

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

23 July 2016

South Korea: Hyundai Motor workers strike

About 15,000 unionised workers at Hyundai Motor, South Korea's top automaker, walked off the job at the company's plant in Ulsan and other facilities for four hours each day from Tuesday to Friday as talks with the company over a wage increase and other issues remain deadlocked. Hyundai Motor claims the strike will cost it 40 billion won (US\$35 million) a day.

The union wants a 7.2 percent rise in the basic monthly wage and performance pay totalling 30 percent of the automaker's 2015 net profit. Other demands include giving employees the right to refuse promotion so that they can maintain their union membership.

The union claimed that Hyundai wants to freeze wages, revamp the wage structure and expand the "peak-wage system," which reduces salaries in return for extending the retirement age. When workers reach the age of 59 their pay would be reduced by 10 percent. It is one of the labour-market reforms demanded by the Park Geun-hye administration in 2015.

South Korean shipbuilding workers strike

Workers at two of Korea's "big three" shipbuilders, Hyundai Heavy Industries (HHI) and Samsung Heavy Industries (SHI), walked off the job for four hours on Tuesday in protest against government and industry efforts to "reshape" the nation's yards. Daewoo Shipbuilding & Marine Engineering (DSME) workers did not join the strike. Instead, they staged a protest at the shipyard during lunchtime.

Samsung workers are striking over the company's plan to axe 1,500 positions this year and to cut its workforce by 40 percent by the end of 2018. DSME wants to slash wages by 20 percent, sell two of its five floating dry-docks and reduce its workforce to 10,000 positions. In early June South Korean President Park Geun-Hye called for "bone-crushing" overhauls of the three shipbuilding companies.

Cambodian electronics factory workers on strike

More than 300 workers from the I Sound Cable Cambo in Kampong Speu province have been on strike for over a week to demand improved conditions and entitlements and the reinstatement of their union leader. The striking workers demonstrated in front of the labour ministry on Tuesday, ignoring a threat from factory management that they would be sacked if they did not return to work.

The electronics workers want compensation for workplace-related injuries, easier access to annual leave and a three-month maternity leave payment in one lump sum to help new mothers cover hospital bills. The labour ministry said they would "find a solution" if the strikers returned to work.

Cambodian footwear factory closed after mass fainting

The Grand East Footwear International factory in Kandal province's Ang Snoul district was forced to close for the day on Monday following the sudden fainting of 89 employees at their work stations in the morning. All were sent to either a private clinic or referral hospital for treatment before being released later in the evening. Over 1,000 workers are employed at the factory.

According to a National Social Security Fund report, nearly 2,000 workers in 32 Cambodian garment and footwear factories fainted during 2015, a figure consistent with 2014 figures. The report said several factors caused the fainting, including excessive overtime worked, poor health and chemicals used in production and pest control.

Pakistan: Islamabad health workers stop work

Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS) workers on Monday announced that they would begin a campaign for their recognition as government employees. The Joint Action Committee, representing staff from administration, para medical, nursing and others, said employees would strike for two hours each day between 8 and 10 in the morning.

The workers at PIMS—a 1,200-bed hospital affiliated with the Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto Shaheed Medical University—want to maintain their status as civil servants and are demanding the separation of PIMS from the university and its establishment as a government hospital.

Hyderabad municipal workers protest job cuts

Hyderabad Development Authority (HDA) workers are maintaining demonstrations outside the HDA main office in Hyderabad against the termination of 1,600 contract and temporary workers. They began protesting on July 13.

Authorities claim the city is facing a financial crisis due to excessive employment in HDA. The dismissed workers are from HDA and the

Water and Sanitation Agency (WASA). The HDA Mehran Workers Union said hundreds of families had no income.

HDA and WASA workers struck in February to demand six months' unpaid wages. The action followed protests in October last year over delayed wages.

India: Gurgaon auto-workers demand release of jailed Maruti Suzuki workers

Hundreds of workers from factories across the Manesar-Gurgaon-Bawal automobile belt, on the outskirts of New Delhi, marched from Rajiv Chowk to the Mini-Secretariat in Gurgaon on Monday. They were demanding the immediate release of 35 Maruti Suzuki workers who have been in jail for over three years. Protesters submitted a memorandum to the deputy commissioner.

Maruti Manesar factory workers struck three times in 2011-12 to demand their right to be represented by the Maruti Suzuki Workers Union and for better wages and working conditions. A senior manager, who supported the workers, was killed and several others injured during one of the strikes. Haryana police, using lists supplied by company management, arrested almost 150 workers, including the entire leadership of the Maruti Suzuki Workers Union. One hundred and fifteen have been released. The company had also sacked 546 regular and 2,000 contract workers in the wake of the incident.

Monday's protest follows various ad-hoc demonstrations in the past five years. Unions from Hyundai, Ford, Toyota and Hindustan Motors have opposed united action by Indian autoworkers to defend the victimised Maruti Suzuki workers.

LG electronics union calls off strike without resolution

Leaders of the LG Electronics Union on Thursday have called off a 10-day strike by over 2,000 workers at the LG electronics plant in the Noida industrial zone in the National Capital Region, Uttar Pradesh. The union claimed it called off the strike in response to pressure from LG employees.

Some 850 permanent workers and 1,200 contract workers at the plant walked out in a dispute over wages and working hours on July 11. They were demanding fixed working hours, a wage rise and in protest against the expulsion of trade union leaders who were pushing their demands.

The strike shut down production at the 19-year-old Nodia plant, LG's largest production base in India for home appliances. It produces 8,000 refrigerators, 5,000 washing machines and 700,000 compressors a day, in addition to microwave ovens.

Goa shipyard workers strike over unpaid wages

Around 350 workers at Western India Shipyard Limited stopped work for two days on Monday and demonstrated at Headland Sada in Vasco city over the non-payment of salaries. The workers, who have been protesting over the issue for the last seven months, threatened to hold a hunger strike at Azad Maidan in Goa's capital Panaji from July 20 to 25.

Delhi power utility workers walk out

Contract workers, who are members of an unofficial union at the power distribution company BSES in Delhi, walked out indefinitely on Wednesday to demand equal pay and an end to the contract labour system. The strike disrupted electricity supply causing intermittent blackouts over most of Delhi. Workers complained that they are paid below the minimum wage of 10,000 rupees (\$US148) a month and do not receive allowances or leave entitlements.

The contract workers' action follows several years of protests and strikes over the issue. In October 2012, close to 30,000 contract workers from six power companies in Delhi walked out over similar demands. Workers complained that none of them earned above the minimum wage of 8,000 rupees. Many said they only received between 2,700 and 3,500 rupees a month and no benefits.

In 2015 the Supreme Court ordered that all contract staff working for eight months had to be made permanent. In order to avoid the ruling, companies shunt contract workers from one company to another every four to five months. Workers also claim that only 50 percent of their salary is paid with the remaining amount given to officials. Those affected include labourers, linesmen, bill distributors, meter readers, meter installers, engineers, payment recovery personnel and stenographers.

Haryana car seat manufacturing workers on strike

Some 100 contract workers at the NHK F Krishna Automotive Seating factory in Oragadam, Haryana have been on strike since July 12 to demand permanency. Management has brought in workers from its sister companies in Gurgaon and IMT Manesar in an attempt to maintain production. The strikers were joined by 500 workers from other auto factories on Sunday in a protest outside NHK's plant.

The workers are demanding permanent employment for the 55 workers who joined the company on start-up in 2013, reinstatement of terminated employees and a minimum of 25,000 rupees per month. Base wages currently vary between 6,300 and 11,000 rupees, depending on classification.

A conciliation meeting with government officials, workers and the company on Monday failed after the company refused to take on the contract workers as permanent and declined to even recognise them as skilled workers.

Telangana coal mine workers protest

Singareni Colliery Company Limited (SCCL) workers demonstrated in front of the company's head office at Kothagudem in Khammam district on Monday to demand reestablishment of the dependent employment scheme (i.e., recruitment of family members), better wages for contract workers, housing and 25 percent share of company profits. The demonstration followed an eight-day march by SCCL workers and family members from four districts in the Telangana coal belt. It was organised by the Singareni Colliery Workers Union, affiliated with the Stalinist All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC).

Sri Lankan railway gate keepers demand wage increase

Railway-crossing gate operators protested outside the railway department office at Vavunia in Sri Lanka's north on July 12 to demand a 5,000-rupee monthly wage and that they be absorbed into Sri Lanka's railway department. They are currently attached to the police department.

There are around 620 unprotected railway crossings manned by around 2,000 gate keepers in Sri Lanka. They are only paid 250 rupees per day, are not entitled to leave and have to work seven days a week to earn 7,500 rupees (\$US51.3) per month.

Workers complained that they did a responsible job and that their meagre wages were below subsistence living. The gate operators have been fighting for their demands since March this year.

Victoria: Parmalat ends lockout after reaching agreement

Thirty-seven workers at the Parmalat milk processing factory in Longwarry, in south-east Victoria, voted to approve a new enterprise agreement on July 15 ending an 11-day lockout. Parmalat, a subsidiary of French dairy giant Lactalis, locked out the National Union of Workers members on July 5 after they told the company that they planned work bans following ten failed meetings for a new enterprise agreement.

The workers—26 full-time employees and 11 casuals—wanted their wages and benefits brought into line with other Parmalat employees in Victoria. According to the union, the new agreement includes a 9.6 percent pay increase over 3 years and a pathway to permanent jobs for contract workers.



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