

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

28 May 2016

India: Jammu & Kashmir water utility workers' strike in 11th week

Thousands of Jammu Public Health Engineering Department daily wage and temporary workers remain on strike, after walking out to demand payment of 35 months' wages and job permanency.

While some water pumping stations and tube wells are being operated by public health temporary staff, many areas are without water as a result of the strike. The government has refused to meet the strikers and has not organised any alternate water supply for residents in the region.

Indian bank workers strike

Up 50,000 government bank employees in five Indian states struck work on May 20 to protest the pending merger with their parent bank, the State Bank of India (SBI). The five associate banks are State Bank of Mysore, State Bank of Hyderabad, State Bank of Bikaner and Jaipur, State Bank of Patiala and State Bank of Travancore.

Workers fear that jobs will be lost and branches closed by the merger. The All India Bank Employees Association (AIBEA) has threatened to call another strike on June 7.

Karnataka food warehouse employees demonstrate

Karnataka Food and Civil Supplies Corporation porters in Shivamogga protested Monday to demand higher wages and an improved social security net. A workers' representative said the porters are only paid 5 rupees per bag of grain or 250 rupees (\$US3.70) per day. The workers want their wage increased to 10 rupees per bag. A spokesman for the demonstrators said many porters suffered work injuries but had no health insurance and provident fund facilities.

Union closes down Goa lifeguards' strike

The All India Trade Union Congress called off a three-day strike by 600 lifeguards on May 22 after the state government mobilised police to do lifeguard duty at major Goa tourist venues. The lifeguards who are employed by Drishti Life Saving Private Limited want job permanency and a wage increase.

The lifeguards said they would resume their protests if they government

failed to grant their demands. The Goa government has refused to intervene, declaring that the lifeguards' services have been outsourced and that it has nothing to do with the dispute.

Pakistan: Karachi ship-breaking workers end strike

The Ship-Breaking Mazdoor Union has shut down strike action by Gadani ship-breaking yard workers after yard owners agreed to reinstate 360 sacked workers terminated on May 16 as part of a cost-cutting plan. The Pakistan Ship Breakers Association was forced to mediate after striking workers blocked the main road leading to the yard and brought all work to a stop by the second day. Workers' health and safety demands, however, have not been resolved.

Gadani, near Karachi, is among the top three ship-breaking yards in the world. The 16-kilometre stretch of Gadani foreshore is occupied by 132 separate yards that directly employ over 15,000 workers.

Ship-breaking is a highly dangerous job with frequent deaths and injuries. Employees are not provided safety boots or gloves and there are no health care or social security entitlements. Workers said that the area is serviced by one ambulance.

Bangladeshi unemployed nurses demand jobs

Hundreds of protesting unemployed nurses were prevented from marching on the prime minister's office in Dhaka on Wednesday by a barbed wire fence erected by police. Nurses began street protests on March 30 after the Public Service Commission published an advertisement to appoint 3,616 senior nurses.

The nurses want the positions filled on the basis of seniority and merit. The following day they marched to the residence of Health Minister Mohammed Nasim. On May 1, the Bangladesh Diploma Bekar (unemployed) Nurses' Association and Bangladesh Basic Graduate Nurses' Society called off a series of strikes and protests after false promises from the health minister.

Bangladeshi garment workers demand higher wages

Garment workers marched to the Wage Board chairman's office in Dhaka on Wednesday to demand that the minimum wage be increased from 5,300 taka (\$US67) a month to 16,000 taka (\$202). Their wage has

remained the same for three years with most garment workers earning just \$103 a month, including overtime. The protest was organised by the Garments Sramik Odhikar Andolan, a combination of 12-garment workers' rights bodies.

The protest followed a demonstration in Dhaka on Monday by former Ayesha and Galia Fashion workers calling on factory owners and the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association to pay outstanding wages and service benefits immediately. The factory was closed by the owners on April 13.

Burmese police arrest protesting wood factory employees

On May 18, police arrested over 86 wood workers who had marched 300 kilometres from Sagaing Region to Burma's capital Nay Pyi Taw to protest poor working conditions and "wrongful" sackings. The Myanmar Veneer Plywood Private Limited workers had hoped that their three-week march would allow them to speak with government officials about their demands for better working conditions, reinstatement of 100 sacked workers and recognition of their union.

The factory workers were stopped by 200 police on the outskirts of the city and forced into police vehicles. Witnesses said that as the workers were driven away, they shouted, "We will topple this government! We will cut off the little finger that we voted for it with!" Their shouts were aimed at the co-ruling party National League for Democracy, led by Aung San Suu Kyi.

Philippines rope workers on strike

Over 450 workers from the Manila Cordage Company (MCC) and Manco Synthetics Inc. have been on strike since May 4 and are camping in the factory premises at Carmelray Industrial Park, Laguna. They issued a strike notice in March and decided to walk out after their demand for job permanency was ignored.

An MCC-MSI Employee Labor Union-Organized Labor Association representative said that although new workers were promised permanent jobs after 10 months, they were made to sign five-month renewable contracts.

Workers complained that they were placed under the management of two service agencies, Alternative Network Resources and Work Trusted Cooperative, who deducted costs for protective clothing and uniforms from the 315 peso (\$US6.75) daily wage, and failed to remit their full contributions to the Social Security System for some employees.

A spokesman from the National Conciliation and Mediation Board said the board was mediating the dispute. The newly elected Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte had previously threatened to have killed export-processing workers who attempted to form unions.

Industrial court terminates strike at Essential Energy

An 80-hour strike by thousands of power workers in New South Wales, due to begin on May 23, was called off after the Fair Work Commission (FWC) ordered Essential Energy into a 21-day bargaining period with the Electrical Trades Union (ETU). If bargaining is unsuccessful, the FWC

will rule on the dispute.

Negotiations between the ETU and Essential Energy for a new enterprise agreement began 18 months ago. The strike would have involved workers at 120 depots and control centres across 90 percent of New South Wales' electricity network. The company wants to axe 800 jobs over the next two years, followed by unlimited job cuts after 2018. It also wants to cut emergency duty pay and slash the wages and conditions of contractors, among other changes.

French Polynesia airline workers maintain strike

Air Tahiti (domestic) workers have been on strike since May 13 over fears of job and pay cuts due to falls in domestic travel. Air Tahiti, which services international and domestic routes, including 46 of the colony's 67 islands, employs over 700 workers. Airline management wants to reduce flights to some regions from once a week to once a fortnight, a move that would cut jobs and cause major inconveniences for outlying island residents.

Mediation talks last week failed. As redundancies due to the strike are likely, more employees of related industries have joined the strike, which has affected the entire archipelago.

Over 17,000 workers have lost their jobs and about 80,000 are living in poverty since the 2008 global financial crisis. Unlike in France, there are no unemployment benefits in the Pacific colony.

New Zealand airport catering workers vote to strike

Catering workers at the Wellington International Airport voted to strike over a pay dispute on Wednesday. The vote was sparked after their employer, the US contracting company Delaware North, refused in December to negotiate a new work agreement with their union the E tu unless it could introduce youth rates. Delaware North runs nearly all catering facilities at the airport.

The commencement wage, also known as youth rates, is legal under certain criteria for workers under 19 and is 80 percent of the adult minimum wage of \$15.25 or \$12.20 an hour. The catering workers accused the company of wanting to take advantage of its high employee turnover rate (84 of 86 new recruits over the last two years have left) to drive down wages.



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