

# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

3 January 2009

## Hong Kong airport ground staff strike

About 1,000 ground staff at Hong Kong Airport Services struck for three hours on December 27 affecting over 80 flights and leaving thousands of passengers waiting for hours for their luggage.

The ground staff were protesting a company decision to scrap an annual performance-based bonus of approximately one month's salary for its 3,000-strong workforce. Management claimed it could only pay a bonus of \$HK750 (\$US96.2) because of "the economic downturn". This was rejected by employees whose monthly salaries range from 6,400 and 10,000 Hong Kong dollars.

The union rejected a second company offer to pay a half-month's salary but called its members back to work when management agreed to enter negotiations on January 5.

## Chinese garment workers protest

Hundreds of workers protested outside a garment factory in the southern manufacturing hub of Guangdong on December 29 after the death of a colleague, which they claimed was caused by overwork. The employee, a factory chef in his 40s, had worked more than 10 straight days before his death.

The chef's family and factory workers were not satisfied with compensation provided by the factory and have threatened to maintain their protest until the issue is resolved. There has been no official report on the cause of the chef's death.

## Thousands of Korean media workers strike

Members of the National Union of Media Workers from 120 South Korean television and radio stations walked off the job on December 26 in protest against government plans to deregulate broadcasting ownership and competition laws.

New government legislation would allow some of South Korea's largest newspapers and corporate conglomerates to hold a 20 percent stake in terrestrial broadcasters, 30 percent in comprehensive channels and 49 percent in news-only channels. Comprehensive channels deal with all content, including news, entertainment and sports.

Some 2,000 media workers, including reporters and producers from the top three broadcasters—KBS, MBC and SBS—rallied in central Seoul. Three days later they demonstrated outside parliament and have vowed to continue their protests until the Grand National Party government abandons what media employees have described as "evil legislation".

## Indian civil servants protest

On December 29, thousands of teachers and state employees marched in the busy Hazratganj area in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, in protest against the partial implementation of a pay commission report. The demonstrators are angry that full benefits have not been paid to all government employees as recommended by the Sixth Pay Commission. Teachers and staff of local government bodies, corporations, public undertakings, zilla panchayats (district administrations) and development authorities have all been disadvantaged.

The protest was called by the Karmachari Shikshak Samanvay Samiti in Uttar Pradesh, which has threatened to call a work boycott by civil workers at all district headquarters from January 16 and hold a rally in the state capital on February 3.

## Indian coalminers protest

Coalminers picketed the Central Coalfields Limited (CCL) headquarters in Ranchi, Jharkhand on December 26 to demand a change in the Indian government's wage policy. According to Coal Ministry policy, miners' wages can only be revised every 10 years. The coalminers want a salary

increase after five years.

The picket was to block Union Minister of State for Coal Santosh Bagrodia from entering the CCL building. Coal workers have threatened to launch a three-day strike if their demands are not fulfilled.

### **Indian loco drivers on fasting protest**

Three members of the All India Loco Running Staff Association, supported by 100 colleagues, began a fasting protest in Bangalore, Karnataka on December 29. Their demands include lifting assistant loco drivers' pay to 2,800 rupees (\$US57) per month and the establishment of distinct wage grades to correspond with functional differences.

The workers also pointed out that there are no promotional opportunities for drivers who are forced to work for 12- to 13-hour shifts.

### **Junior doctors in India strike**

Junior doctors at the Government Medical College in Kozhikode, Kerala held a 24-hour strike on December 31 as part of state-wide agitation for a monthly salary increase. The doctors only worked in the Emergency Services during the walkout.

On December 15 most medical services in Uttar Pradesh were suspended as junior doctors held an indefinite strike to demand salary and allowances as per the recommendations of the Sixth Pay Commission. Around 600 junior doctors from Chhatrapati Sahuji Maharaj Medical University also boycotted work and picketed the hospital premises.

In Allahabad city, Motilal Nehru Medical College medicos called an indefinite strike and rallied outside the Swaroop Rani hospital before marching to the college. Strike action by junior doctors was already underway in Jhansi district.

Meanwhile, the S N Medical College principal declared strike action was banned under the Essential Services Maintenance Act (ESMA).

### **Retrenched diamond polishers in India rally for jobs**

Around 400 unemployed diamond polishers rallied in Varachha, Surat City on December 29 to demand jobs. The factory owner offered 1,500 rupees and household items as relief until he could reemploy the polishers. This was rejected by the protesting workers, who said they wanted "jobs not money".

The polishers agreed to move into the factory and begin negotiations

following the arrival of the police and representatives of the Surat Diamond Association, Surat Diamond Workers Association and Labour Department officials. The factory owner agreed to increase his relief offer to 2,500 rupees and gave an assurance that he would reemploy the workers in mid-January when he reopens the plant.

### **Thai auto workers demonstrate for bonus**

About 400 subcontract workers from the Thai Summit Auto Body Industry Co Ltd in Samutprakarn (29 kilometres south of Bangkok) rallied outside the company premises on the Bangkok-Trat Road on December 24. Traffic was blocked for several hours while workers negotiated with management for a year-end bonus.

The protestors also demanded that the company hire subcontractors as full-time employees, withdraw lay-off plans and not penalise the demonstrating workers. The company has 2,000 employees with around 600 contract personnel.

Workers dispersed after management agreed to pay all subcontractors a bonus equivalent to 300 days' pay. Those with less than six months of work will receive 600 baht (\$US17.20).

On the same day about 300 members of Auto Alliance (Thailand) used 50 pick-up trucks and sedans to block the Sukhumvit Road near the organisation's provincial office. The workers want higher bonuses than those being offered by their employers. Two companies of commando police were deployed to the scene but failed to disperse the protesting workers.

The workers previously rejected a six-month bonus offer plus a 14,000-baht allowance and demanded a six-and-a-half month bonus and 25,000 baht.

### **Laid-off workers block road in Samut Prakan**

Some 200 laid-off employees from speaker manufacturer Sammi Sound Tech Thailand blocked Theparak Road on December 26 to demand compensation for their termination. Workers blocked the road after the Korean owners of the company did not arrive at the factory to give workers promised severance pay. The factory has been closed for two months.

The protesting employees dispersed several hours later after provincial authorities agreed to give each worker 1,400 baht as initial compensation on January 26. The workers were also asked to file a complaint with police against the firm.

## **Fiji postal and telecom workers to vote for strike**

Some 1,200 Fiji Post and Telecom Employees' Association members have decided to participate in a strike ballot that will be held on January 19 to 23 over unresolved salary issues.

Telecom Fiji employees have rejected the government-owned company's last pay offer of annual tiered wage hikes of between 1 and 3 percent. The union has dropped its original claim for a 10 percent across-the-board cost of living adjustment and is now demanding a 5.8 percent increase.

If a majority of union members vote for a strike, it could range from an all-out walkout to rolling industrial action.



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