

NEWS WRAP

AGD

WHILE AUTOMOBILE component companies have made enormous profits, the workers have received a negligible share. Workers are being squeezed, so as to raise exports. To create a mass market, the purchasing power of workers is not being increased. It takes twenty times more months for a worker at the Maruti Plant in Maneswar to buy a Maruti car, compared with a German worker in Germany. A key driver of the parent group's profits, Maruti Suzuki, the Indian subsidiary of Japan's Suzuki, has been India's biggest car maker for nearly three decades. In 2011, the position of Maruti Suzuki has been weakened, by labour unrest that has hit production, and resulted in long delivery period for the most popular models. Since June 2011, workers at the company's five-year-old plant at Manesar (Haryana), have called strike three times. Initially it was to press demand for an independent union, and subsequently against management's punitive moves against strike leaders. At the highly auto-mated, ultra modern factories, Indian industrial workers have an increasingly combative mood, feeling that they are not getting an adequate share of India's rising prosperity. The agitation at Maruti had similar causes as the labour unrest which shook up many foreign owned factories in China, over the last few years. In India there has been a steep rise of factory level industrial action at multi-national groups.

POLIO IN SUB-CONTINENT

According to the polio surveillance project, there were 741 confirmed polio cases in India, recorded in 2009. This was more than half the total for the entire world, making India one of the world's worst rates of polio infection. Mass vaccination campaigns reduced the total to 42 confirmed cases in 2010; 94% less than the previous year. A 'polio-free interval' has been achieved between Jan to Sep 2011, with nil recorded cases.

Seven new cases of polio were recorded in Pakistan during Sep 2011, raising the number of people infected by the virus to 84. Pakistan is behind only Chad, which has 109 cases in 2011. The spurt in polio cases in Pakistan is attributable to poor public policy and cross border movements between Pakistan and Afghanistan, where the disease is also present. India is vaccinating all children under the age of five, crossing the Wagah border from Pakistan. The risks have never been high since there has never been a significant movement of population, between India and Pakistan. In Sep 2011, China confirmed its first case of polio, in over ten years, and sources the strain to Pakistan.

JEWS IN KAIFENG

Descendants of merchants who came from Persia, Jews have been settled in Kaifeng, a dusty walled city in central China, since the 11th century. The few Kaifengers who move to Israel are required to obtain a rabbi-certified conversion to be accepted as Jews. The Chinese government maintains that there are no Kaifeng Jews, because there are no Chinese Jews. The

five official religions in China do not include Judaism, and Jews are not one of China's designated *55 official minorities*. Similar to Chinese traditions, the Kaifeng Jews trace their heritage through their father, while orthodox Jews accept Judaism through their mother. Between 500 and 1000 people in Kaifeng are descendents of Kaifeng Jews, and abide by some Jewish traditions. A synagogue was destroyed in an 1860 flood and never rebuilt on number 21 Teaching and Tora Lane. The Jews married the local women and rose to become state and military officials. By the early 1900s, none of the Kaifeng Jews could read Hebrew, and the community's Torah scrolls were sold to collectors. With the communist takeover in 1949, Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping looked on the Kaifeng Jews as subversive, but the Kaifeng Jews were never singled out for discrimination. China's ban on unauthorized religious activity makes the Kaifeng Jews live cautiously. The Jews rarely meet in groups of 10, the number required by Jewish law for a religious service, for fears that the government might view it as a religious gathering. Candles are lit on Sabbath as a folk custom. Passover is celebrated as a restaurant meal, and not as a religious gathering. Some share 'matzos' from Hong Kong. The Kaifeng Municipal Museum has an unmarked, padlocked store room where several stone tablets from different Kaifeng synagogues are kept. □□□