

China's **Sentencing** of High-Level Uyghur Officials **to Death** Stuns Critics, Who Demand Evidence

By RFA, 2021-04-09

CGTN



Sattar Sawut

Fmr. Deputy Secretary,
Education & Work Committee, Xinjiang
Fmr. Director General,
Education Department, Xinjiang
Fmr. Leader,
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Sattar Sawut, former director of education of East Turkistan, shown in a documentary detailing his 'crimes' on Chinese state television, in an undated photo.

Observers say fair trials don't exist in East Turkistan (so-called Xinjiang) and that the punishments do not fit the 'crimes.'

China's recent sentencing of two high-level Uyghur officials to death has stunned critics who have questioned the legality of the decision given the lack of evidence against them and say the move shows that even Uyghurs loyal to the Communist Party cannot escape persecution in East Turkistan.

On April 6, authorities in East Turkistan (so-called Xinjiang) announced that Shirzat Bawudun, former director of the justice in East Turkistan High Court and deputy secretary of East Turkistan Political and Legal Committee, and Sattar Sawut, former director of education of East Turkistan, had been given two-year suspended death sentences for "separatism" and "terrorism."

Additionally, they announced that the court sentenced both of them to permanent deprivation of political rights and confiscation of all personal property.

While several other prominent Uyghurs have been given death sentences since authorities in the region launched a campaign of extra-legal incarceration that has seen up to 1.8 million Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities held in a vast network of internment camps beginning in early 2017, this marks the first occasion on which high-ranking government officials have been given the death penalty.

Though the High Court announced the verdicts on April 6, they released no additional information about when and where the trials took place, how they proceeded, and when the verdicts were actually decided.

The sentences, which come as the U.S. government and several Western parliaments have designated rights abuses in East Turkistan as part of a state-backed policy of genocide, have led observers to further question the severity of the situation in the region, where the legal system has long been used as a tool of oppression by the state.

Sophie Richardson, China director at New York-based Human Rights Watch (HRW), told

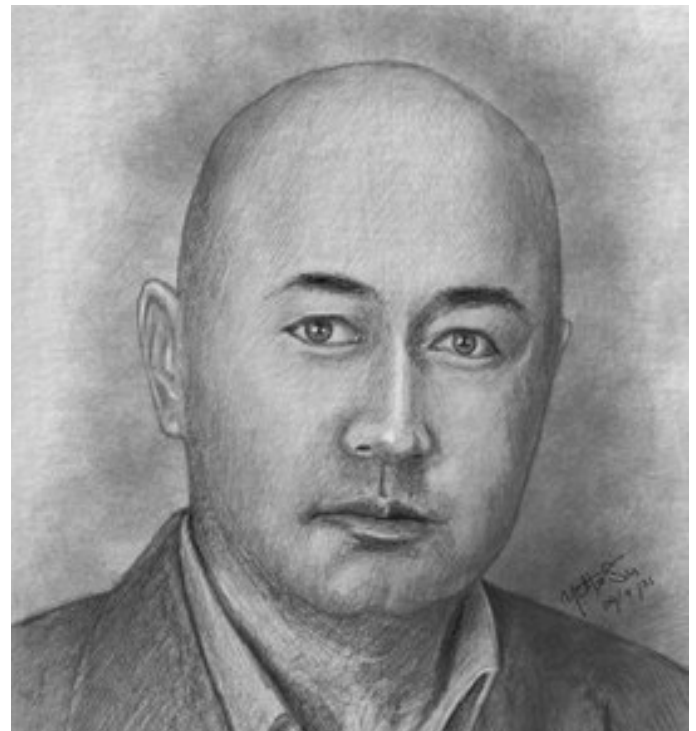
RFA's Uyghur Service that there is no such thing as a fair trial in East Turkistan and called on the government to release its evidence against the two officials.

"Let me be very clear: Human Rights Watch is utterly and totally opposed to the use of the death penalty in many circumstances, because it is fundamentally cruel and unusual," she said.

"We also know very well that most people in East Turkistan do not get anything even remotely resembling a fair trial."

In particular, she pointed out the absurdity of how harsh Sawut's punishment was, given that he was accused of including "extremist" content in children's primary school books that had previously been approved by censors. He had overseen publication of textbooks, all government approved.

"The idea that somebody should get a life



A sketched portrait of former editor-in-chief of the XUAR Education Press and renowned Uyghur literary critic Yalqun Rozi. Yette Su/RFA

sentence for a textbook that was published 13 years ago is crazy—there's no other word to describe it," she said.

"And I think it's imperative that the Chinese government make all of the evidence available. I'd like to know whether these two men had lawyers of their own choice, whether they had any ability to see the evidence that was presented against them, or really contest the charges."

'Separatism' and 'terrorism'

According to the limited information shared by the High Court, Bawudun was accused of "long-term planning to split the country," "participating in the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) and betraying the interests of the people and the country," and "providing illegal intelligence to people outside the borders [of China]."

ETIM, which was formerly on the U.S. State Department's list of terrorist organizations, was removed late last year because there was "no credible evidence" that the group continued to exist.

Sawut was also described as being "two-faced"—a term applied by the government to Uyghur cadres who pay lip service to Communist Party rule in East Turkistan, but secretly chafe against state policies repressing members of their ethnic group—and having hidden in key a position for a long time.

In his previous post prior to his arrest, Sawut oversaw the Bureau of Education's work in compiling and publishing Uyghur language and literature textbooks for primary and secondary students. He has been accused of insisting on the inclusion of content that promoted "ethnic separatism," "violence," "terrorism," and "religious extremism" in these books, as well as of "attempting to break up the country through 'de-Chineseification.'"

Teng Biao, a prominent Chinese human rights

lawyer in the U.S., told RFA that the "crime" of "splittism" is a tool China has long used to crack down on opposition. In this case, however, the tool is being deployed against cadres within the very system of government itself.

"The Chinese government often uses the charges of "splitting the country" or "subverting state power" or "inciting division" or "inciting subversion of the country" to combat dissidents, and increasingly as a way of achieving its political goals," he said.

Teng also noted that although Bawudun and Sawut were previously in favor as part of the state apparatus, they are now paying the price for being Uyghur in a period when China appears to be working toward eradicating that distinct identity through genocidal policies.

"On the one hand, they're political and legal cadres within the Communist Party system, but on the other hand, they're Uyghurs and they identify with the religious and cultural identity of their ethnic group," he said.



Uyghur literary critic and writer Yalqun Rozi, seen on a visit to New York in 2014, was given a lengthy jail term.
Photograph: AFP/Getty

"On the one hand, they're political and legal cadres within the Communist Party system, but on the other hand, they're Uyghurs and they identify with the religious and cultural identity of their ethnic group," he said.

"These two roles are in complete conflict with one another. It must be very painful for them. So, I think it's in this context that the Communist Party used some of their practices, statements, and opinions as grounds for the crime of 'splittism.'"

Attack on Uyghur language and culture

The Uyghur language and literature textbooks Sawut oversaw, which the Chinese government has claimed are "terrorist," "separatist," and "poisoning" to young students, were published in 2003 and used in literature classes until 2016.

U.S.-based Kamaltürk Yalqun, the son of editor-in-chief of East Turkistan Education Press and renowned Uyghur literary critic Yalqun Rozi, told RFA that if there were actually any "problems" in these textbooks, they would have been discovered and dealt with in the authorities' annual reviews of educational materials.

"Whereas other books might be published after going through the censors once or twice, [authorities] established special committees for the textbooks and censored them over and over again, at the Bureau of Education, at East Turkistan [government] level," he said.

"These textbooks were used for more than a decade and no major problem was discovered in them. That they were suddenly, in 2016, as soon as Chen Quanguo became Party Secretary [of East Turkistan], made out to be problematic books doesn't actually prove that anything was wrong with them. If there had been problems, they would have emerged in the multiple rounds of censors the books went through every year."

Yalqun's father Rozi was arrested in 2016, an early target of what would go on to become a mass incarceration campaign targeting allegedly "two-faced" members of the Uyghur intellectual and cultural elite, and later sentenced to 15 years in prison for his involvement in the publication of these textbooks. He said he believes that the Chinese government's real intention in arresting and sentencing textbook compilers, including his father, is to eliminate the Uyghur language and culture.

Reported by Erkin for RFA's Uyghur Service. Translated by the Uyghur Service. Written in English by Joshua Lipes.



Rights groups say that China has arrested over 1 million people from Uyghur, Kazakh and other minority Muslim groups in East Turkistan

Surviving the Crackdown in East Turkistan

By Raffi Khatchadourian, April 5, 2021

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As mass detentions and surveillance dominate the lives of China's Uyghurs and Kazakhs, a woman struggles to free herself.

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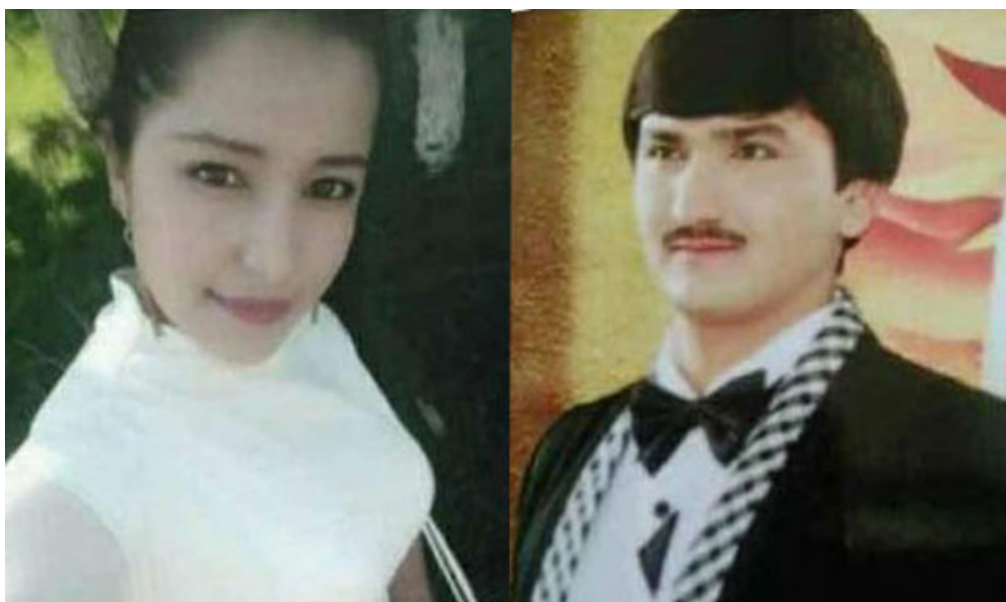
After building a new life in Canada, Anar Sabit returned to a region gripped by an obsession with “prevention and control.”

The New Yorker published the heartbreaking story of Anar Sabit, who survived the horrors inside of the internment camps. In 2017 Anar Sabit, who was working as a junior accountant in Canada, had to return to East Turkistan to settle her father's affairs, after he suddenly passed away. She was arrested by the

Chinese police officers at the airport when she tried to fly back home. After hours of interrogation and torture, she was brought into an internment camp. Almost 2 years later, she managed finally to escape the horror machinery of the Chinese government.

Wife of Imprisoned Uyghur Taxi Driver Jailed For Weeping in Front of a Foreigner

By RFA, 2021-04-07



Munira Memtili (L) and Shireli Memtili (R) in undated photos. RFA

kely a non-state-sanctioned imam—and receiving “illegal religious education” from him. Sources told RFA at the time that Memtili’s mother Aygul Turahan was sentenced in early 2019 to a decade in prison after she was detained for moving her household registration, or hukou, from Ili Kazakh (Yili Hasake) Autonomous Prefecture’s Tekes (Tekesi)

Authorities in occupied by China have sentenced the wife of a jailed Uyghur taxi driver and mother of two to at least three years in prison for weeping in front of a foreigner, saying she had disclosed “state secrets,” according to sources in the region.

In April 2020, RFA’s Uyghur Service reported on the case of Shireli Memtili, a taxi driver in Ghulja (in Chinese, Yining) city’s Hanbing township who was detained in November 2018 and sentenced to 200 months in jail in May 2019 for driving the religious figure—li-

county to Ghulja’s Hanbing neighborhood nine years earlier.

However, RFA recently learned from a source claiming inside knowledge of the situation in Ghulja that Memtili’s wife, Munira, who was left alone at home with her two children, was taken to a police station on a June night last year with a black hood over her head and later charged with “revealing state secrets.”

According to the source, who spoke on condition of anonymity out of fear of reprisal, the **As she returned home from the city to Han**

bing, a businesswoman from Kyrgyzstan was sitting next to her on the bus, the source said. The two began speaking, and when the businesswoman asked about her husband, Munira could not hold back her tears.

The bus driver reportedly warned Munira not to “upset the mood of the foreign guests.” The source said Munira

day before her disappearance, Munira went to the Ghulja city Public Security Bureau, where she requested permission to videochat with her husband, who is serving his sentence in Shiho (Wusu) city, in Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture’s Tarbaghatay (Tacheng) prefecture. The police reportedly denied her request.

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businesswoman asked about her husband, Munira could not hold back her tears. The bus driver reportedly warned Munira not to “upset the mood of the foreign guests.” The source said Munira was taken into custody by police on the basis of the bus driver’s report and was later convicted of leaking state secrets for “masterfully” informing foreigners that her husband was being held in captivity. The source said that just one month after Munira was arrested, police removed her clothes from her unoccupied home in Hanbing’s “New Community” district. Seeing this, neighbors surmised that Munira might have been transferred to an internment camp or prison from a detention center, but no one dared to ask about her case lest they themselves be targeted.

Despite China threats, Lithuania moves to recognise Uyghur genocide

By Andrius Balčiūnas | LRT.lt/en, Apr 7, 2021

After Brussels moved to impose sanctions on China in March, Beijing retaliated by targeting four Lithuanian politicians among more than a dozen European diplomats and officials. Now, despite direct pressure on Lithuanian MPs, Vilnius is planning to recognise as genocide China’s repression against Uighurs. EURACTIV’s media partner LRT.lt reports.

Beijing insists that “East Turkistan is a great example” of progress on human rights, and has invited foreign diplomats to visit the region.

However, when EU ambassadors asked to meet with the imprisoned Uighur activist and Sakharov Prize winner Ilham Tohti, the planned visit was frozen.

“They are demanding a meeting with a criminal convicted under Chinese law,” the Chinese Ambassador to the EU, Zhang Ming, commented at the time. “I am very sorry, but this is unacceptable.”

According to Šakalienė, special hearings will be held in the Lithuanian parliament on April 22, where international experts and relatives of imprisoned people will talk about the rep-

ressions in East Turkistan.

“The parliaments of several countries will work together to make it very clear: we will not be intimidated. These are the fundamental values of the EU and we will defend them unanimously,” said Šakalienė.

Back in 2019, Lithuania was among the dozen EU members to sign a letter to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights condemning Beijing’s actions.

However, Janda is sceptical about the possibility to recognise the Uighur genocide even at the EU level.

“Major countries like Germany, France, and Italy are afraid of Chinese economic punishment so they are trying to be soft and not to upset China,” he said.



A security staff stands guard as delegates leave after the closing session of the National People's Congress (NPC), at the Great Hall of the People, in Beijing, China, 11 March 2021. [EPA-EFE/ROMAN PILIPEY / POOL]

China made a ‘La La Land’-inspired propaganda musical about the life of Uyghur Muslims, which omits all mention of mass surveillance and oppression

Bill Bostock Apr 6, 2021



*A still from the 2021 Chinese propaganda musical “The Wings of Songs”
The State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China*

China released a propaganda musical that purportedly depicts the life of Uyghur Muslims, which fails to mention mass surveillance and systematic human-rights abuses.

“The Wings of Songs,” which premiered in China on March 28, follows the story of a Uyghur, a Kazakh, and a Han Chinese man who form a musical group in East Turkistan.

In the film, the relationship between Uyghurs and Han Chinese is described as the “seeds of

a pomegranate,” according to The New York Times.

In reality, Beijing has since at least 2017 sought to erase Uyghur culture, detaining more than one million Uyghurs in hundreds of prison camps across East Turkistan.

Similarly, the Uyghur men in the film are depicted as clean-shaven and drinking alcohol, while Uyghur women are seen without their traditional headscarves, the Times said.

Last week António Guterres, the UN secretary general, said that he had begun negotiating with Beijing to secure a visit to East Turkistan so that allegations of genocide could be examined.

Do you know the Chinese regime has destroyed about 16000 mosques in East Turkistan?



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