

Hundreds freed from forced labor in China

by UPI

BEIJING -- Chinese officials, cracking down on illegal kilns using forced labor, found 367 mentally handicapped people among 1,340 freed workers. Xinhua, China's official news agency, reported Monday the rescue effort began in June when the practice of forced labor came to light after about 400 parents in central Henan Province posted an online petition. The petition called for help in rescuing their children who had been kidnapped to work in small brick kilns, the report said. During the crackdown, authorities inspected illegal kilns, as well as mines and workshops employing more than 12 million workers. Sun Baoshu, vice minister of labor who headed the investigation group, said police found 67,000 -- 24.2 percent of the kilns, mines and workshops inspected nationwide -- were operating without licenses. Of the 185,000 cases registered during the inspection, more than half related to employing workers without contracts or failing to provide workers with social security insurance. The crackdown resulted in the arrests of 147 people. "We should combine inspections with handling reports and complaints from the public ... to root out all the illegal kilns, mines and workshops," Sun was quoted as saying.

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