

CHINA



CHINA: UYGHUR POEMS UNDER SUSPICION

On the occasion of “World Poetry Day” on March 21, the Uyghur writer Aziz Isa Elkun spoke to the online magazine “Bitter Winter” about the more than five hundred Uyghur poets who

have been sentenced to long prison terms or are being extrajudicially persecuted by the communist dictatorship.

“Their only crime was to write poems in their God-given mother tongue, Uyghur,” he said in the interview. Aziz Isa Elkun has been living in exile in the UK for two decades.

Religious leaders of the Uyghurs, who are almost all Muslim, their writers, teachers and academics were sent together with up to three million members of the Uyghur ethnic group and other Turkic peoples to so-called “vocational training camps”, internment camps in which they were indoctrinated with communist ideology. Elkun’s sister was detained in one such camp.

The poet said that apart from translations of Xi Jinping’s speeches, no books have been published in the Uyghur language in his home country since 2018.

“Every independent Uyghur bookstore has been closed,” he said.

Those persecuted include Abduqadir Jalalidin, a renowned Uyghur poet, scholar and literature professor at Xinjiang Normal University. He was arrested in 2018 without giving a reason and later sentenced to 13 years in prison. His whereabouts are unknown.