

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

9 June 2012

India: Vijaya private hospital nurses strike

About 500 nurses at the privately-owned Vijaya Hospital in Vadapalani, Tamil Nadu have been on strike since May 28 to demand higher wages. The striking nurses have alleged that hospital management tried to evict them from their hostel accommodation by force. They said that “ward boys” from another hospital had been allowed entry to the hostel and threatened to burn the nurses’ degree certificates if they did not leave the hostels.

The Vijaya Group of Hospitals Nurses Union has demanded that monthly salaries be lifted from 8,500 rupees (\$US153) to around 12,000 rupees. A senior doctor told the media that nurses’ conditions were “quite pathetic” and pointed to the pay disparity between doctors and nurses. Doctors are paid around 200,000 rupees (\$3,600) per month.

The strike follows several months of strikes and protests by nurses at public and private hospitals in Tamil Nadu and Kerala that began in March. Nurses across India are campaigning for a 12,000-rupee monthly minimum wage.

New Delhi motorbike manufacturing workers strike

Around 1,200 workers at the two-wheeler Bajaj Auto Pantnagar plant downed tools on June 4 in a dispute over wages. The strike was triggered when management suspended five workers during negotiations for a pay increase. The motorbike workers wanted their pay lifted from 2,000 rupees (\$US36) a month to 8,000 rupees. Management has only offered a 1,500-rupee increase.

The strikers returned to work after management agreed to lift their suspension of the five employees. The strikers warned that management settled the last pay dispute by offering 5,000 rupees but only paid 2,000.

India’s auto manufacturing industry has been racked by industrial action this year with workers at Hero MotoCorp, Rockman Industries, Satyam Auto and Maruti Suzuki Manesar demanding wage increases.

Bangladeshi commuter transport workers strike

After failed talks with the Bus-Owners’ Association and local police, the Sarak Sramik Federation called a three-day strike on June 5 in eight northern districts of Bangladesh’s Rangpur division.

The union’s ten-point demands included a wage rise, withdrawal of false charges against the Rangpur District Transport Workers Union’s general secretary, removal of illegal markets from the highways, an end to

illegal toll collection by highway police, and a ban on human-haulers and battery-run auto-rickshaws on highways.

Bangladeshi land port workers win wage rise

Benapole land port loading workers on the Indian border ended a four-day strike on June 6 after the Bangladesh Land Port Authority agreed to workers’ demands for a wage increase.

Benapole Port-handling Workers’ Union members walked out after their contracts expired. They refused to resume work until the authority raised wages to the government-declared minimum. The Bangladeshi government hurriedly reached a deal after Petropole port employees on the Indian side of the border walked out in solidarity.

Sri Lankan tea plantation workers on strike

Around 850 tea workers at the Park Estate in the central hills of Sri Lanka remain on strike after walking off the job on May 28 to demand the re-opening of the estate’s factory. Management had closed the facility, supposedly for repairs in January, and forced 70 workers into the fields. The tea harvest is now sent to a nearby factory. The Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC) has refused to support the strikers because they did not inform union officials before the walkout.

Pakistan: Punjab paramedics’ strike in fifth week

Punjab paramedics are maintaining strike action begun on May 9 over a pay claim. The year-long state-wide dispute has involved protests and rolling two-hour stoppages at public hospitals. Paramedics ended industrial action in February over the same issues, after health officials agreed to consider their demands. Technicians, including x-ray, MRI and ECG, have also joined the protest providing only emergency services.

Punjab Paramedic Alliance (PPA) members want a service structure for lesser qualified Grade 1 to Grade 4 employees, a health professional allowance, and regularisation of contract workers. According to paramedics, the Punjab chief minister has failed to honour a promise made in May 2011 to give “high priority” to the health workers’ demands.

On June 4, health authorities told PPA officials that they would “refer” the paramedic’s campaign to the police if the strikers refused to return to work. The government claims that funds are not available to meet the

paramedics' demands.

Cambodian garment workers strike

On May 31, 2,000 workers at the Gawon Apparel factory in Takhmao City, Kandal province walked off the job and protested outside the plant after they were told that their bonus would be cut for any days missed during a recent local election. Workers claimed that a government directive allowed them up to three days off for the election. The strike ended later in the day after management agreed not to cut pay.

Burmese steel plant workers end strike

Workers at the Yangon Crown Steelworks in Myaungdakar Industrial Zone in the Yangon region ended a nine-day strike on May 29 after the Chinese owner agreed to increase the basic wage and improve conditions. Workers currently receive 4,800 kyat (\$US5.82) a month, 80 kyat per hour overtime and a 5,000-kyat payment for regular attendance.

The steel workers had demanded a raise in basic pay and bonuses and a reduction to penalties for being absent. According to workers, the company cut the regular attendance payment if employees took a single day's leave, even when they were ill, and that basic pay was cut if they were absent five days in a month.

Victorian public school teachers strike

About 200 state government primary and secondary schools were closed in Victoria on June 7 when teachers and principals walked out for 24 hours in their eight-month dispute with the Baillieu government for a new Enterprise Agreement. Over 10,000 teachers at meetings in Melbourne, and regional meetings in Mildura and Wodonga, overwhelmingly endorsed the union's vaguely-worded proposal for future stoppages and protests targeting state government MPs. The Australian Education Union (AEU) told the media that there could be another 24-hour strike next term.

The AEU wants a 30 percent pay rise over three years and a reduction in the number of contract teachers in a new work agreement. The government is offering 2.5 percent per year, with any further increases offset by productivity gains and the introduction of performance based pay.

New South Wales community and social care workers protest

Thousands of community and social care workers across New South Wales (NSW) rallied outside the offices of state Liberal members of parliament on June 5 to protest the government's attempt to delay an "equal pay rise" approved by Fair Work Australia (FWA). The Australian Health Services Union (HSU) claims that the O'Farrell government has made submissions to FWA postponing the "equal pay" increases for up to six years. At least 30,000 workers are affected.

Some 150,000 community sector workers throughout Australia were

awarded equal pay rises earlier this year, following a long-running union test case in FWA. The unions falsely claimed that the ruling would close the 18 percent wage gap between male and female workers in the industry.

NSW government employees to protest compensation cuts

Hundreds of state government employees, including nurses, teachers, fire fighters and public servants, plan to rally in Sydney on June 13 in opposition to the NSW state government's proposed changes to the WorkCover compensation scheme. The state government claims that the scheme is over \$4 billion in deficit. It intends to cut compensation payouts, slash full pay entitlements for injured workers from 26 weeks' leave to 13 weeks and force them back to work earlier.

Nurses at Penrith's Nepean Hospital in Sydney's outer-west voted to strike for nine hours to attend the June 13 rally. A spokesman for the NSW Nurses' Association said injured registered nurses would have their pay cut from \$1,200 to \$460 a week, forcing many back to work while still injured.

New Caledonian journalists walk out

Journalists employed at New Caledonia's only daily publication *Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes* struck for 24 hours on June 5 to oppose the alleged planned sale of the paper and printing business by its French owner, the Hersant Media Group, to a local business consortium. Hersant plans to restructure and merge with the Rossel group in Belgium.

Journalists fear for the job security of the newspaper's 240 employees in New Caledonia and have raised concerns that local business ownership could threaten the balance of news reporting.



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