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'The Chinese Authorities Must Release My 19-Year-Old Sister,' Demands Uyghur Engineer

By Anjuman Rahman, Middle East Monitor, 2023.3.5

Genocide against the Uyghur Muslims continues to worsen as the world looks on, despite its mass atrocities that have come into stark focus over the past five years.

Thousands of Uyghur children have been abandoned without parents and family, as their mothers, fathers and siblings are forced into Chinese internment camps, prisons and other detention facilities, according to evidence from government documents in Xinjiang.

Two months ago, the day it was confirmed that his 19-year-old sister had been detained at a detention facility, Kewser Wayit, based in the United States (US), rushed to call his family hailing from Artush city in southern Xinjiang.

However, the countless calls made to the Chinese national security officer in charge of communication between him and his family

were instantly cut. Frantic and desperate, he continued his attempts at making the calls again and again, always with the same result.

«I tried calling the office for over a week repeatedly for confirmation that my sister had been taken, but no calls or texts were being responded to. Then I realised he's put me in this position to trap and break me, so I decided this must stop. First, they took my dad and, now, my sister. I'm speaking up now,» he said.

Kewser, a 26-year-old ethnic Uyghur from China's frontier region of Xinjiang, left his homeland for the US back in 2013. When he returned to the US from Xinjiang after a visit in the summer of 2016, he had no idea that would be his last visit, and of the horrors that would follow his family.

In 2017, his father was suddenly arrested and



imprisoned in a detention centre before being forcefully transferred to a concentration camp, where more than a million Muslims have been arbitrarily detained.

«I thought my dad would be there for a short term for interrogation purposes since there was no reason behind his arrest, but they ended up keeping him for two years,» said Kewser. His family were later informed by local authorities that his 10-day business trip to Turkiye had raised serious suspicions of separatist activities, hence his detainment.

Uyghurs are banned from travelling to 26 «sensitive countries», most of which have a Muslim majority population, including Egypt, Turkiye, Saudi Arabia and Malaysia.

«It was a frightening time; I felt so helpless and far away,» described Kewser. «I started losing interest in school because of depression because I started questioning what's the point of learning if I can't even help my family? I left sports too; I used to play track and field, but it felt pointless.»

«I wasn't the only one suffering; I had other Uyghur classmates and friends who were being told about their family members disappearing into the camps.»

In 2017, according to official statistics, arrests in Xinjiang of its ethnic minority citizens accounted for nearly 21 per cent of all arrests in China, despite people in Xinjiang making up only 1.5 per cent of the total population.

However, most people around the world, particularly in the West, had not been made aware of Xinjiang or heard of the plight of the Uyghur Muslims.

«There were mixed responses when we tried telling some Chinese students at my college

of what was happening at the time, but most of them responded in support of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) saying it was for stability reasons,» said Kewser.

«The Americans and others would listen to us but couldn't imagine such abuse to be true and actually happening today.»

The evidence of China's barbaric abuse of Uyghur Muslims is now undeniable, though. According to information obtained through leaked official documents and first-hand eyewitness accounts, somewhere between one million and three million people have been forced into these camps, where they're subjected to dehumanising abuse, such as torture, rape, forced labour and routine humiliation.

Hundreds of thousands of Uyghurs have been held for years without any due process or explanation.

In spite of repeated accounts of such torture at the hands of authorities, the Chinese government says accusations of human rights abuses against the Uyghurs are «the most preposterous lie of the century, an outrageous insult and affront to the Chinese people, and a gross breach of international law and basic norms governing international relations.»

«My father changed,» said Kewser. «When he was finally released in 2019, during which he was admitted to the hospital twice due to high blood pressure, his health deteriorated greatly. He looked so thin and lost a lot of hair. He also started constantly suffering headaches and developed a heart problem.»

«But he couldn't talk about it with me. He couldn't share what he went through inside because of the WeChat calls being



monitored.»

Tormented by his father's silent suffering, Kewser shared a video testimony in September 2019 with Gene Bunin, a prominent campaigner, best known as the founder of the *Xinjiang* Victims Database, which contains entries for over 50,000 people incarcerated, detained or unaccounted for in *Xinjiang*.



The move cost him an instant loss of communication with every member of his family. The CCP often punishes the relatives of dissidents and treats them as guilty by association and further uses them to threaten outspoken family members.

«When I kept calling the local police station back home, they kept hanging up. After almost 100 calls, they connected me with the Chinese National Security Director of Artush, who ended up going to our house twice in 2022 and allowed me to speak with family. My siblings were not allowed to be on those calls. And, both times, I was told to stay silent and not get into political activism in the US.»

During the months of radio silence following the call, Kewser's sister, Kamile Wayit, headed to college to study pre-school education at a university in Henan province in Central China.

Despite being deleted from her WeChat contact list, a Chinese social media app, as safety precautions, Kewser was still able to view her latest posts. One day, she had posted in support of the «white paper revolution», calling for an end to strict Covid lockdown measures and political freedoms, which her dad received a warning call about from the police.

«I found a way to communicate with her for a few months in the fall of 2022, before her return home and she told me about the white paper revolution post. I also took the opportunity to ask her about some relatives who disappeared into the camps and what happened during Covid when I was cut off from communication,» explained Kewser.

«The conversation was a risk because she was not allowed to communicate with me, since my family was forced to sign a document not to contact me by any method in September 2019,» he added.

Kewser was right. Upon her return to *Xinjiang* for winter break, Kamile was arrested by the Chinese police. However, due to the ban on communication with his family, Kewser was unaware of his sister's detainment.

It was not until he noticed the sudden lack of updates and posts on her WeChat account since 12 December, that he started questioning her whereabouts, after which he immediately contacted friends and called the police station in *Xinjiang* and confirmed that his sister had been arrested. »They gave no clear reason for detention, but it could be because of my communication with her or the post she shared about the white paper movement. I was worried for my parents'

well-being, so again, I tried reaching out to the Chinese National Security agent; however, he ignored my calls and messages. Then, I finally made the decision to no longer stay quiet.»

«I don't want to imagine what my sister is going through; she suffered enough during my father's detainment. I'm worried and feel guilty but I have

nothing left to lose now; I will be active and speak up now.»

It has been almost three months since Kamile's arrest and the circumstances of her case remain unclear.

In a short video posted on Twitter, Kewser called out the CPP, «My 19-year-old sister Kamile Wayit has been detained by the local Artush city police after her arrival at home. She's innocent and committed no crime. I demand the Chinese authorities release her immediately and let her speak to me.»

«I won't stop until she's free,» he said.

Liberal MP Accused of Getting Help From China Skipped House Votes Condemning Beijing

By Ryan Tumilty, National Post, 2023.2.28

A Liberal MP accused of benefiting from Chinese interference during his election has twice missed Parliamentary votes declaring Beijing's treatment of Muslim Uyghurs a genocide.

Toronto MP Han Dong is alleged to have received assistance from the Chinese consulate in 2019 when he successfully ran for the party's nomination in Don Valley North, based on a recent report from Global News citing unnamed national security sources. According to Global's reporting, the consulate bused in seniors and Chinese international students to vote for Dong in the nomination contest that was fiercely contested by other Liberal candidates.

Don Valley North is a consistently Liberal riding, with a significant Chinese diaspora population. Dong has won both of his elections in 2019 and 2021 with more than 50 per cent of the vote.

Since Dong came to office there have been two votes connected to the Uyghur genocide. On Feb. 1, this year two Quebec Liberal MPs brought forward a motion highlighting the genocide and calling on the government to come up with a plan to bring 10,000 Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims to Canada.

The motion noted that Uyghurs in other countries are pressured to return to China, where they face the risk of arbitrary detention, forced labour and torture. When the vote came to the floor, Dong missed it. It passed, however, with the unanimous consent of the 322 MPs who were in the chamber.

Dong had been present just before the Uyghur genocide motion to vote for the government's childcare legislation, and he voted after the Uyghur motion passed in favour of a bill that would change the term child pornography in the criminal code to child sexual abuse and exploitation material.



Dong also missed a vote in his first term in office that declared what the Chinese government was doing to the Uyghurs was in fact a genocide. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and his cabinet abstained from that vote, but his MPs were free to vote as they chose. No MPs voted against it.

Since March 2021, MPs have been able to vote via an app, and during the pandemic they could vote remotely through Zoom.

Jonathan Miller, a senior fellow and Director of Foreign Affairs with the MacDonald Laurier Institute, said for the Chinese government criticism of how they treat the Uyghurs is a direct attack.

"It is getting into one of the most sensitive issues. China would list a range of issues as what they call 'core interests'," he said.

Miller said those core interests include the Uyghurs, Tibet, Hong Kong and Taiwan and the Chinese government bristles against any criticism on those fronts.

"These are what China would refer to as internal matters."

Several recent media reports have suggested the Liberals benefited from Chinese interference during both the 2019 and 2021

elections. Former Conservative MP Kenny Chiu has said he believes he was the victim of Chinese government misinformation, which he said targeted ridings with large Chinese communities like his, Steveston-Richmond East, as well as the neighbouring B.C. riding of Richmond Centre and the Greater Toronto Area riding of Markham Unionville.

Liberal MPs were elected in all of those ridings in 2021, but all of them voted in favour of denouncing the Chinese genocide against the Uyghurs on Feb. 1.

There were two other votes in Parliament between the 2019 and 2021 elections directly related to China: one denouncing China's foreign policy and calling on the government to make a decision on Huawei within 30 days and the other creating the parliamentary committee on Canada-China relations.

Dong voted against both of those motions, but so did the entire Liberal caucus. Dong has applauded his government's decision to expand work permits to residents of Hong Kong seeking to come to Canada, saying on Twitter that "Hong Kong residents who share Canada's values of freedom and democracy," should be able to live and work here.

Dong did not respond to questions about the missed votes or his view on the Uyghur genocide before press time, but he has denounced media reports suggesting he was helped by foreign interference.

"I strongly reject the insinuations in media reporting that allege I have played a role in offshore interference in these processes and will defend myself vigorously against such inaccurate and irresponsible claims," he said in a statement released on Monday.

Trudeau defended Dong as well on Monday saying he was a valuable member of the government.

“Han Dong is an outstanding member of our team and suggestions that he is somehow not loyal to Canada should not be entertained,” he said.

Trudeau denied the government had been warned by CSIS about Dong’s candidacy and said while he values the advice he receives from the spy agency, it does not dictate who can run in an election.

“It is not up to unelected security officials to dictate to political parties who can or cannot run,” Trudeau said.

Volkswagen Defends Xinjiang Plant Despite Uyghur Concerns

By Stefan Nicola, Bloomberg, 2023.2.28



Volkswagen AG reaffirmed its commitment to an automotive plant in Xinjiang after a visit by its China chief, despite persistent concerns of human rights abuses in the country’s far western region.

The German carmaker said it has no indication that workers are mistreated at the facility in the city of Urumqi, which is operated by a subsidiary of its joint venture with state-backed SAIC Motor Corp.

“The JV plant looks like all other JV plants in China,” Ralf Brandstätter, VW’s China chief since last year, told reporters after touring the facility this month, the first such visit by a top company executive. “Our partner has great interest in and is committed to ensuring a positive atmosphere and proper working conditions.”

VW has fielded uncomfortable questions about its presence in Xinjiang due to allegations by



the US and others that China has pushed ethnic minorities including Muslim Uyghurs into jobs programs as part of sweeping effort to force them to assimilate into the Han-dominated society. Last year, the United Nation's top human rights official found that China had committed "serious human rights abuses" in Xinjiang while the world body's slavery expert determined that the forced-labor claims in the region were "reasonable."

China has repeatedly rejected criticism of the work programs, calling allegations of forced labor lies and defending its policies as an effort to reduce poverty and unemployment. China and the European Union have sanctioned each other's officials over the claims, prompting Brussels to suspend approval of a landmark investment pact.

VW is under pressure to defend its position in China, its biggest market, against home-grown manufacturers offering models geared to local tastes. Sales in China have slid from a peak of 4.2 million cars in 2018 to 3.18 million vehicles last year. The likes of BYD Co. and Li Auto Inc. are catching up fast, and they're all-in on electric vehicles.

While the Urumqi plant has been in the

spotlight, it doesn't manufacture any cars. Its roughly 240 workers — 17% of whom are Uyghurs — make final quality checks of already assembled vehicles that are then sent on to dealerships in the region.

The facility, which at its peak employed 670 workers, doesn't get any external parts and there are no plans to resume automaking there. The plant had produced the New Santana model until 2019. VW is bound by contract to the site and has no intention to break that obligation, said Thomas Steg, the carmaker's chief lobbyist.

Plant management is committed to making minority workers feel welcome, Brandstätter said, citing signs in several languages, a cafeteria that serves halal food, and two extra cultural holidays for Uyghur workers.

The executive said he spoke at length to seven workers individually and no government representative was present during his 1.5-day tour of the site.

"Our partner SAIC is aware of the critical reports on Xinjiang," said Brandstätter. "We agree with them that basic values and law must be respected and protected in joint ventures."

Belgium's Cyber Security Agency Links China to Spear Phishing Attack on MP

By Financial Times, 2023.3.1

Belgium's cyber security agency has linked China-sponsored hackers to an attack on a prominent politician, as European governments become increasingly willing to challenge Beijing over alleged cyber

offences

Samuel Cogolati, a Belgian MP, was named by authorities last month as being the subject of a cyber attack around January 2021 when he wrote a resolution to warn of



“crimes against humanity” against Uyghur Muslims in China.

In a letter seen by the Financial Times, the Centre for Cyber Security Belgium (CCB) wrote that it had been informed that a specific Chinese state actor called “APT31” was most probably behind the so-called spear phishing attack.

The cyber authority’s willingness to name a Chinese state actor, and to link them to a specific attack, comes as European cyber agencies lose their former reticence to call out China over suspected incidents.

Belgium’s foreign ministry last year took the unusual step of asking China’s government to rein in its malicious cyber activity. The EU also warned of Chinese attacks in 2021.

Christopher Ahlberg, co-founder of cyber intelligence firm Recorded Future, said such malicious activity by China-linked groups had “shifted towards Europe” in recent years.

But countries often declined to attribute attacks openly to China, Ahlberg added, fearing upsetting relations with a major economic power.

“For a small country like Belgium, it’s pretty gutsy. It was pretty much non-existent for European countries to attribute attacks to China four to five years ago. The consistent complaints have become harder for China to ignore,” Ahlberg added.

While Cogolati was drafting the Uyghur resolution, he received an email from a fake news organisation claiming to have



information on human rights abuses in China. Cogolati only realised the significance of the message after it was flagged by Belgium's cyber security agency.

"We have reasons to believe that this series of emails came from APT31, a threat actor associated with China and who has shown interest in people who have criticised the actions of the Chinese Communist party," wrote the CCB.

The CCB later told the FT that a source had linked APT 31 to the activity but that its involvement "could not be confirmed by CCB" with complete certainty.

Cogolati, who confirmed the alert from the CCB, said his main aim now was to "shed full light on the extent of China's cyber attacks against my country".

The email attack Cogolati received was in the form of a spear phishing campaign, in which an attacker designs an email to target a specific group of victims.

APT31's signature move is to add a "tracking pixel", often used in marketing, into an image attached to an email, which sends back general data about the victim's IT set-up. The attackers will then follow up with further emails with malicious links or attachments personalised for the victim's system.

A Belgian parliamentary hearing in May 2021 with Uyghur victims had to be postponed after parliament was shut down by a mass cyber attack.

"We do not encourage, support or connive at cyber attacks. We reject the Belgian side's irresponsible assertion," said a Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson in response to Belgium's 2022 allegations. Responding to a request for comment on the latest Belgian claims, China's embassy in Belgium said: "We reject the Belgian side's irresponsible assertion that 'Chinese hacker groups' carried out the 'malicious cyber activities'."



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