

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

13 October 2012

Pakistan: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa university staff on strike

Academic and non-academic staff of state-run universities in Pakistan's northern province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have been on strike since October 1 to demand immediate payment of the 20 percent wage increase allowed for in the 2012-13 federal budget. All universities, and many support departments and colleges, remain closed. Ongoing examinations and new admissions have been rescheduled.

The strike, called by the Federation of All Pakistan Universities Academic Staff Association (FAPUASA), follows a series of rolling stoppages and protests begun on September 15. According to FAPUASA officials, the wage increase has been implemented in Punjab, Sindh and Balochistan provinces but the chancellors of 14 public sector universities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa had opposed paying the increase.

FAPUASA said the action would continue indefinitely. A joint action committee of academic and non-academic staff has been formed to coordinate planned protests.

Bangladeshi garment workers strike

About 7,000 workers from two Intramex Group garment factories in the Gazipur industrial area, Dhaka division, walked out on October 6. Their demands included production incentives, salaries for September and October, and leave for Eid religious holidays. In addition, workers want the removal of officials who beat workers when they requested leave for Eid. Strikers resumed work after several hours when management agreed to grant eight days for Eid holidays and make other payments in two installments.

In another incident on the same day, Dody Fashion garment workers stopped work to demand a wage increase. They returned to work after several hours when management agreed to "consider" their demand.

Union ends Bangladeshi non-government teachers' protest

Hundreds of teachers and employees of non-government educational institutions from across Bangladesh ended four days of protest in Dhaka on October 4 after being attacked by hundreds of police in full riot gear using batons and teargas. At least 50 demonstrators were injured. The Bangladesh Teachers-Employees Oikya Jote union called an end to the action, telling teachers that the prime minister would "discuss the demands shortly."

The protest followed a six-day strike on September 9 by 500,000

teachers and employees of 28,000 non-government schools, colleges and madrassahs. The strikers' charter of 17 demands includes speedy implementation of the National Education Policy 2010 and payment of Monthly Pay Order benefits, increased house rent, medical and festival allowances and annual wage increments, and a retirement age fixed at 65.

India: Hyundai workers end strike with no gain

Under the direction of the Hyundai Motor India Employees Union (HMIEU), 1,300 striking employees of the international firm TVS Logistics Services, which is contracted to manage forklifts, production line feeding, tow truck operations, data entry and welding in Hyundai Motor's plant in Irungattukottai, near Chennai, Tamil Nadu ended a three-day strike on October 11 without fully resolving their demands.

TVS workers had sought the HMIEU's assistance after walking out on October 8 with several demands that included the reinstatement of dismissed employees, revocation of suspension orders against six workers and increased minimum and maximum salaries to 10,000 and 13,000 rupees a month, respectively. TVS is only paying between 4,000 (\$US80) and 7,000 rupees a month.

Under pressure from the HMIEU and the Labour Department, workers caved-in and accepted a deal that cost the employer nothing. A HMIEU official confirmed that in the deal TVS agreed to drop the charges against two employees and not to take disciplinary action against the workers who participated in the "illegal" strike. Suspension of another worker would be considered by the Assistant Commissioner of Labour, the HMIEU official added.

On the issue of salary increases, HMIEU negotiators accepted a vague commitment from TVS to "discuss" the issue with workers. The HMIEU is affiliated with the Stalinist Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU).

Jammu and Kashmir power workers on strike

More than 50,000 Jammu and Kashmir power workers have been holding rolling stoppages and protests since October 1 in a fight for long outstanding demands for better pay and conditions.

Demands include removal of salary anomalies, regularisation of daily-wage workers, risk allowances, health insurance and the provision of safety equipment. In addition, workers want power tariff subsidies, improved work station facilities, and jobs for family members of the daily-wage workers who pass away discharging their duties. The Electrical Employees Union has threatened statewide stoppages.

Bihar teachers protest

On October 8, primary teachers in Bihar government schools demonstrated in Patna against the government's attacks, including terminations, on contract teachers who protested against Chief Minister Adhikari Yatra. Contract teachers had demonstrated against the chief minister in several districts to demand parity in salaries and allowances with regular teachers.

The permanent teachers, who demonstrated under the banner of the Bihar Rajya Prathamik Shikshak Sangh (BRPSS or Bihar State Primary School Teachers Union), also oppose the contract system and the wage disparity. BRPSS threatened that all its 73,000 teacher members would be directed to take action if their demands were not met within 15 days.

Haryana teachers campaign against education overhaul

Over 12,500 teachers at 3,200 government schools in the northern Indian state of Haryana, whose capital is New Delhi, began a statewide campaign of protests on October 10 to oppose the government's plan to overcome a teacher shortage by forcing teachers to teach more than the current 27 periods a week and increasing class sizes from 40 to 60 students.

The Haryana School Lecturers Association (HSLA) has demanded that the government recruit additional teachers and scrap the Right to Education Act.

Tamil Nadu retired transport workers protest

Retired transport workers demonstrated in Pudukottai on October 8. The demands of the Tamil Nadu State Transport Corporation (TNSTC) Pensioners Association included immediate disbursement of outstanding pensions and Dearness Allowance arrears, and life-time extension of the pension scheme. A spokesman said some retirees were still waiting for their pension payments after one-and-a-half years.

Other demands included restoration of a loan scheme for pensioners through State Bank of India, free bus passes for widows of employees who die in service and for those who retire on medical grounds. TNSTC retired workers in Madurai, Dindigul and Virudhunagar protested in August over the same issues.

Nepalese shoe factory lifts lockout

The Shikhar Shoes Factory in Nepal ended a 20-day lockout on October 7 after reaching an agreement with its 150 employees for improved wages and conditions. The lockout followed a week-long strike by workers over a charter of 17 demands that included a 50 percent pay rise.

During talks, that involved the factory union and the Federation of All Nepal Trade Union-Revolutionary, management agreed to promote temporary workers to permanent positions and increase wages. Unskilled workers will receive a minimum of 6,200 rupees (\$US78.72) a month, semi-skilled 7,500 rupees, skilled 8,500 rupees and highly skilled 10,500 rupees.

Other demands agreed to were: salaries paid within the first week of every month, provision of basic facilities, including drinking water, toilets, apron and masks, as well as accident insurance and overtime allowances.

Indonesian oilfield workers strike

Around 700 outsourced workers at the Pertamina EP Jatibarang oil field in Indramayu, West Java, a subsidiary of the state-run energy firm PT Pertamina, walked off the job on October 3 and blocked the roads to the oil production facility, shutting down the field's compressor. Workers demanded an end to the company's outsourcing policy, a demand they initially presented to the company in July.

Jatibarang field has a capacity to produce around 1,500 barrels per day. By October 9, the estimated financial loss from the oil-field shutdown was over 7.6 billion rupiah (\$US790,700).

Victorian teachers union imposes limited bans

In a long running dispute with the Victorian state government over a new work agreement the Australian Education Union (AEU), covering 50,000 public school teachers, will impose additional limited work bans from October 16. Teachers will refuse to write comments on students' report cards and stop booking camps or excursions for 2013. Region-by-region work stoppages will also begin.

The action follows two statewide one-day stoppages. The union presented a log of claims to the state government nearly 18 months ago, calling for a 30 percent wage increase over three years, lower class sizes and the end of short-term contracts. According to the AEU, almost 22 percent of teachers and 45 percent of support staff are employed on contracts.

The state government has insisted on a 2.5-percent annual wage ceiling—which it has imposed on all public sector workers—combined with the introduction of performance-linked pay, increased hours for secondary teachers, and other productivity demands.

Bathurst Hospital nurses implement work bans

Following three days of protests last week, nurses at Bathurst Hospital, west of Sydney, have imposed work bans to demand improved staffing levels in the hospital's emergency department (ED).

Western Local Health District rejected a New South Wales Nurses & Midwives Association grievance motion asking for an additional nurse on each ED shift. Last month, the O'Farrell state government directed the health department to make more than \$3 billion in savings, including a \$775 million "labour expense cap."

New Zealand bus drivers reject union agreement

On October 6, 51 percent of 800 NZ Bus drivers in Auckland, New Zealand's largest city, rejected a third pay offer from their employer. FIRST Union and the Tramways Union, supported by the Council of Trade Unions, have championed each of the pay offers. Drivers and cleaners are demanding \$20 per hour beginning in July 2013, but the company wants to roll out pay increases more slowly, across three stages. No details have been released about the most recent proposed time frame. Last month workers rejected a proposal to delay the increase until April 2014.

Drivers earn between \$14.05 and \$16.75 an hour, with split shifts often keeping them away from home for long hours. Workers in September rejected an offer of a 6.6 percent pay rise across 27 months, and a \$20 per hour pay rate applied by December. They were particularly angered by roster changes at two depots, introducing longer hours and additional weekend shifts. At least 1,000 employees, including cleaners, and four unions, are in dispute. The unions and company were to resume talks on October 10.

Fishing company attempts to buy off abused workers

Korea's largest fishing company, Sajo Oyang Corporation, has attempted to pay off members of an Indonesian fishing crew who have lodged complaints of fraud and assault with Korean courts and the New Zealand Immigration Service. Crew of the Oyang 75, currently stationed at Mauritius, off the southeast coast of Africa, are seeking \$US23,000 for the six months they worked before walking out on their contract over alleged inhumane conditions in Lyttelton, on New Zealand's South Island. The company has offered the 32 crew members \$US7,300 to withdraw their allegations against it.

The Korean Coast Guard is pressing charges of assault and sexual assault against the Oyang 75 officers. New Zealand police dismissed the crew's claims of abuse as a "workplace issue" and not a criminal issue.

On October 3, 12 Indonesian fishermen occupied a factory in Christchurch, on New Zealand's South Island, demanding unpaid wages in a separate case. Poor conditions are widespread in New Zealand's fishing industry, with frequent reports of physical abuse, poor nutrition and non-payment of wages.



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