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Ethnic minority Uyghurs in a township in China's troubled Xinjiang region risk losing their farmland and entire personal belongings if they do not respond to calls to appear before the police, according to sources.



Map showing location of Hotan county in Xinjiang. RFA

In Langru Township in Hotan county, any Uyghur on the police suspect list who fails to present himself or herself to authorities will have their name "erased from township household registers," according to one police document recently obtained by RFA.

"Your and your family members' farmland and personal belongings will be confiscated," the document continues, threatening further that suspects' families' homes and gardens will be wrecked and state benefits canceled.

The tough rules were believed to have been implemented around September as part of a crackdown against Uyghurs in Xinjiang following a spate of deadly violence blamed on "terrorists" and Islamist insurgents seeking to establish an independent state.

Uyghurs in Hotan are also increasingly blocked from foreign travel, sources said.

Those denied passports include members of illegal religious or political groups, veiled women, and citizens receiving social welfare payments, they said.

Attacks this year against a marketplace and train station in Xinjiang's capital Urumqi have led to strict controls in areas populated by the mostly-Muslim Uyghurs, a Uyghur who recently moved to Turkey told RFA's Uyghur Service.

"Beginning in May of this year, some 200,000 cadres and government officials have been sent to Uyghur villages to preserve 'political stability,' the source said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

"They are the government's watchdogs, and their main agenda is to control people's thoughts, beliefs, behavior, and activities," he said, adding, "People living in other countries cannot imagine the repression and political hardships now faced by local Uyghur residents."

Mass clearance required for travel

Under laws introduced two years ago but enforced strictly only recently, Hotan residents wishing to travel abroad must be cleared by a large number of township and county offices that track the applicant's record for a history of political or criminal offenses, the source said.

"Representatives of ten offices belonging to the township government, and six offices belonging to the county government, must sign, seal, date, and enter their contact numbers on the application form" indicating approval, the source said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

"Only then has the applicant been cleared to request a passport from a police department at the level of the prefecture or the [Xinjiang Uyghur] Autonomous Region," he said.

Evidence of a Uyghur's membership in illegal religious organizations emerging in the application process will especially involve the applicant in "unbelievable hardships," he added.

Township and county officers must also certify that any passport applicant must be free of debt and not in violation of official family planning policies, according to a copy of an application document obtained by RFA.

Applicants must also show no record of "political problems," the document says.

"If any history of political problems is revealed, we will not approve the application," a police officer in Langru township told RFA, speaking on condition of anonymity.

"Problems might include involvement in a political organization or in illegal religious activities, such as a woman covering her face with a veil," the officer said.

"We only offer our approval to people who obey the orders of the [ruling Chinese Communist] Party and the government," he said.

Applicants must also not be recipients of *dibao*, or subsidies provided to low-income families by the state, an employee of the township's civil affairs office said.

"If government departments at a higher level inform us that an applicant belongs to a *dibao* family, we are not permitted to approve his or her application," he said.

Regret

Government employees at the local level frequently regret the difficulties caused by these requirements, an employee at Langru's Economy Management Office told RFA, adding, "But we have no choice, since these are the rules of our county."

Hotan prefecture, in which the county lies, "is a very special region in the [Xinjiang] Autonomous Region," he said. "Most of our population here are Uyghurs, and their Islamic beliefs are very strong."

"Maybe in the northern parts of Xinjiang, these complicated procedures do not apply," he said.

The Xinjiang region, which is home to millions of Turkic-speaking Uyghurs, has seen an upsurge in violence that has left hundreds dead since 2012.

But rights groups accuse the Chinese authorities of heavy-handed rule in Xinjiang, including violent police raids on Uyghur households, restrictions on Islamic practices, and curbs on the culture and language of the Uyghur people.

Reported by Jelil Kashgari and Erkin Tarim for RFA's Uyghur Service. Translated by Eset Sulaiman. Written in English by Richard Finney.

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