

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

11 June 2016

India: Thousands of Karnataka government employees hold one-day strike

Ignoring threats of imprisonment and heavy fines, over 500,000 Karnataka state government employees stopped work for the day on June 2 to demand equal pay with workers in the central government and the filling of numerous vacancies in various government departments. While work in government offices, schools and colleges came to a standstill, transport, hospitals and essential services were not involved.

A State Government Employees' Association official said the strike was called after the government refused to meet with the union over its demands. The union wants 7th Pay Commission implemented and says that there was a 40 to 100 percent difference between state and central government employees' wages.

Delhi University teachers bans continue

Scores of Delhi University teachers are maintaining their bans on the correction of undergraduate exams in opposition to the University Grants Commission (UGC) criteria to ascertain their academic performance. The Delhi University Teachers Association members began the action on May 24, after the UGC issued a circular calling for inspection of their academic performance.

Teachers said UGC amendments could lead to the loss of 5,000 jobs at the university and associated colleges, drastically worsening the pupil-teacher ratio. The new UGC norms are based upon the academic results of students, axing teachers' jobs if students do not perform well. They also increase workloads. Associate professors' direct teaching workloads would rise by eight hours a week. Teachers held a large on-campus protest on Tuesday and presented a memorandum to the university chairman.

Jammu Kashmir water utility workers end strike

Thousands of Jammu Public Health Engineering Department (PHE) daily wage and temporary workers ended an 85-day strike on Monday, following a meeting with PHE and government officials. PHE workers walked out in March to demand 35 months of unpaid wages, regular pay and job permanency. The government refused to meet with strikers and failed to organise alternate water supplies for residents in the region.

The government told PHE Workers Union representatives that administrative changes had been made to guarantee regular wage payments and plan the transition of workers to permanent employment.

The outstanding wages were to be resolved through phased payments.

Indian government workers plan national walk out

The Joint Action Council, consisting of unions representing over 3.2 million Indian government employees, issued a notice on Thursday for an indefinite national strike, effective from July 11. The strike will include railway, defence, postal, income tax, customs and excise workers and is in response to the Modi government's inaction over a 36-point charter of demands by the unions.

These include an increase in minimum monthly wage, scrapping of the New Pension Scheme and restoration of the old pension system and rejection of the Bibek Debroy Committee report, which calls for privatisation of the railways.

The strike was previously planned for April 11 but called off by the unions after back room talks with the government.

Bangladeshi nurses attacked by police

At least 40 protesters were injured when police used batons and water cannons against demonstrating unemployed nurses outside the health minister's residence in Dhaka on Wednesday. Police lodged vandalism cases against 1,400 nurses the following day. The protest followed a rally on Monday that blocked the road in front of the National Press Club and ended with a march to the health minister's residence to protest changes in recruitment criteria.

The nurses began street protests on March 30, after the Public Service Commission advertised for 3,616 senior nurses. The nurses want the positions filled on the basis of seniority and merit, as in the past.

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.

Pakistan: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa nurses' union calls off strike

Strike action by nurses at government hospitals in Peshawar was called off by the Nursing Association Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Monday after the government claimed it would address the union's demands.

Nurses walked out on June 2 to demand implementation of the new service structure previously agreed to by the government and which

includes promotions and allowances. The issue of allowances was not resolved during negotiations. The government has frequently falsely promised to address nurses' complaints.

The nurses' demands were similar to those of protesting paramedics and doctors in the province's government hospitals. The unions leading the strikes have prevented a combined struggle of the health workers.

Protest by Punjab teachers ends without resolution

The Punjab All Teachers' Alliance ended a four-day demonstration by government school teachers outside the Provincial Assembly in Lahore on Monday after meeting with government officials. None of the teachers' grievances were resolved. The union accepted government promises to establish a committee to investigate teachers' demands.

The teachers' action was part of an ongoing state-wide campaign opposing the privatisation of government schools. Teachers also want pay-scale upgrades previously promised by the government.

Under pressure from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, the Pakistan government has implemented austerity measures, forcing cash-strapped provincial governments to do likewise. The Punjab government has organised a public-private partnership deal and is handing management of public schools to the NGO-Punjab Education Foundation (PEF).

In the first phase, the government last month handed over 1,000 primary schools to NGOs that will run them in collaboration with the PEF. In the second phase, some 5,000 public schools would be privatised under public-private partnerships.

Islamabad government workers oppose job transfers

Capital Development Authority workers providing municipal services in Pakistan's capital Islamabad demonstrated at Aabpara Chowk on Monday. They were opposing the transfer of large numbers of workers to the newly-formed Islamabad Metropolitan Corporation.

Workers claim that they do not have the same job security and benefits at the new entity and want the transfers stopped. About 75 percent of the workforce, or up to 10,000 employees, are affected.

The restructure is in response to pressure from the International Monetary Fund for the government to slash its budget deficit. As a result public services are severely affected, wages remain virtually frozen and payment of monthly salaries are often delayed by weeks or months.

New South Wales garbage collectors end strike without resolution

Around 90 garbage collection workers on New South Wales' central coast, north of Sydney, ended a five-day strike on Tuesday over a new enterprise agreement with no resolution to major issues such as job security and pay parity for casual employees. The Transport Workers Union claimed it was closing down the strike "in good faith," after the contract employer Remondis and the Central Coast Council agreed to meet over the issues on June 15.

Workers want a clause inserted into the council's tender for waste services that protect local jobs, existing workers and their conditions. In

their dispute with Remondis, the workers also want clauses protecting current conditions if the council renews its contract in 2018 and for temporary outsourced employees paid on par with other depot workers.

The garbage collection workers fear that future contracts will force them onto general award conditions that pays nearly 30 percent below their current rate.

New Zealand call centre workers walk out

Dozens of workers at Sitel's Onehunga call centre in Auckland walked out for three hours on Tuesday after their employer, the US-based company Sitel refused to offer them a pay rise and agree to fair treatment when they use sick leave. A representative from the E tu union said workers complained that Sitel supervisors time toilet breaks and use bullying tactics when workers are on sick-leave to get them back to work.

Almost all of the call centre staff work on behalf of insurance giant IAG, which has a huge share of the New Zealand insurance market.

French Polynesia airline strike ends

The three-week strike by 100 workers of French Polynesia's domestic carrier Air Tahiti ended on June 4, after the government and airline agreed to negotiate with workers. Airline employees walked out on May 13 over fears of job and pay cuts due to falls in domestic travel. Unlike in France, there are no unemployment benefits in the country's Pacific colony.

Airline management wants to reduce domestic flights to some regions from once a week to once a fortnight. This would cut jobs and cause major inconveniences for outlying island residents. Media reported that details of the strike settlement were not immediately clear.



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