

NEWS WRAP

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There have been numerous reports on sweatshops, children in fabrication slavery, and workers' protests emerging from China's unsatisfactory labour conditions. In anticipation of New labour laws, certain companies have been laying off large numbers of workers. Huawei, China's major telecommunications equipment manufacturer tried to persuade 7000 employees with more than eight years of service to resign, and compete for new short term posts, as a scheme for reclassification as new employees. The new law on employment contracts, effective January 2008, will strengthen workers' rights, and ensure higher job security. The companies will have to inform the unions, before dismissing a worker with ten years or more of service, having an open-ended contract. Besides empowering the unions to negotiate collective contracts, the law could bring higher severance payments.

While the new labour law could build a "socialist harmonious society", jobs could continue for life, with a sharp decline in incentives. The All China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU), the umbrella organization for China's unions and an arm of the government, will be strengthened. With the state-owned industries declining, and the private sector flourishing, avoiding unions and Communist Party cells, the state controlled unions had suffered an erosion in power, over the recent years. With independent trade unions in effect illegal, the ACFTU may not actually become a leader for downtrodden workers, and workers' rights. The Chinese government expects the ACFTU to prevent unrest amongst workers. The right to strike in China, stands abolished since 1982, amidst tears of Poland's Solidarity trade-union movement. The new law may not improve the conditions of millions of migrant workers from the countryside, who comprise the majority of unskilled labour in urban areas, and are frequently the victims of poor labour conditions. Capitalism may assume a human face with the new law, after reports of June 07 that local officials in the northern province of Shanxi had permitted rural brick kilns to employ hundreds of workers, including children, in conditions of slavery. The increasing number of labour disputes in China may remain unaffected by the new law.

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Six countries have emerged from old Yugoslavia, but Kosovo is still a province under Serbia. About 90% of Kosovo's 2m population are ethnic Albanians. The next two-round presidential elections in Serbia, are due in January/February 08. To brighten incumbent, Kosovo Albanians are being persuaded to hold off declaration of independence, before the elections. Serbia is the legal successor state to Yugoslavia, and the UN Security Council governs Kosovo, under resolution 1244, which describes Kosovo as part of Yugoslavia. Diplomats from USA and Europe are attempting to search for legal clauses, to replace the UN Mission in Kosovo, with one from the EU. While Serbia does not import anything from Kosovo, it exports to Kosovo goods worth \$ 280 million annually. In the event of a Serbian blockade, this trade could be re-routed through Montenegro and Macedonia. About 50,000 Serbs live in enclaves in Kosovo.

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