

Asia, Australia and the Pacific

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Garment workers in Cambodia on strike

Over 1,000 workers at PCCS Garments in the Cambodian capital of Phnom Penh went on strike last week to protest against the lowering of an overtime allowance and other poor working conditions.

The overtime payment was reduced from 80 US cents an hour to 54 US cents after April when the government-owned Cambodian Garment LTD was sold to the Malaysian-based PCCS.

One 19-year-old striker said: "We're not going back to work until we get a deal for proper overtime and working conditions." She also complained of very poor ventilation in the factory.

Another worker said workers were not even paid the 2,000 riel (54 cents) overtime allowance if they took a short meal break at midnight in the course of a shift that went from 6pm to 6am.

"Wages paid at the factory were never more than \$45 a month and if workers were away sick their pay was docked \$1.50 a day," he said.

Chinese miners killed in explosions

A total of 23 workers were killed in two separate coal mine explosions in Yiyang county in China's Hunan province last month. Another five miners were also seriously injured in the blasts.

The first explosion that killed 11 workers occurred at a small unlicensed mine on December 1. The second blast that claimed 12 lives took place on December 26 at an adjacent mine. There are over 100 small illegal mining operations in the coal-rich county.

Indian bank workers strike

Nearly one million bank workers across India went on strike for 24 hours on Tuesday to press their demand for a 20 percent wage increase. The strike was called after talks between the Indian Bank's Association (IBA) and the country's nine bank unions broke down.

The IBA has offered only an 8 percent wage increase, claiming there was "no scope" to improve the offer "because of the economic slowdown" in the region. All Indian Bank Employees Association secretary Tarakeshwar Charkraborty has already signaled that the union will work to reduce the claim. In the course of the strike he told the media: "We are willing to significantly come down."

Nurses impose work bans

Nurses employed at Wollongong Hospital on the New South Wales south coast voted to work to rule and impose overtime bans to oppose the refusal by the region's Illawarra Health Service to fill nursing vacancies to overcome serious staff shortages.

The nurses said the present nurse-to-patient ratio is threatening the safety of patients. A NSW Nurses Association spokesman warned that if the health service did not agree to employ more nurses then beds could start closing by the end of this week.

The crisis at the hospital has been sharpened since the decision by state Labor government at the end of 1997 to downgrade the nearby Port Kembla Hospital to a rehabilitation and aged care centre, drastically reducing the number of hospital beds available in the region.

Prior to the downgrade the number of beds in the two hospitals had already been slashed from 145 to 108. In 1979-80 the Illawarra region had 10 hospitals with 1,004 beds but this has been reduced to six hospitals with less than 700 beds to service a population of 300,000.

Public school staff to strike

Administrators, first aid officers and other auxiliary staff employed at public schools in New South Wales have voted to strike on January 27, the first day of the new school year. The strike has been called in response to the failure by the Education Department to meet the final instalment of a 16 percent pay rise that was to be paid over three years.

The final 4 percent instalment was due on December

31 last year. Stopwork meetings will be held on the day of the strike.

Tin miners to strike

Miners at the Renson Bell tin mine on Tasmania's west coast have threatened to strike against the sacking of 82 workers on Wednesday. The dismissed workers were called in one by one to the manager's office in the early hours of the morning and told their employment had been terminated.

The sacking of almost one quarter of the mine's total workforce is the result of a review begun last year when the operation was taken over by Murchison United. Although a spokesman for the Communications Electrical and Plumbers Union, which covers the miners, said he was shocked by the sackings, the union was fully aware that the jobs' review was being conducted.

The union is now attempting to head off industrial action by pushing the dispute into the industrial commission.



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