

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

7 June 2014

Asia

South Korea: KBS journalists continue strike action

Around 80 percent of unionised workers at the state-run KBS, South Korea's largest broadcaster, have joined a strike by 300 journalists who walked off the job on May 19 to demand the resignation of Gil Hwan, the company president. Gil is accused of interfering in news reportage, biasing it in favour of the government.

While the total number of striking workers is not clear, the action includes members of the National Association of KBS Journalists and the KBS Journalists Association, with 2,500 and 1,200 members respectively. The KBS board of directors had planned to meet on June 5 to discuss the dispute.

China: Dismissed Walmart employees fight for severance pay

Sixty-seven dismissed Walmart employees from the company's Changde branch in Hunan province this week rejected a 3,000 yuan (\$US480) severance pay offer for each worker. The proposed payout was offered after two days of settlement talks.

Walmart has shut down 13 stores in China over the last 15 months. In most cases workers were given just two weeks' notice. On March 19, police in three Chinese cities—Changde, Maanshan and Anhui—violently dispersed protesting Walmart employees picketing their closed, or soon to be closed, stores. Several workers were injured.

The predominately women workers, many of them long-serving employees, were offered just two options: relocate to another Walmart store in China or accept substandard severance packages. Workers complained that neither the two-week notice period nor the amount of compensation was in accordance with China's labour laws. They wanted Walmart's severance pay doubled and rental and other subsidies for workers transferring to stores in other cities.

Bangladeshi mobile phone call centre workers strike

About 300 workers at the Genex Infosys call centre in Dhaka stopped work on May 28 and demonstrated outside the Mascot Plaza a dispute over their contract. The workers, who are contracted by the Robi cell phone operator, want their job contracts extended from the current three months to one year, the provision of transport facilities and regularisation

of part-time employees. Workers claimed that contracts transferred from Robi to Genex Infosys in July last year were not honoured.

Protesters told the media that Genex Infosys did not grant sick leave, registered any lateness as an absence and forced non-Muslim employees to work during their religious festivals. The call centre workers said that protests would continue, until their demands were met. Genex Infosys employees walked out for three days in August with similar demands.

Bangladeshi garment workers protest over factory closure

On June 1, over 100 Ambia Garments employees in Chittagong, Bangladesh demonstrated against the temporary closure of their factory and for immediate payment of wage arrears.

Protesters blocked the airport road at Agrabad Badamtala intersection until the police intervened. Ambia Garments management claim the closure was due to unavailability of orders.

Sri Lankan power workers demonstrate

Ceylon Electricity Board (CEB) employees protested outside the company's headquarters in central Colombo on June 4 to demand immediate payment of salary increments and other claims. They also called on CEB management to stop interfering in workers' union rights. The protest caused major traffic congestion in the Colombo Fort area. CEB workers have threatened to take strike action if their demands are not met.

Pakistan: Police attack protesting government employees

On June 4, police used teargas, rubber bullets and batons against hundreds of protesting government clerks and teachers in Islamabad. The attack continued for about an hour. Over 300 protestors were arrested and several injured.

Arrested protesters were told they would be charged with assault, unlawful assembly, rioting and obstructing police. The demonstration continued in defiance of the police crackdown.

The workers, who have rejected a 10 percent wage increase offer, are demanding a high pay rise and other benefits. The current basic monthly wage is just 11,000 rupees (\$US112). The demonstration was organised by the All Pakistan Clerks Association and the Punjab Teachers' Union. It

included government workers from various departments and sectors from across the country.

Pakistani textile mill workers strike

On May 30, hundreds of textile mill workers in the town of Vehari in Pakistan's Punjab province held a sit-down protest on the Vehari-Multan Road to demand the mill administration pay outstanding salaries. The mill closed shortly after a company takeover.

The new management refused to employ regular employees and demanded that workers transfer to daily contracts. When employees refused to work under these conditions, the owners closed the factory, failing to pay several months of outstanding wages.

Textile workers said they also had to vacate company accommodation because the power had been disconnected. The new owners had failed to pay electricity bills.

Burma police enforce lockout at wood-finishing factory

At least 700 migrant workers at the Chinese-owned KankaungchinYadana wood finishing factory in Yangon (also known as Rangoon) demonstrated in the city on May 27 to demand their jobs back.

On May 19, factory management threatened to sack workers if they did not sign a job contract. Two days later police and security guards evicted 700 workers who had refused to sign the contract. Workers told the media that they were not legal proper contracts.

The locked out workers have also been forced from company accommodation and are currently relying on local residents for assistance. They have taken temporary shelter at a monastery, about seven miles from the factory.

Cambodia: Cambo Handsome workers end strike

Around 3,000 employees of the South Korean-owned garment factory Cambo Handsome, in Phnom Penh's Pur Senchey district, returned to work this week. Management agreed to begin negotiations if employees dropped severance pay demands, which the company claimed were outside existing Cambodian labour laws.

Workers walked out on May 23 in a dispute over work contracts, severance pay, a \$US20 bonus, and the removal of representatives of the Khmer Union Federation (KUF), which they said was not serving their interests.

Suspended garment workers in Phnom Penh protest

Over 1,000 Ocean Garment employees have been protesting outside their factory in Phnom Penh's Pur Senchey district since May 27 to demand 50 percent compensation for lost wages when the factory suspends its operations for a month over reduced demand from buyers. The company has offered just \$US15 a month.

The Garment Manufacturers Association in Cambodia claims that many buyers are slashing orders because of industrial unrest in Cambodia's garment industry.

School bus drivers in Indonesia strike

Around 100 school bus drivers in Ciracas, East Jakarta struck for one day on June 3 to demand that the transportation ministry pay them in full. Drivers claim that UPT, their employer, had only paid part of their salaries in April and not at all in May. The strike was called after management failed to meet its commitment to pay the drivers by Monday.

Workers also want their three-month contracts upgraded to twelve months, a holiday allowance and medical insurance.

Australia and the Pacific

Public hospital workers in Western Australia impose work bans

On May 30, around 1,000 Western Australian public hospital workers, including physiotherapists, radiographers, occupational therapists, administrative staff and ward clerks, imposed state-wide bans. The limited action includes bans on recording patient statistics, photocopying and on all communication with the health department and the Minister for Health.

The health workers' action is for an improved pay offer from the state Liberal government in a new enterprise bargaining agreement. In May the state government capped all public sector pay rises at 2.5 per cent annually, part of a "suite of measures" to cut \$75 million annually from state spending.

The Health Services Union (HSU) wants a 9 percent pay increase over two years with no trade-offs. The union said it will call stop-work meetings later this month if the government offer is not improved.

Sydney ferry workers stop work

Sydney ferry workers held four-hour stop-work meetings on May 30 and June 6 after six months of failed enterprise agreement negotiations with the New South Wales Liberal government and private operator Harbour City Ferries. Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) and the Australian Institute of Marine and Power Engineers members have rejected a 9 percent pay increase over four years. The unions have said that deckhands' weekly pay would also be cut by \$500.

As part of limited industrial action, the unions have imposed bans on collecting fares for four evenings during the Sydney Harbour Vivid Festival this week and all throughout this weekend and the Monday public holiday.

Victorian regional maternal and child health workers protest

About 20 maternal and child health nurses stopped work for two hours

on June 3 and, together with new mothers and their babies, demonstrated in the regional town of Bendigo. The two-hour walkout by members of the Australian Nurses and Midwifery Federation is for an enterprise agreement with the City of Greater Bendigo.

The nurses want an additional pay grade so they have wage parity with colleagues in the Loddon and Buloke shires and other regional councils. While these councils have three grades in their pay scales Bendigo has only two. Nurses also want a workload adjustment and an extra 30 minutes of non-clinical administrative time to finalise referral paperwork and data entry responsibilities.

Papua New Guinea seafarers protest

Laid off seafarers from Lutheran Shipping Services protested with their families outside the Ampo Lutheran Church in Lae to demand two months' unpaid salary and entitlements. The Lutheran Church has downsized its shipping services and sacked staff. The company previously ran a fleet of eight small passenger/cargo ferries and general cargo ships. Only two passenger services will be continued.



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