

# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

16 June 2012

## Air India pilots' strike in sixth week

Four hundred Air India (AI) pilots are defying Indian government threats and maintaining strike action begun on May 8. Management of the state-owned carrier has begun advertising to replace the 101 pilots it has already sacked.

The pilots are members of the Indian Pilots' Guild (IPG), which walked out of a tenth round of talks with carrier management on Wednesday without any resolution in sight. The labour commissioner has called for talks to resume on June 18.

The current dispute was triggered after AI management offered 50 percent of training places on its new fleet of Boeing 787 Dreamliners to lower-paid members of the Indian Commercial Pilots' Association (ICPA). The IPG pilots are also demanding outstanding salary arrears from 2007, travel on first class when not working and the opportunity to be promoted as commanders within six years. While IPG pilots are paid a fixed salary, ICPA pilots are only paid for the hours they work and not for training.

## Mass arrests of protesting Tamil Nadu day-care workers

Police arrested hundreds of day-care (anganwadi) workers in four Tamil Nadu cities on June 8 and 9 in an attempt to break up state-wide protests and pickets. The anganwadi workers want to be made government employees with seniority promotions and pensions. They are also demanding repeal of Bill 73 which makes Saturday work compulsory.

The protests were organised by the Tamil Nadu Anganwadi Workers and Assistants Association. The arrested day-care workers were released later that evening.

## Uttar Pradesh nurses and pharmacists protest

Nurses and pharmacists in government hospitals and medical colleges in Uttar Pradesh began industrial action on June 11 to demand that 14,000 vacant positions be filled to reduce their workload. Other demands include the number of male nurses increased from 5 percent to 25 percent of the workforce, lifting the retirement age to 65 and improved allowances.

According to their union, the Rajkiye Nurses Sangh, while 18,000 nurses are legally required in government hospitals only 5,000 nurses are currently employed. The health workers are striking for two hours at the beginning of each morning shift and have threatened to picket the collectors' office on June 16.

## Bangladeshi garment workers walk out

At least 100 garment, knitting and packaging factories in the Ashulia industrial zone on the outskirts of Dhaka were shut on June 11 after thousands of workers demonstrated demanding a pay rise. Hundreds of workers from Artistic Design, a packaging factory of Ha-Meem Group, walked out in the morning and began protesting outside their plant for a wage increase.

Witnesses said when the strikers moved their protest to the Dhaka-Tangail Highway they were joined by thousands of other workers from factories. Factory owners closed their plants fearing returning workers would cause damage to equipment.

## Sri Lankan university non-academic workers maintain strike

Thousands of non-academic staff at 13 universities and 26 related institutions are maintaining strike action begun on June 6 after talks failed between the Inter University Trade Union Joint Committee (IUTUJC) and government officials on June 9.

The IUTUJC wants an immediate 25 percent pay rise as part of its campaign to rectify salary anomalies dating back to 2004 when a government report proposed to rationalise pay scales for non-academic employees. The issue has become all the more pressing following the Rajapakse government's cuts to price subsidies.

Sri Lanka education minister, Bandula Gunawardena, told the media that the government would not rectify the anomalies because other workers would "demand a salary hike."

The latest strike is the fifth since November 2011 and follows walkouts and protests since 2003 over the issue. Each time the unions have accepted the false pledges from authorities who promised to resolve the issues. At least 12,000 employees are affected. Workers told the media they would remain on strike until their demands were met.

## Sri Lankan government graduate workers protest

Thousands of Sri Lankan public sector graduate workers demonstrated in Colombo on June 12 as part of nationwide protests against low wages and to demand a government program to recruit more graduates. According to the Employed Graduates Association, workers' rights have been violated by the government and there are irregularities in public service graduate employment recruitment.

## **Pakistan: Punjab paramedics end five-week strike**

Punjab government hospital paramedics ended a 33-day strike on June 11 after talks with the state chief minister. Punjab Paramedic Alliance (PPA) members had demanded a service structure for lesser qualified Grade 1 to Grade 4 employees, a health professional allowance, and regularisation of contract workers.

The chief minister approved a 1,500-rupee monthly risk allowance (\$US30) for Grade 1 to Grade 4 paramedics and agreed to regularise employees working at teaching hospitals and autonomous medical institutions. He also said the secretary of health would devise a strategy within three weeks to improve the service structure of Grade 5 to 17 paramedics.

The deal ends a year-long state-wide dispute that involved protests and rolling two-hour stoppages. Technicians, including x-ray, MRI and ECG staff, joined the paramedics' strike action last week.

## **Pakistan Railways doctors walk out**

Hundreds of doctors at the Pakistan Railways (PR) hospital in Rawalpindi struck on June 8 in protest against their forced eviction from their hostel by police and PR officials on May 30. The protesters blocked a main road carrying placards and banners demanding they be allowed back into the hostel. The doctors have boycotted the outpatients department and threatened to widen their protests.

## **Pakistan railways workers protest**

Railways Workers Union and the Pakistan Railways Employees Union members protested and burnt tyres outside the main railway station in Rawalpindi on June 6 to demand cost of living wage rises and oppose government plans to privatise the rail network. Workers have rejected a 20 percent increment proposed in the latest federal budget, declaring that it was not enough.

## **South Korean KBS journalists end strike**

KBS public broadcasting journalists ended a 94-day strike on June 6 after a union agreement with management. The union claimed that the deal would end political bias in broadcasting. KBS journalists, along with striking journalists and production staff at MBC and YTN, two other public broadcasters, had called for their CEOs to resign because of alleged political bias.

While MBC and YTN journalists remain on strike, the KBS union dropped its demand for the CEO Kim In-kyu to step down and has accepted a deal establishing an internal watchdog committee and reestablishment of a political investigative reporting team.

## **Burmese wig strikers return to work**

Around 2,000 employees at the Hi Mo wig factory in Rangoon's Hlaing Tharyar Industrial Zone ended their 28-day strike on June 5 after the company's South Korean owner agreed to some demands. The agreement was signed by the labour minister and four other companies—Costec, Great Forever, CNN Myanmar Trading and San Kaung—where workers were also on strike.

The basic monthly salary will be lifted from 8,000 kyat to 29,700 kyat (\$US35). With overtime pay, allowances and bonuses, workers in junior positions can now earn up to 56,700 kyat per month. Experienced employees will be paid more. The wig workers can refuse overtime work and take Sundays off.

Workers' representatives told the media, however, that it was only a temporary settlement until the government set a minimum wage.

## **Burmese gold miners march to stop closure**

On June 11, over 1,000 miners from 12 gold mines in the Mandalay Division in central Burma began a 142km march to the state's capital Naypyidaw to demand the government reopen mines closed early this month. The march follows demonstrations by tens of thousands of gold miners after the Myanmar National Prosperity Public Company (MNPPC) banned mining in the 6,000-acre Moehti Moemi area on May 5.

The miners have accused the MNPPC, which is contracted to supply the Burmese mining ministry with gold, of falsely claiming the pits are unviable. MNPPC is also currently attempting to force small contractors, who are allowed to keep half the gold they extract, to work directly for the company.

## **Queensland mine workers to strike**

The single bargaining unit (SBU) representing three unions at Wesfarmers' Curragh coal mine, west of Rockhampton in Queensland has notified the company there will be protected industrial action from June 18-24. The rolling 24-hour stoppages and an overtime ban come after ten months of failed negotiations for a new enterprise agreement.

Members of the Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union, Australian Manufacturing Workers Union and the Electrical Trades Union want a pay rise, more housing for full-time workers, back-pay from the expiration of the previous agreement in January, improved sick leave and annual leave entitlements, and realistic bonus targets.

## **Queensland public servants protest**

On June 13, 200 workers at Queensland's department of communities rallied in Queen's Park in Brisbane to oppose the axing of about 1,300 temporary workers currently employed in the sector. The demonstration follows state-wide protests last month by other public sector union members.

According to the union, more than 30,000 of Queensland's 250,000 public servants are on temporary contracts—most of them employed on that basis for over 10 years. The contracts of most temporary workers are up for renewal on June 30. The job destruction is part of the state Liberal National Party government's plans to slash \$2.8 billion from the

Queensland budget in the next 12 months.

### **Papua New Guinea power workers strike**

Papua New Guinea Power Workers Union members planned to strike for an unspecified period on June 15 in opposition to Papua New Guinea (PNG) government plans to restructure the country's power industry.

Proposals being considered by PNG's national executive council include the sale of PNG Power Limited's Yanki hydro and partial privatisation of power generation and distribution assets in Port Moresby and other major centres. While the union claims concern about job losses it wants the government to include it in the restructuring process.



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