

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

29 October 2016

Bangladeshi telecommunications workers end strike

Workers at state-owned mobile phone operator Teletalk ended indefinite strike action on Tuesday after the Bangladesh minister for posts and telecommunication gave an assurance that employees' demands would be met. All service points and customer care and call centres throughout Bangladesh remained shut during the walkout.

About 600 Teletalk workers began strike action on Monday to demand a 100 percent salary increase. While the Teletalk Employee Welfare Association has been calling for the rise since July 2015, it called off a strike in August after the telecommunications minister falsely agreed to grant the claim. Workers rejected an offer by the company in September to increase wages by 50 percent.

Garment workers locked out in Bangladesh

Workers from the Heasong Corporation and Hasong Sweater in Savar, a suburb of Dhaka, were locked out on October 22 after demonstrating on the factories' premises over unpaid wages. Management terminated over 600 workers and closed the garment plants for an indefinite period.

Around 300 workers protested at the Savar Bus Stand on Monday with 11 demands. These included payment of outstanding wages, reopening of the factories and reinstatement of illegally sacked workers. The workers are members of the Garment and Shilpo Sramik Federation.

India: Haryana health workers strike

About 8,000 contract workers, including several hundred doctors, employed under the National Health Mission (NHM) walked out across Haryana state on Tuesday to demand permanency and equal wages with state health department employees. Six union office bearers who were part of the strike were victimised by the government, which has threatened to register police cases against them and other workers involved the walkout. Another 4,000 NHM workers joined the strike on Thursday.

NHM workers are employed in a range of departments, including ambulance, maternal health, vaccinations, adolescent health, birth and death records, child immunisations, nursing and data entry. Some NHM employees said they have been on contract wages for 18 years, even after passing interviews and holding qualifications accepted for permanent workers.

Nurses in Madhya Pradesh strike

Close to 20,000 nurses walked out in Madhya Pradesh on Tuesday in a 24-hour state-wide strike. They have threatened indefinite industrial action on November 9 if the government does not address their seven-point charter of demands. All services were affected except emergencies and critically ill patients.

The United Nurses Association is demanding wages be upgraded in line with the Seventh Pay Commission recommendations and for second grade level nurses to be designated as "Nursing Officers."

Mumbai sanitation workers on strike

About 6,000 contract sanitation workers for the Nevi Mumbai Municipal Corporation (NMMC) have been on strike since Monday to demand a wage increase as per the Minimum Wages Act. Garbage has started blocking roads while workers not on strike have refused to clear garbage from areas where strikers normally work.

The contract workers are split between 91 different employers who have not increased wages since signing contracts with NMMC in February 2015. Workers want their 11,500-rupee monthly wage increased by between 4,000 and 5,000 rupees to bring them in line with the government's revised minimum wage.

Electric rickshaw owner-drivers rally New Delhi

Hundreds of e-rickshaw drivers protested at the Rajghat memorial in Delhi on Tuesday with a raft of demands for the government.

The drivers want a 30,000-rupee subsidy towards the purchase of a rickshaw, no delay in verification or registration processes, low interest rate loans and other demands. The protest was called by the Unorganised Workers' Morcha.

Tamil Nadu ambulance service workers protest

Employees of the 108 Emergency Ambulance Services demonstrated for an hour outside the Red Cross building in Coimbatore on Wednesday to demand an 8.33 percent Diwali festival bonus. While the annual bonus is supposed to be the equivalent of one month's salary, the ambulance

service workers have not been paid for the past eight years.

A spokesman from the 108 Ambulance Workers Welfare Association said workers also wanted a reduction of the current 12-hour shifts to 8 hours, paid overtime, the scrapping of mandatory transfers, and reinstatement of 15 days' personal leave each year.

Andhra Pradesh hospital paramedics protest

Around 700 members of the Ayush National Rural Health Mission Paramedical Association came from around the state to demonstrate in Vijayawada on Monday to demand unpaid wages. Ayush (Indian traditional medicine) hospital paramedics said they have not been paid for over seven months. The association also demanded that doctors be appointed to ayush hospitals.

Pakistan: Model colleges teaching and non-teaching staff strike

Teachers and other workers at Islamabad's model colleges went on strike for an indefinite period on Tuesday over the government's failure to resolve promotion procedures and other issues. Called by the Joint Action Committee (JAC) of the model colleges' teaching and non-teaching associations, the strike brought academic and administrative activities at the colleges to a halt.

The strikers demanded timely payment of wages and changes to a range of promotion procedures, including, regular time-scale promotions, creation and re-designation of the posts, and promotions on merit or seniority. The JAC warned that the strike would continue until demands are met.

Islamabad police attack government school daily wage workers

Islamabad police attacked government school workers holding a peaceful sit-down demonstration outside the Federal Directorate of Education (FDE) office on Tuesday. The violent crackdown left several injured. Police also detained leaders of the Young Teachers Association who called the protest.

Over 350 daily wage teachers and non-teaching staff from Islamabad government schools were demonstrating as part of their campaign for unpaid wages, a pay increase above the current 13,000 rupees (\$124) per month to 30,000 rupees and job permanency. A walkout and ongoing class room boycott was triggered on October 5 in response to four months of unpaid wages.

The FDE, overseen by the Capital Administration and Development Division, has more than 2,000 daily-wage staff members, teaching and non-teaching, at 422 educational institutions in the Pakistan capital. While the workers have been employed by the FDE for around eight years, the government refuses to make them permanent and is attempting to recruit new daily wage employees.

Sindh cotton mill workers protest

Hundreds of workers from the Dewan cotton factory in Kotri, Sindh province, demonstrated outside the plant on Sunday to demand unpaid wages. A spokesperson for the workers said that about 1,500 Dewan employees have not received their salaries for the past eight months.

Sri Lankan mine workers oppose privatisation

Over 100 workers at the Kahatagaha graphite mine in Sri Lanka's North Western province downed tools and began a protest occupation and fast in the mine on Tuesday. The occupation is 1,032 feet (314 metres) underground. The miners are demanding the government drop plans to sell the mine to an Australian company. According to the striking workers, privatisation will destroy jobs in order to drive up productivity and profits.

The sale is in line with International Monetary Fund demands that the Sri Lankan government sell state-owned enterprises in return for billions of dollars in loans. Workers have vowed to maintain their protest until the government drops its plan.

Cambodian garment workers protest

More than 100 workers from the Orient Spring Cambodian garment factory in Phnom Penh's Meanchey district have been protesting at the factory's gate since October 21 over the company's use of short-term employment contracts.

Workers said management only hires on three-month contracts, even though many have worked for two years or more. According to Cambodian labour laws, workers with two years' seniority are entitled to be transferred to long-term or undetermined duration contracts.

A Worker Unity Trade Union told the media that workers wanted at least six-month contracts. Protesters are also demanding a 2,000 riel (about \$US0.50) daily food allowance and 18 days' paid annual leave a year.

In a similar dispute, over 400 workers at the Soo Apparel factory in Phnom Penh's Stung Meanchey district walked out on Tuesday after being denied a 5 percent bonus promised in their contracts. They said they had not been paid the monthly bonus since August, which is normally paid after completion of three-month work contracts.

Queensland: Caltex oil processing workers on strike

Workers at Caltex's lubrication manufacturing plant and distribution centre in Brisbane walked off the job for an indefinite period on Monday in a dispute over a new work agreement. National Union of Workers (NUW) members established a picket outside the facility's main gate, preventing vehicles entering and leaving the plant.

According to the NUW, the new agreement demanded by Caltex will reduce the working week from 42 to 38 hours and axe two hours of overtime work paid at 160 percent of the standard rate. Caltex workers claim this represents a pay cut of between 15 to 20 percent. The company also wants to cap redundancy payouts at 55 weeks, down from 63, and cut superannuation contributions.

New Zealand ambulance paramedics prepare for strike

The Ambulance Professionals First union announced two weeks ago that over 1,000 ambulance workers would begin low-level industrial action on November 4 for a new work agreement.

A union spokesman said that if talks failed on November 2 with the employer, St John New Zealand, members would impose work bans including not wearing uniforms, completing paperwork or covering extra shifts. St John New Zealand, is a private charity that receives government funding to provide the bulk of ambulance services throughout the country.

The ambulance workers rejected St John's latest offer of a one percent pay rise in return for the elimination of time-and-a-half for extra work, which is used to cover under-staffing. Workers want the extended working hours cut, complaining that it is unsafe because they are near breaking point from exhaustion.

Auckland pastry workers walk out

Some 37 workers at Pastryhouse in Manukau, Auckland, walked out for 48 hours on Wednesday and established a picket outside the factory in their dispute for a new work agreement. Management has offered annual pay increases of just 1.5 percent over two years, which workers rejected. According to the E-tu union, workers want a better pay rise and one-year contracts, instead of the current two-year agreements.

Pastryhouse is owned by the Australian company Allied Mills, which manufactures uncooked frozen pastry products for the local and international market. Management has refused to enter into further negotiations.

Papua New Guinea health workers to vote for strike

The 3,000-strong PNG Health Support Workers Association has been granted permission from the Labour Industrial Relations Department to vote on strike action at the Department of Personnel Management (DPM). The department has not responded to a log of claims submitted by the union in September 2015.

The association, which accuses the DPM of not paying staff according to their qualifications, has given the government three weeks to respond to their demands before they take action.

Union claims include an upgrade of job ratings, accommodation allowances, a subsidiary allowance of 400 kina and leave fares. It also wants a 25 percent health support service allowance, 100 kina per fortnight mental health payment, insurance cover, paid overtime and risk allowances.



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