

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

17 January 2015

Nepal health workers on strike

Health workers in Nepal stopped work on January 11 and demonstrated outside the Department of Health Services in Kathmandu over 13 claims. Their action follows protests in the capital and other areas during the last two weeks.

Represented by seven health sector unions, workers want immediate appointment of recently promoted officials, overtime incentives, a non-practising allowance, food and lodging facilities, an increase in rural allowances, amendment to the Health Service Act, implementation of the Health Service Regulation and provision of an academic course and training for the health officials.

The striking workers pledged to maintain industrial action until all their demands are met.

India: Foxconn workers protest

At least 1,000 employees from Foxconn India's factory complex in Sriperumbudur, Tamil Nadu marched to the District Collector's office in Kancheepuram on January 12 to demand that the government intervene and save their jobs. They presented a memorandum to the Collector.

Foxconn suspended operations on December 22, claiming it did not have enough orders to keep the plant open. In March, it lost 70 percent of its business after Nokia India closed its Sriperumbudur facility. Some 1,700 Foxconn employees are affected. The Foxconn workers' latest protest follows the arrests of over 500 employees over the past three weeks when they tried to enter Foxconn's premises demanding that they be given work.

The Foxconn India Employees Union, which is affiliated to the Centre of Indian Trade Unions, wants the Taiwanese-owned phone manufacturer to divert orders from China or Vietnam to save jobs at Sriperumbudur.

Workers from neighbouring factories in the economic zone have offered support to the Foxconn workers. In an attempt to keep a lid on the situation the government has held seven rounds of tripartite talks between the company, the workers and labour department officials but with no resolution. Another round of discussions is planned for January 27. Workers are planning to hold a hunger strike in Chennai, the Tamil Nadu capital, on January 23.

Telangana beedi workers protest

Thousands of women beedi workers (cigarette rollers) demonstrated in

Karimnagar on January 12 to demand that the government pay a monthly 1,000-rupee dearness allowance, as promised by the ruling Telangana Rashtra Samithi party during the 2014 state elections.

Beedi and Cigar Workers' Union officials addressed the protesters, calling on the government to ensure that the beedi workers are offered 26 days' per month. Although labour law demands that they be offered 26 days, many only get 15 days. The latest action follows a demonstration over the same issue in December in Nizamabad.

There are over 700,000 beedi workers in Telangana who are paid around 100 rupees (\$1.60) per 1,000 cigarettes rolled and a monthly dearness allowance or pension to compensate for low wages. Beedi workers across India have been campaigning for several years for the state government to pay a dearness allowance.

Pakistan: Punjab paramedics strike

Paramedics at the Chandka Medical College Hospital (CMCH) and five other local government headquarters hospitals in Larkana, Sindh province stopped work for the day on January 7. They were protesting over the withdrawal of the time-scale facility by the provincial government. Apart from emergency cases, services at all the health facilities were suspended while paramedics protested outside the CMCH.

A Pakistan Paramedical Staff Association (PPSA) spokesman said that last month the finance department directed district accounts officers to stop time-scale allowances and to recover money paid to paramedics since 2006 when the allowances were granted.

The PPSA has accused the government of discrimination, arguing that doctors and other employees are paid according to time scale.

Paramedics called on the Sindh government to immediately reverse its decision to withdraw the time scale. They also called for health, risk, casualty and hard area allowances be paid to paramedics and extend their promotion to Grade-20. Sit-in protests are planned for January 21 outside the office of the health director general's office in Hyderabad and the chief minister's house in Karachi on January 28.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa doctors end strike without resolution

Doctors at the Hayatabad Medical Complex, Khyber Teaching Hospital and Lady Reading Hospital—three main governmental hospitals in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province—have ended a four-day strike after the government agreed to begin negotiations.

The Provincial Doctors Association (PDA) called the strike on January 10 in opposition to planned legislation, which does not include their

service structure and bans private practice, a main source of income for the low paid doctors. Supported by paramedics, the strike forced the closure of outpatient departments and other services.

The bill only allows institution-based private practice or large privately owned health services. The doctors complained that the planned law does not allow private practice in rural and remote areas where it is an integral part of health service.

While the PDA claimed the government agreed to change the bill as a basis for doctors returning to work, the provincial health minister has denied that the government has agreed to any amendments and declared that this “would damage the original spirit of the document.”

Pakistan: Daily-wage education workers maintain protests

Daily-wage teaching and non-teaching staff at Islamabad Federal Directorate of Education (FDE)-run schools and colleges are continuing protests outside the National Press Club in Islamabad on weekends and in front of the FDE offices on week days. The demonstrations began on December 10.

At least 3,000 employees have not been paid for six months. This week, the daily wages employees announced that they will protest whenever the state minister for Capital Administration and Development Division (CADD) visits educational institutions in Islamabad.

According to protesters, the Islamabad High Court ordered the FDE to make employees permanent and adjust salaries by December 15. Despite repeated assurances and issuance of directives by the CADD minister, wages are not being paid.

Bangladeshi garment workers protest against layoffs

On January 15, DK knitwear garment workers in Jamgara, Ashulia, a suburb of Dhaka, protested at the factory to demand the reinstatement of 26 fellow employees who were suspended for demanding a wage increase.

Workers arrived at the factory in the morning and refused to enter the plant after reading a notice on the factory gate stating that the 26 “agitators” were suspended. Management called in police who forcefully dispersed the angry workers and maintained security cordon around the factory to prevent any future protests.

South Korea: Former Ssangyong Motor workers protest

Two former employees of Chinese-owned auto manufacturer Ssangyong Motor have been protesting on a 70-metre chimney at the company’s plant in Pyeongtaek, Gyeonggi Province since December 13 demanding reinstatement.

Kim Jeong-wook and Lee Chang-geun are among more than 2,000 workers who were laid off in 2009, following a drop in car sales. The chimney protesters are supported by 150 former workers who are also demanding reinstatement.

Street protests in 2014 gained support from other workers and the wider community. Fearing an escalation of protests, management announced last week that it was willing to “have dialogue” with the former workers but said the chimney protest must end first. Ssangyong has begun legal action

to fine each of the chimney protesters 1 million won (\$909) a day for “disrupting” operations.

Cambodian garment workers strike over minimum wage

Around 2,000 Dewhirst (Cambodia) garment factory workers in Por Sen Chey district are on strike to demand higher wages.

A representative of the Coalition of Cambodian Apparel Workers’ Democratic Union said that management refused to negotiate on the workers’ demand for \$138 monthly minimum wage, rather than the new mandated figure of \$128. Dewhirst employees were previously paid \$110 a month and are demanding the full \$28 increase. Management has said it will only increase pay by \$18.

Cambodian garment workers strike for conditions

Around 1,000 CS Gold Way Textile workers in Takeo province walked off the job and protested outside the factory on January 12 with 29 demands. They returned to work after two days when management agreed to scrap compulsory overtime and to pay pregnant women 50 percent of their usual salary during their last trimester.

While some bonuses were increased, the company only paid a \$9 monthly transport allowance and \$10 attendance bonus. Workers were demanding \$15 and \$20 respectively.

Vegetable processing workers accept pay cut

Around 600 vegetable processing workers at Simplot’s plants at Bathurst and Kelso in New South Wales, and at Devonport and Ulverstone in Tasmania have accepted a wage cutting deal struck between Simplot Australia and the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) and the Communications Electrical and Plumbing Union (CEPU).

Under the new enterprise agreement, which followed 12 months of negotiations, workers will only receive a 6 percent increase over three years, below the annual inflation rate, which is more than 2 percent.

Workers wanted a 12 percent pay increase over three years, income protection and guaranteed hours for casuals. Simplot was demanding a wage freeze for year one, 2 percent increases in years two and three at its Kelso and Bathurst plants, and 2 percent each year for the next three years at Ulverstone and Davenport factories.

The unions called off industrial action in October while talks were held in the Fair Work Commission. During negotiations the unions accepted company demands for more flexibility to close its plants due to seasonal changes in vegetable supplies.



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