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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.

To know more about Uyghur crisis, click [here](#)

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

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