

# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

12 August 2006

## Asia

### **Bangladeshi teachers continue fight for pay and conditions**

An indefinite strike by 500,000 teachers from 30,000 non-government high schools, colleges and madrasas in Bangladesh entered its fourth week on August 5. The teachers are fighting for a 17-point log of claims, including a 100 percent basic salary increase, improved house rent allowances, full medical and festival allowances and other benefits in line with UNESCO and International Labor Organisation recommendations.

The workers have rejected a government announcement on August 6 offering a 10 percent pay rise. A spokesman for the strikers told a press conference: "We could not call off the strike on the basis of the government's announcement for partial fulfilment of our demand".

In a separate dispute, Bangladesh Non-government Primary Teachers Association held a rally on August 3 in Dhaka demanding the government take over their employment. Following the protest, teachers marched on Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's office but were stopped by a barbed-wire barrier erected by the police. Police later allowed a delegation of five teachers to present a memorandum on their claims.

A number of teachers began a hunger strike at Muktangan and others an indefinite sit-down protest at the Central Shaheed Minar in Dhaka after the march. Rallies were also held in district towns across Bangladesh.

### **Andhra Pradesh vets strike**

Veterinary Assistant Surgeons in Kurnool in the south Indian state of Andhra Pradesh began a one-week strike on August 4 over unrealistic government work targets. They also want a range of benefits, including restoration of a travelling allowance. While veterinary officers are required to travel extensively they have not been paid travel allowances for the last three years.

The Andhra Pradesh Veterinary Assistant Surgeons Service Association claims that the government has set a target of 4,500 new cases for treatment but only provided 12,000 rupees (\$US260) in medical supplies. The association claims that 450,000 rupees (\$US10,000) are needed to meet the target.

### **Computer teachers protest poor pay**

Protesting computer teachers in Indian state of Punjab

marched to Excise and Taxation Minister Sardool Singh Bandala's residence in Amritsar on August 6 over poor pay. Computer teachers only earn 3,960 rupees (\$US88) per month, even though they are required to have an IT post-graduate degree.

Also in the Punjab, teachers and non-teaching staff from non-government colleges in Chandigarh stopped work after the second period on August 7 and marched to the Punjab Congress Bhawan. The protestors presented a memo to Punjab's chief minister demanding the Congress Party honour its 2002 election promise to establish a pension-gratuity scheme for teachers and staff.

The march was organised by the Punjab and Chandigarh College Teachers' Union and supported by the Principals' Federation and Non-Teaching Employees Union.

### **Indian childcare workers end national protest**

At least 20,000 government anganwadi (childcare) workers from 23 Indian states ended 10 days of protest in New Delhi on August 3. The protestors represented 16 million anganwadi workers nationally and are part of a program that focuses on preventing malnutrition.

Their main demands are for permanency and an improved pay scale for carers and helpers. If the government does not grant permanency the workers want a minimum monthly wage of 3,000 rupees (\$65) for carers and 2,000 rupees (\$43) for assistants.

Protest leader Shindu Ji from Kerala pointed out that: "Forty percent of children in India are under the curse of malnutrition and only 1.50 rupees (\$US0.03) per child is given by the government to anganwadi workers, which is very minimal," she said.

Kanta Devi said: "About 1,463 rupees (\$31) is the average wage of an anganwadi worker in Punjab but the nature of the work is very much the same as that of a permanent employee of the state government. Even after getting much less than permanent employees, we don't enjoy other rights like allowances and pensions." Many childcare workers are not even paid on time. Employees in Delhi and Jharkhand, for example, have not been paid for four months and one year, respectively.

The protestors were also opposing moves by some state governments to place anganwadi workers under the direct

control of village governing bodies. Neelam, a childcare worker from the Bijapur district in Karnataka, said that would see an increase in sexual harassment cases. She cited the example of an anganwadi worker in Madhya Pradesh who committed suicide and the struggle of childcare workers in Haryana against sexual harassment.

#### **Korean auto workers vote to strike**

Workers at Ssangyong Motor in South Korea decided on August 8 to strike next week over alleged moves by company owners, the Shanghai Automotive Industry Corp (SAIC), to transfer plant technology to China. The 5,700-strong Ssangyong Motor union believes that the move is part of plans by SAIC to relocate all production to China.

SAIC bought a 48.9 percent stake in Ssangyong Motor for \$US500 million in October 2004. The union alleges that the companies signed a licensing agreement at that time allowing technology transfer.

#### **Australia and the Pacific**

##### **Teachers vote to strike in pay dispute**

On August 8, 3,000 public school teachers in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) voted in a secret ballot to strike on August 17. The strike is part of a long-running industrial campaign, including 4-hour rolling stoppages, for a pay increase without trade offs.

The ACT Labor government is demanding teachers accept the destruction of 135 jobs, school closures and increased workloads for a 4 percent per annum pay increase over three years. A union spokesperson said that the government was “demanding a 10 percent cut in our secondary school staffing to fund a salary increase that only matches CPI and we’re losing other positions elsewhere in the system”.

##### **Cleaners protest for better wages and conditions**

As part of an ongoing national campaign, hundreds of cleaners rallied at Federation Square in Melbourne on August 10 to protest working conditions imposed by cleaning contractor Australian Facilities Management (AFM).

The workers, members of the Liquor, Hospitality, and Miscellaneous Workers Union (LHMWU), claim that since AFM took over the contract to clean a 32-storey city office block last November workloads have increased dramatically.

A spokesman for the LHMWU said that AFM had cut cleaners’ shifts and working hours and instructed them to empty bins on only three of the 32 floors. He said one cleaner had the time allotted to each floor reduced from 70 minutes to less than 40.

Cleaners rallied outside the Melbourne Stock Exchange last month to protest Domain Cleaning’s increased production demands on employees.

##### **New Zealand supermarket workers protest over pay**

New Zealand supermarket workers employed by Progressive Enterprises protested outside Kilbirnie Woolworths’ in Wellington and Greenlane Foodtown in South Auckland on August 5.

The protests were part of a campaign for a pay increase. Workers rejected Progressive’s 2.6 percent pay offer and are demanding a 7 percent pay rise, an end to youth rates, a collective bargaining allowance and the continuation of an extra week’s long-service leave. NDU national secretary Laila Harré said workers were using rostered time off to campaign for support from supermarket customers. Formal bargaining initiated on July 31 gives the company 40 days to respond.

##### **New Zealand doctors’ pay talks fail to reach agreement**

The New Zealand junior doctors’ multi-employer collective agreement remains unsettled nearly two months after a 5-day national strike. Negotiations between the Resident Doctors’ Association and 21 district health boards (DHBs) were due to resume on August 7 but were called off with no definite date set for resumption.

The dispute centres on a memorandum of understanding proposed by the DHBs which allows for committees with health board and union representatives to develop “local solutions” to staffing issues. Doctors fear the scheme will lead to constant re-negotiation of employment terms less than those in collective agreements. It could also result in current protections, such as a 16-hour maximum for continuous work, being eroded.

The Association of Salaried Medical Specialists (ASMS) met with DHBs last week in separate pay talks for hospital-employed specialists. The ASMS is seeking an average 7 percent base rate pay rise and improvements for night and weekend work. The ASMS, which represents 2,700 senior doctors, claims NZ mid-grade specialists earn \$176,000 compared with Australian doctors of similar experience who are on \$226,145. DHBs contend that the doctors’ claim represents a 25 percent increase when extra leave, training and other allowances are included and that available funding only permits them to meet about 3 percent.

##### **PNG lab technicians impose work bans**

Laboratory technicians at the Port Moresby general hospital on August 7 banned all overtime and shift work. The 46 technicians, members of the Medical Laboratory Technician Association, are protesting illegal management adjustments to a memorandum of understanding (MOU) governing working conditions signed in November 2000. The changes reduce overtime and shift loading payments.

The union has registered its dispute with the Industrial Registrar, declaring that saying management should renegotiate the MOU if it wants to make changes.



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