

## U.N. Report on Uyghurs in Xinjiang

### What is the issue?

China has vehemently rejected the United Nations Human Rights Office report on human rights violations in the northwestern Xinjiang region.

### What is the significance of the Xinjiang region?

- **Xinjiang**- Located in the northwest China, Xinjiang covers one-sixth of China's territory.
- It is officially known as the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR).
- Significance
  - Borders Russia, Afghanistan, India, Pakistan and other central Asian countries.
  - Contains a wealth of natural resources.
  - Part of the ancient Silk Road
- Xinjiang is sparsely populated with a population of 25 million, the majority of which belong to mostly Muslim ethnic groups.
- **Uyghurs**- The Uyghurs are mostly Muslims and they speak their own language which is similar to Turkish.
- They see themselves as culturally and ethnically close to Central Asian nations.
- When first census was done in 1953, around 75% of the total population included Uyghurs while ethnic Han Chinese accounted for 7%.
- The latest census shows that the Uyghur population has come down to 45% of the total in Xinjiang, while that of Han Chinese has increased to 42%.

### What are the allegations against China?

- **Abuse against minorities**- In 2014, Chinese leader Xi Jinping ordered a massive crackdown following violence in the region.
- In the years that followed, Uyghurs and others were sent into re-education camps as part of the campaign.
- This was followed by a string of allegations of mass imprisonment, torture, compulsory sterilisation, sexual violence, destruction of Uyghur cultural and religious sites and forced labour.
- In 2018, a U.N. panel estimated in its periodic review that over a million Uyghurs and Muslim minorities had been forced into political camps for indoctrination in the Xinjiang region.
- **Beijing's response**- Beijing has rejected such claims and insisted that its mass detention camps are designed to counter terrorism and extremism.
- It has maintained that no human rights were abused and attendance in camps was voluntary.

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### **What does the human rights office assessment report reveal?**

- **Human rights violation-** The U.N. report concludes that China committed serious human rights violations in the Xinjiang region under its anti-terrorism and anti-extremism strategies.
- It notes that Chinese interpretations of “extremism” are exceptionally broad and often target standard tenets of Islamic religion and practice.
- **Arbitrary detention-** Uyghurs and other minorities were discriminated on perceived security threats without due process and for an indefinite duration.
- Evidence shows that an individual could be sent to a Vocation and Educational Training Centre (VETC) for having
  - too many children
  - being an unsafe person
  - being born in certain years
  - being an ex-convict
  - wearing a veil or beard
  - having applied for a passport and not having left the country
  - having foreign connections
  - attempting to cancel their Chinese citizenship
  - possessing dual registration in a neighbouring country
  - having downloaded WhatsApp
- **Torture in camps-** The report says allegations of torture, ill-treatment and sexual violence inside VETCs.
- Two-thirds of former detainees interviewed claimed they were subjected to torture and ill-treatment.
- The report describes that almost all former detainees mentioned that they lost significant weight due to constant hunger.
- There was constant surveillance, some were not allowed to speak their own language (Uyghur or Kazakh) and could not practice their religion.
- They were either administered injections, pills or both regularly, while their blood samples were collected in the VETC facilities.
- The uncertainty about the reasons for detention, length of their stay, the conditions, the constant atmosphere of fear, lack of contact with outside world and anxiety amounted to psychological torture.
- **Sexual violence-** Some were stripped naked, forced to perform oral sex during interrogation and were subject to invasive gynaecological examinations.
- **Violation of reproductive rights-** Official figures indicate a sharp decline in birth rates, with the birth rate dropping from 15.88 per thousand in 2017 to 8.14 per thousand in 2019.
- **Destruction of religious sites-** The satellite imagery indicated that many religious sites either appeared to have been removed or tampered with.
- **Genocide-** The report does not refer to genocide.

## What is the response of China?

- China has maintained that its crackdown in Xinjiang is aimed at containing the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) which is allegedly linked to radical outfits.
- Beijing registered a strong opposition to the U.N. report and slandered the Western forces for using human rights as a political tool.
- China also maintained that Xinjiang enjoys social stability, economic development and religious harmony.

## References

1. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/uyghurs-xinjiang-explained-united-nations-human-rights-report-china-repression/article65844402.ece?homepage=true>
2. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-22278037>

