

# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

15 April 2017

## Pakistan: Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa health workers demand allowances

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa non-medical health workers at government hospitals across the province are maintaining a series of protests to demand their inclusion in a health professional allowance scheme. While their action remains scattered, more than 18,000 health department employees are involved in ongoing protests and strikes.

Administrative, clerical, technical, security and sanitation workers from the Ayub Teaching Hospital in Abbottabad blocked the Karakorum Highway in front of the hospital on April 7 and threatened to demonstrate at the provincial assembly. Class IV employees, clerical and sanitary staff from hospitals across Hazara division maintained protests begun on April 3 over the issue. Services at most government hospitals in the province are now affected.

Meanwhile, medical staff have complained that the government is continuing to fail to pay the allowance to those already entitled, including doctors, nurses and paramedics. As the federal government and provincial governments are cutting public expenditure, funds allocated for a range of public services are being slashed severely affecting the health sector. The trade unions have kept industrial action limited to individual hospitals preventing a coordinated action of all medical and non-medical workers.

## Sindh government contract workers protest

Contract and daily wage employees who collect religious taxes and administer relief programs for the poor in Sindh province demonstrated in front of the Karachi Press Club on Wednesday demanding job permanency.

Around 850 audit officers, audit assistants and clerks with 15 years' service are affected. Their action followed a series of demonstrations across the province. Workers said that if the government continued to ignore their demands they would march to the province's chief minister's house with their demand.

## Punjab health workers demand job permanency

Workers from the Integrated Reproductive Maternal New Born Health and Nutrition program, and the Lady Health Workers program in Khanewal district, Punjab province demonstrated on the Lahore-Karachi highway and protested outside the District Health authority on April 1 and 2 to demand job permanency. About 2,000 health workers in the district are affected. Their action follows several years of protests over the issue.

## India: Sugar mill workers in Bihar protest

At least 24 people, part of a large group of workers and farmers demonstrating outside the Motihari Sugar Mill, were seriously injured on Monday after being viciously attacked by police trying to break up three days of protest. Two workers sustained burns to 70 percent of their bodies when they tried to immolate themselves during the demonstration. Former mill workers and farmers were demanding wages due since 2002 when the mill was closed.

## Karnataka economic zone workers protest

Around 700 contract workers from the Padubidri Special Economic Zone (SEZ), near Mangalore, demonstrated outside the SEZ gates on Tuesday protesting against their sudden termination. The workers were employed by two manpower agencies who claimed their contracts with the Suzlon SEZ during work on its Padubidri premises had expired.

Workers ended their day-long protest after a compromise was reached with the company and agencies. The workers are to be paid salaries, bonuses and arrears, and a vague promise was made that they "should" be employed by the new contracting agency.

## Haryana commuter transport workers strike

Haryana Roadways Workers Union members stopped work across the state on Monday to oppose a government decision to allow private operators to run buses on 273 routes. Around 3,500 state buses were grounded by the walkout.

Workers have accused the government of restricting the transport services in order to justify privatisation. They claimed that there should be around 16,000 government buses providing jobs to around 96,000 workers. Currently there were only 4,000 buses, of which only 3,500 were on the road, workers said.

## Punjab university workers protest

Punjab Agriculture University teachers union and Class IV workers' union members demonstrated at the university in Ludhiana on April 8 over several demands. They want higher salaries, promotions on par with

Punjab University employees, payment of wage arrears and vacant lab technical and field staff positions filled. The unions said there would be further action if the university authorities did not implement these demands within two days.

### **Sri Lankan port workers on go-slow**

Port workers in the South Asia Gateway Terminal (SAGT) at Colombo Port have been on a go-slow campaign since April 4, to demand a full bonus for the New Year festive season. SAGT management has transferred workers from the Jaye Container Terminal and Colombo International Container Terminal in an attempt to minimise disruption.

SAGT is the first private container terminal operator in Sri Lanka and boasts of its high level of productivity through exploitation of its workers. Ships reportedly have begun bypassing the port due to the workers' action.

### **Sri Lankan power workers strike**

Around 4,000 Ceylon Electricity Board workers struck for 24 hours on April 5 in a long-running dispute for a pay rise and the rectification of salary anomalies. The Joint Trade Union Front claimed that wage disparities increased for 90 percent of workers after they won a salary increase in 2015. It pointed out that the ratio between lower employees to management salaries is currently 1:9 but that it should be 1:6. Management has promised to correct these disparities on numerous occasions.

The unions have threatened to take indefinite strike action on May 1 if CEB management continued to ignore workers' demands. The unions previously threatened indefinite strike action on February 15 but failed to organise the walkout.

### **Philippines banana workers demand permanency**

Fifty-three manpower agency banana plantation workers employed under contract to the Korean-owned Shin Sun Tropical Fruit Corporation in Mindanao's Compostela Valley are picketing the company after being told they were being terminated. The workers claim that because they have worked at the plantation for over six months they are entitled to be made permanent employees under a new Labor Code.

At least 80 agency workers were terminated at Shin Sun on March 16 and immediately replaced by workers from a different agency in an attempt by the company to avoid its obligations under the Labor Code. Most of the workers had been employed at the plantation for over two years.

### **Australian port workers strike**

Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) members at the Port Kembla Coal Terminal (PKCT) in New South Wales walked off

the job for three days on Tuesday in a dispute over a proposed enterprise agreement. Located 72 kilometres south of Sydney, PKCT services two of the nation's richest coal reserves, the Southern and Western coalfields of New South Wales.

The CFMEU and PKCT have been attempting to negotiate a new agreement for two years. Details of the disputed issues have not been made public but the union said it was concerned about the company decreasing coverage in the proposed agreement. Conciliation talks are due to resume in the Fair Work Commission on April 27 and May 22.

### **Victorian food processing workers resume strike action**

More than 100 food-processing workers at the McCormick Foods plants in Clayton South and Moorabbin in Melbourne implemented four-hour rolling stoppages on April 6 in their dispute over a proposed wage-cutting enterprise agreement. Their action follows a 24-hour walkout a week earlier.

The company's "offer," includes a 6 percent pay cut each year for the next three years. A National Union of Workers (NUW) spokesman said McCormick Foods also wanted to remove paid breaks from afternoon and night shifts and completely change rosters.

McCormick Foods claimed the cuts were in the "best interests of our overall business in Australia." According to the NUW, which has isolated the strike, the company made a \$472 million profit last year.

### **Papua New Guinea electoral office workers protest**

A group of former PNG Electoral Commission employees demonstrated at the commission's office in Madang on Monday to demand payments they claim have been outstanding since the 2012 general election.

Protesters included assistant returning officers, service-providers and other electoral officials who demanded to be paid before the issuing of writs next week for the 2017 national general election. Service providers claim that the commission owes them more than 4 million kina (\$US1.2 million).



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