

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

26 February 2011

Bangladeshi police attack protesting melamine factory workers

At least 10 protesting melamine factory workers from Rugganj in central Bangladesh were injured when police tried to break up a demonstration over the death of a work colleague on February 21. Over 400 workers walked off the job and rallied along the Dhaka-Sylhet highway after factory management refused to pay compensation to the dead employee's family.

Mazharul Islam, 25, from the plant's cutting section, was electrocuted on the job. According to workers, his death was the result of negligence by the factory authorities and lack of proper treatment.

Bangladeshi garment workers locked out

On Tuesday, over 1,000 workers from the Onetex Apparel Factory in Ashulia rallied along the Dhaka–Mymensingh Highway to demand unpaid wages for January. The demonstration erupted after the workers were locked out and informed by a notice on the factory gate that they would not be paid last month's wages until February 28 when the plant was reopened.

Police were deployed to prevent the protesters entering neighbouring factories to win support from other garment workers.

India: Tamil Nadu village administration officers on strike

At least 650 members of the Tamil Nadu Village Administrative Officers Association and the Tamil Nadu Revenue Department Employees Association are on strike. They walked off the job on February 17 to demand pay rises in line with Sixth Pay Commission recommendations. They also want promotion based on qualification rather than seniority.

The protests were held outside municipal offices in Nagapattinam, Vedaranyam, Thirukuvalai, Keezhvelur, Tharangambadi, Mayiladuthurai, Sirkazhi and Kuthalam.

Tamil Nadu government workers and teachers demand wage rise

Several hundred government employees and teachers from eight unions demonstrated outside state government offices in Vellore on February 17 to demand improved wages and conditions. Their demands include the

filling of all vacancies, wages paid on a time-scale basis and full payment of all arrears, retrospective to January 1, 2006. They also want all allowances, including the house rent allowance, to be equal with payments made to central government employees and the rectification of other recommendations by the Sixth Pay Commission.

Gujarat ad-hoc teachers on strike

Over 1,000 teachers hired on temporary contracts in the degree and diploma engineering colleges in Gujarat have been on strike since February 12. The teachers are demanding full-time employment in currently vacant faculty positions. They have threatened to intensify their protests during the forthcoming budget session of Gujarat state assembly.

Manipur college teachers maintain protests

Teachers at 28 Manipur state colleges began one-hour daily protests outside their respective colleges last Monday to demand pay rises in accordance with the University Grant Commission (UGC) scheme. The Federation of College Teachers' Associations said that teachers would maintain their protests until Saturday. They have been demanding implementation of the UGC scheme for the last 18 months.

According to the union, the state government decided in November to set pay rates lower than the UGC scheme. Under the UGC scheme, basic pay is 15,000 rupees (\$US330) and academic grade pay 6,000 rupees. The government, however, fixed basic pay at 9,300 rupees and academic rates at 5,200 rupees.

South Korean university cleaners reach agreement

Cleaners, guards and other non-permanent workers at Hongik University have reached a tentative agreement with their employers, ending a 49-day dispute that started with a sit-in protest at the university campus in Seoul. The protest followed the sacking of 170 subcontractors in December. The terminations occurred not long after the workers organised a labour union and demanded higher wages and improved conditions. Cleaners said they were being paid 4,120 won (\$US3.65) per hour, which is less than the 4,320 won legal minimum.

The two labour supply companies that fired the workers agreed to rehire them on slightly improved wages and to negotiate with the university so

they can return to their old jobs. According to the agreement, the hourly wage will rise to 4,450 won (\$US3.94) for cleaners and 3,560 won for security workers on the condition of working eight hours a day, five days a week. The companies also agreed to pay 50,000 won for meals and holiday bonuses, as well as additional payments for overtime work.

Seoul court cleaners walk out

On February 17, 74 cleaners from the Seoul District Court and the High Court walked off the job for 24 hours to demand the legal minimum wage. They held a lunch-time protest outside the courts shouting, "Courts, follow the law!" An official from the Korean Confederation of Trade Union's Women's League told the media that the minimum wage had been raised by 5.1 percent this year but that the courts were not paying the new rate. Workers said that if they remained on their current rates they would lose 500,000 won (\$US443) over a year.

Pakistani police attack protesting education workers

Two people were injured and 12 arrested when police fired teargas and baton-charged a demonstration by low-paid contract employees from the Sindh provincial education department outside the Karachi Press Club on February 18. Members of the All Sindh Education Department Lower Staff Association had joined with dozens of Education and Literacy Department contract workers on the third consecutive day of a protest outside the club. Their demands include regularisation of jobs and payment of outstanding salaries.

Meanwhile, workers from four public sector universities in Sindh province have announced they will stage a "long march" on Sunday from Sindh Agriculture University Tandojam to Hyderabad Press Club to push for their demands. The All Sindh Universities Employees Federation said members would stage a sit-in outside the club until their demands are met. The federation wants employees' medical allowances doubled and the resolution of other outstanding issues.

Sri Lankan plantation workers strike

Up to 400 plantation Kachcha estate workers in Pusallawa struck for 24 hours on February 16 to demand urgent repairs to the Pusallawa-Pedrash road, which workers claim has become a death trap. The strike was sparked after an elderly woman was killed on February 15—the seventh fatality since the road fell into disrepair—and several people were injured and required hospital treatment. The estate workers threatened that unless immediate arrangements were made to repair the road they would take further strike action and hold a protest hunger strike.

Philippines national radio workers threaten action

The two unions covering workers at the state-run Radio Philippines Network (RPN) Channel 9 filed a notice of strike at the Department of

Labor and Employment on Tuesday. Over 200 members of the RPN Employees Rank-and-File Union and the RPN Directors and Supervisors Union have been holding daily protests over the past three weeks to oppose government plans to privatise RPN. Workers fear they will lose their jobs and retirement benefits. No strike date has been announced.

Indonesian domestic workers protest

Nearly 100 demonstrators from the Yogyakarta Domestic Worker Protection Network (JPPRT) rallied at the Hotel Indonesia traffic circle in Central Jakarta on February 14 to demand decent wages and legal protection for domestic workers. Protesters hung T-shirts on clotheslines that said, "Bosses prosperous because of domestic workers".

Domestic employees **work an average 18 hours a day, seven days a week** on low pay without the protection of any existing Indonesian labour laws. The JPPRT wants immediate enactment of the Domestic Workers' Law currently on the National Legislation Program 2011.

TNT drivers hold another Australia-wide strike

Over 1,500 Transport Workers Union (TWU) members at TNT Australia stopped work for 24 hours on Tuesday and picketed TNT depots nationally over stalled enterprise agreement negotiations. The action follows a 24-hour strike last week and rolling four-hour stoppages last month. The TWU covers 2,500 workers at TNT, including drivers and dockhands.

While management and the union have agreed to an 8 percent pay rise over two years, the company has opposed claims for 1 percent annual increases in employers' superannuation payments until total contributions reach 15 percent. TNT has also rejected demands that it pay matching rates to its 3,000 casual and labour hire employees as well as access to annual leave, sick pay and overtime penalties. The multi-billion dollar global corporation claims it cannot afford workers' demands.

New Zealand secondary school teachers stop work

New Zealand secondary school teachers from the Post Primary Teachers Association (PPTA) held stop work meetings on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday this week to discuss their demands and plans for further industrial action for a new work agreement. Industrial action over the last four months of 2010 included rolling stoppages and work bans.

The teachers want a 4 percent pay rise and a commitment by the ministry of education to address increasing class sizes through teacher retention and recruitment. The government's last offer, which was rejected by the PPTA, was a pay rise of 2.75 percent over two years plus an \$800 one-off payment in the first year. The PPTA will resume negotiations with the ministry on Monday.



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