

NEWS WRAP

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Consequent to 1000 years of imperial domination by China, and a border skirmish in 1979, a sizeable section of the Vietnamese population remains hostile to China, their northern neighbour. Even then Vietnam requires a higher amount of investment from China, as it runs a large trade deficit with China. The Vietnamese government is driving ahead with the Chinese bauxite mining project in Vietnam's Central Highlands, in spite of the Chinese companies' questionable environmental records, and compromise of national security. Vietnam is fiercely patriotic, and feels insecure with China's claims to disputed islands, in the South China sea.

Of late Vietnamese citizens have been wearing nationalist T-shirts, which have imprinted anti-China hostile messages. Distributors of such T-shirts are sometimes critical bloggers on the internet. China continues to be Vietnam's biggest trading partner. Vietnamese police have discovered attempts to print T-shirts opposing Chinese investments in Vietnam, despite widespread criticism from scientists, generals and free thinkers. A number of well known bloggers and on-line reporters, who had written critically about Vietnam-China relations on the internet, have been detained by Vietnam police, on suspicions of "abusing democratic freedom" to undermine the state. Some of the critics who were detained, have subsequently been released, without charges, after several days in detention. The crackdown on bloggers and journalists still continues. The more outspoken commentators are being put under checks, till the three top political posts are re-elected, at the Congress of the ruling Communist Party in 2011. In Dec 08, new restrictions were imposed on bloggers, making it illegal for them to publish under a pseudonym, or to write on political subjects. The Vietnamese government finds it difficult to regulate the internet, as more than 21 million people, a quarter of the population, use the internet; and blog contributors number about 4 million. The vast majority confine to personal diaries, avoiding sociopolitical activism. Some bloggers have exposed corruption in the Vietnam government, and criticized the former Soviet Union and present day China. But arrest of bloggers in Vietnam, has widened internet readership.

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The Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe (OSCE) monitors human rights and elections in its 56 members. Even though the OSCE has never judged an election in Kazakhstan as free and fair, Kazakhstan in 2007 was bestowed the 2010 chairmanship of the OSCE. There were hopes that the honour of the one-year chairmanship would bring about improvements in human-rights in Kazakhstan, which has a one-party parliament and growing oil exports. While some legislative reforms have been introduced, the human rights situation has been worsening. Behind-the-scenes struggles among the elite, have led to arrests of government and state-company officials and bankers, on charges of corruption and embezzlement. Many of the arrests seem unconnected with actual wrong doing. Yevgenic Zhoutis, Kazakhstan's well known human-rights activist has recently been sentenced to four years in jail, for driving a car that killed a man,

who was walking on a rural road, late at night. Trials have become increasingly politically motivated.

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Mainly to avoid problems with trade unions, a large number of business houses, like Reliance, have employed Chinese workers in contracts for their industrial projects. Indians reportedly lack the skills of Chinese workers. With Indians remaining unemployed, the Government of India feels employing the Chinese workers cannot go on indefinitely. The union government had advised the Indian business houses to include a clause in the work contract for the Chinese employees, that once they are hired, they would be bound to impart training to Indian workers, in the required skills at the industrial plant. On the other spectrum, of the lacks of visas issued by Beijing to Indian visitors, only a few thousand fall in the category of employment visas. China has not been issuing employment visas to Indians, in huge numbers.

Presently nearly 25,000 Chinese are working on various projects in India, including laying of gas pipelines. The government of India had issued a September-end deadline, for Chinese citizens working on projects in India, to convert their business visas to employment visas. Till end Sep 09, not more than 1000 applications for conversion of business visa to employment visa, were received by the Indian High Commission in Beijing. The Chinese do not appear to be serious about following the new visa rule, requiring them to enter India for work purposes, only on an employment visa. The Indian government has agreed to Beijing's request for deadline extension for obtaining employment visa, since the non-conversion of the business visas by the Chinese, could seriously affect the Indian projects, where they are employed. Chinese project workers have been inducted mainly in power communication and petroleum sectors of India.

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Tatas installed the small car Nano plant at Sanand in Gujarat, and the area has become a spiralling real estate. Now more than 3500 original land records have disappeared from government custody in Sanand. □□□