened the district after [Bachelet] left China. One Chinese government official neighbor of mine told me the reason for the lockdown in May was because the government didn't want Uyghurs to move freely during her visit to the city.

VOA: How about life in Xinjiang for the Han Chinese?

Jamal: Many Uyghurs face a lot of hurdles if they want to go to other parts of the region or China. They have to get special permission from the authorities first. Han Chinese people can move freely compared to Uyghurs, Kazakhs or other local populations. Their movement is not restricted. Recently under the "zero-COVID" policy, some Han Chinese started to feel and say that their freedom of movement had begun to be restricted.

No Government has Killed More People Through Incompetence Than Communist China

By Miles Yu, New York Post, 2023.1.4

No country in modern history has witnessed more unnatural deaths than the People's Republic of China. Yet unlike other totalitarian regimes, China is unique in that deaths are not only caused by outright brutality, but also simply by the Chinese Communist Party's stupefying incompetence and stupidity.

The majority of deaths, from Mao to Xi Jinping, have been the result of Communist

utopian and hubristic aims combined with unfathomable ineptitude and bureaucratic callousness.

The most poignant example of this is Mao's Great Leap Forward in the late 1950s, which, in an attempt to surpass the industrial output of leading imperialist countries in record time, caused the deaths of up to 45 million people, almost the total death toll from World War II.

But the CCP's streak of brutality and incompetence extends far beyond the Great Leap Forward — to the Cultural Revolution, a bloody massacre in 1989, unspeakably cruel and criminal acts against hundreds of millions of women in forced abortions for nearly 40 years, ruthless crackdowns on any political dissent, surveillance over the entire captive nation enabled by next-generation technologies, massive detentions, by the millions, of ethnic minority and political dissidents and genocide against the Uyghurs.

Indeed, there has been a remarkable degree of consistency in the CCP's lunacy, which we see today in the insanity surrounding

Mao, a ruthless "reformer" like Deng Xiaoping or an egomaniac like Xi, China will continue to be a People's Republic of Disaster so long as it remains Communist.

COVID-19 originated in Wuhan, and rather than view this outbreak as simply a public-health crisis, CCP leaders could not help but treat it as an opportunity to showcase the superior methods of their one-party state. In their desire to display ideological superiority, they proceeded with unbridled policy hubris and the lunacy of COVID-zero lockdowns. Following this path necessarily has led the CCP to engage in a series of criminal coverups.



COVID-zero policy and its effects. Xi Jinping's delusional desire to eradicate every single case of COVID-19 infection throughout the country has been similarly disastrous for both the Chinese economy and the lives of millions of Chinese people and ethnic minorities.

This recognition points us to an observation that cannot be ignored: Regardless of who is at the helm in Beijing, be it a psychopath like

Almost exactly three years ago, the all-powerful Chinese National Health Commission instructed China's labs to destroy the earliest original samples of the virus and repeatedly refused to allow international health organizations and the scientific community to investigate COVID-19's true nature and origin.

COVID-zero lockdowns were then instituted



nationwide, with people literally barred or welded inside their residences and, in many cases, left to die.

That was followed by the criminally negligent instant lifting of national lockdowns when the widespread surge of infection could not be contained anymore, without any meaningful preparation for medical and funeral services. Yet with reckless abandonment, the CCP allowed millions to travel outside China and spread the virus while hypocritically halting domestic travel.

The CCP's lunacy in its approach to COVID-19 has awakened the world and the Chinese

people to the extreme danger of a totalitarian regime, that a government whose power is unchecked and whose ideology is unhinged is an ever-present menace to the world.

The only difference between Mao's China and Xi's China is that the latter is made all the more dangerous by technology and its actions are now intrinsically linked to the free world via massive economic and technological engagement. The CCP's lunatic policies are no longer just a matter of Chinese domestic disaster but global catastrophe, and the rest of us share a global responsibility to contain the scourge that is the Chinese Communist Party.

U.S., Japan Launch Task Force on Rights and Labor Standards in Supply Chains

By Andrea Shalal and David Brunnstrom, Reuters, 2023.1.7

The United States and Japan on Friday launched a task force to promote human rights and international labor standards in supply chains, amid shared concerns about China's treatment of Uyghur Muslims, and said they would invite other governments to join the initiative.

The two sides also signed an updated memorandum of cooperation on cybersecurity to strengthen operational collaboration and hosted a roundtable with Japanese business representatives on upholding human rights and preventing use of forced labor in supply chains, a U.S. statement said.

The signings came ahead of a visit to Washington next week by Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida for talks expected to focus on shared concerns about China's

growing might and other pressing international issues.

U.S. Trade Representative Katherine Tai signed a memorandum on the labor-standards initiative with Japan's visiting Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry Yasutoshi Nishimura.

Nishimura's ministry said the task force envisaged information-sharing on reporting, best practices and enforcement practices, as well as dialogue with stakeholders, including businesses.

Japan's Yomiuri Shimbun newspaper this week cited Japanese officials as saying the move was spurred by issues such as alleged forced labor of minority Muslims in China's Xinjiang region and that Japan would seek to



promulgate regulations that Washington has strengthened to tackle such problems.

Tai and Nishimura said they would invite other governments to join the effort.

«The United States and Japan cannot do this alone,» Tai said. «To make this work, we must partner with all relevant stakeholders – worker organizations, businesses, and civil society – to bring about lasting and meaningful change. We must also invite other governments to join us as we push ahead to safeguard the dignity of workers everywhere.»

USTR said Tai and Nishimura also discussed Japan's priorities during its current presidency of the Group of Seven nations, Tokyo's review of its biofuels policies, and Japan's concerns about electric vehicle tax credits included in the U.S. Inflation Reduction Act.

The cybersecurity memorandum was signed by Nishimura and U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas, who later jointly hosted a roundtable with Japanese business representatives on upholding human rights

and preventing use of forced labor in supply chains, a DHS statement said.

Nishimura on Thursday called for a «new world order» to counter authoritarian regimes that have been bolstered by post-Cold War free trade and economic inter-dependence.

A senior U.S. official told Reuters last year that U.S. allies appeared committed to following Washington's lead in banning forced labor goods from Xinjiang.

The United States' Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act took effect last year to cut U.S. imports of products from Xinjiang, where Washington accuses China of committing genocide against ethnic Uyghurs and other Muslims, and herding them into camps. Beijing denies abuses in Xinjiang.

«We must address forced labor at each stage of our supply chains,» Tai said. «Whether it's the cotton in the clothes we wear or metals in the cars we drive, such abuses threaten to undermine the very foundations of our system.»

Fate of Uyghur Miners Trapped in Gold Mine Collapse Uncertain After Nearly 2 Weeks

By Shohret Hoshur, RFA Uyghur, 2023.1.6

The fate of 18 miners – mostly Uyghurs – trapped in a collapsed gold mine in China's far-western Xinjiang province remained uncertain, officials said, implying that rescuers have failed to pull any of them out alive nearly two weeks after the Christmas Eve disaster.

"I know that the rescue operation is going on, but I don't know the result of the rescue efforts," said an employee of West Gold Yili Co., which owns the mine in Qarayaghach town of Ghulja county, or Yining in Chinese. He insisted on not being identified by name.

An employee at the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Emergency Relief Supervision Command Center said the rescue operations were ongoing and that two of the center's leaders went to the site of the accident the day it occurred, Dec. 24.

"The fate of those trapped in the mine [and] the responsibility for the incident are confidential information," he told Radio Free Asia, also requesting anonymity. "These aren't the questions we have answers to. It is not yet time to ask about responsibility for the incident."

When asked about the number of people participating in the rescue operation, he said he was not allowed to make the information public.

Of the 40 miners working underground at the time of the accident, 22 were safely rescued.

Chinese authorities in Ghulja have not issued any updates about ongoing efforts to extricate

the miners, and the reason for the collapse remains unknown.

So far, they have held only one press conference about the accident, though it highlighted the participation of relevant organizations and leaders in the rescue operations. During the news conference, authorities did not disclose the cause of the mine collapse, who was responsible, or the identities of those still trapped underground.

RFA learned earlier that most of the 18 workers underground were mostly Uyghurs from government organizations in Ghulja county, where the mine company is located.

Likely dead

Chinese authorities have cracked down on unsafe mining practices and levied harsher penalties for violations across the country in recent years, though cave-ins still occur where safety measures are slipshod, especially at makeshift or far-flung mining sites.

Mine collapses are usually caused by large amounts of water erupting underground at the mining site or by the failure of structural material supporting tunnel roofs, said a Uyghur mine expert, who requested anonymity for safety reasons.

The trapped miners could likely survive only three to five days underground, he said.

"If there is no information for 10 days regarding the 18 trapped miners, then it is most likely these miners are not alive anymore," the expert told RFA earlier this week.

“If miraculously they were not injured due to the mine collapse, the air ventilation wasn’t blocked, and no poisonous gas was released, then they would still die of lack of water and food in a week,” he said.

Another officer at the command center said he did not know how many more days the rescue operations would continue.

“We are not responsible for information and propaganda,” he said.

the family of those who were under the mine,” the employee said. “We heard from the community that most of the 18 people were Uyghurs, including teenagers, but we were not informed about this in official meetings.”

Elfidar Hanim, president of the Uyghur American Association, expressed concern about the fate of the trapped miners.

“Such events and subsequent rescue efforts should have been reported live on site, but



“Even if we know, we can’t tell you what we know. There are parts of this matter that are disclosed to the public, and parts that are not disclosed. We can only say that the rescue operation is still going on,” he added.

An employee at the Ghulja County Petition Bureau said relatives of workers still in the mine have not contacted the office.

“We have not yet received a complaint from

the Chinese authorities are not doing this,” she told RFA.

Chinese authorities are protecting their reputation and the failure of their system by placing themselves above public safety, Hanim said.

“Since most trapped miners are Uyghurs, authorities want to deal with this tragedy discreetly,” she added.