

# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

17 June 2017

## Asia

### **Pakistan: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa riot police attack striking doctors**

At least 40 people were injured when riot police viciously attacked striking doctors demonstrating at the Hayatabad Medical Complex in Peshawar on Thursday. Eight doctors were arrested. The government has banned the assembly of more than four people in the area and deployed several contingents of police to enforce the ban.

Young Doctors Association (YDA) members have been on strike since May 23 demanding time-scale promotion, professional allowance and payment for on-call duty. They also want compensation for five deceased doctors caught in a gas leak in a poorly maintained hostel facility. Doctors at the Ayub Teaching Hospital in Abbottabad walked out last month to demand better hostel accommodation.

The YDA is also protesting against the decentralisation of the Postgraduate Medical Institute (PGMI). Doctors fear that the government's plan to decentralise the PGMI to various teaching hospitals in the province will lower professional standards. Doctors have set up a protest tent outside the Lady Reading Hospital in Peshawar and insist they will remain on strike until their demands are met.

### **Government hospital nurses in Quetta continue strike**

Nurses from government hospitals in Quetta, the provincial capital of Balochistan, have been on strike since June 5 over salaries. The nurses ended a four-day strike in February over the same issue after the government falsely claimed that all their demands would be met "without delay" and promised a government committee to "find a solution."

Nurses want a health professional allowance, improvement in their service structure and pay for training nurses increased from 10,000 rupees (\$US157) a month to 20,000 rupees. A Nurses Action Committee (NAC) spokesperson said that nurses had been demanding the health professional allowance since 2011. She said that although government had accepted this demand it had not issued an official order. The NAC and Balochistan Nursing Association want a service structure and professional allowance on par with neighbouring provinces.

In an attempt to break the strike the government has ordered the suspension of classes and deployed all student nurses to hospitals to take the places of striking nurses.

### **Islamabad nurses protest over excessive work load**

Nurses at the state-run Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS) in Islamabad demonstrated on Monday over several issues, including delay in promotions, low rate of allowances and against the rejection of Eid and education leave. Nurses said their last promotion was in 2014.

Nurses are mainly concerned about excessive workloads caused by under staffing. They complained that a nurse has to care for between 30 and 40 patients in general wards, more than four times higher than international standards, and in critical care units, one nurse for up to 8 patients, way over the accepted ratio.

The PIMS Nursing Association said 400 nurses are covering 900 positions at the institute. It alleges that no nurses have been recruited since 2013 to replace those who retire or resign. They accused the authorities of keeping wages and allowances drastically lower compared to what nurses in other provinces receive.

### **India: Police attack protesting Srinagar water utility workers**

Police in Srinagar, Jammu & Kashmir used water cannon and batons against several hundred Public Health Engineering (PHE) department workers who were marching to the city square for a demonstration on June 11. Protesting workers yielded under the vicious police attack and dispersed; a dozen were arrested.

Called by the Kashmir PHE Joint Employees Association, the protest was part of a long running state-wide campaign for permanency by daily wage workers, casual labourers and need-based workers from various government departments. During a two-day state-wide strike in January the J&K Government Employees, Casual Labours, Workers & Pensioners United Platform, accused the government of doing nothing about promises to improve the conditions of its 60,000 members.

### **West Bengal tea estate workers strike**

Tens of thousands of tea estate workers in West Bengal struck work on Monday and Tuesday to demand wages as per the Minimum Wages Act, Food Securities Act benefits and distribution of land to tea workers for residential purposes. A majority of tea estates in the north of the state were closed during the strike.

The media reported that over 90 percent of the 400,000 workers at 300 tea gardens participated in the strike. Hundreds of protesting workers were detained and many injured by police using batons to break up demonstrations in many towns. The strike was called by the Joint Forum of Trade Unions—an umbrella organisation of 24 central and state trade unions.

### **Bangladesh: Khulna jute mill workers protest**

Workers from seven government jute mills in Khulna district began five days of continuous demonstrations on June 7 to demand payment of overdue wages and allowances and the withdrawal of false charges against their union leaders. The workers demonstrated outside the seven mills and in the industrial estate.

Representatives from the Bangladesh Jute Mill CBA (collective bargaining agent) and non-CBA coordination council have threatened a 24 hour strike on June 20 if their demands were not met.

### **Sri Lankan postal workers walkout**

Sri Lankan postal workers held a 48-hour national strike on Monday to oppose government's plan to sell the three heritage listed Postal Department buildings, in Nuwara Eliya, Kandy and Galle.

Around 19,000 workers attached to main post offices, sub-post offices and plantation post offices joined the walkout. The Central Mail Exchange was closed and mail trains, foreign parcels, delivery and collection of letters stopped. Workers fear that the government is planning to privatise postal services in order to raise funds for debt repayments and in line with the privatisation program demanded by the International Monetary Fund.

The strike was called by the Joint Postal Trade Union Front, which threatened to call an indefinite strike if the government persisted with its plan.

### **Cambodia: Sacked Southland garment workers reinstated**

Eleven unionists from the Southland garment factory in Dangkor district, were reinstated on Monday after mediation talks with the government, factory management and the union. The workers were sacked on June 8, two days after a strike by nearly 2,000 factory workers about time off in order to vote in local government elections.

The June 6 strike erupted after workers learnt that the government-aligned Cambodian Union Federation (CUF) did a deal with the company for the workers to be paid for the two days travelling to their villages' to vote in the elections but that three days would be eliminated from their holiday entitlements.

When striking workers refused to return to work management retaliated by sacking eleven leaders of the workers' preferred union, the Collective Union of Movement of Workers. The industrial action ended on June 9 following a court order directing them to return to work.

Workers complained to media that the factory was deducting \$US0.50 from their monthly salary for CUF membership dues, a union they never agreed to join.

### **Australia and the Pacific**

#### **Victorian plywood mill workers reject revised pay deal**

Over 200 workers at the Carter Holt Harvey (CHH) plywood mill at Myrtleford in Victoria's northeast remain locked out after narrowly rejecting the company's latest pay offer. In a secret ballot that ended on June 9, 97 workers rejected the offer with 86 voting for it. A union spokesman said it differed little from the one rejected by workers earlier in the year.

The workers, represented by the Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU), Electrical Trades Union of Australia (ETU) and Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union (AMWU), were locked out on April 19 after announcing that they planned to begin rolling stoppages and overtime bans following 12 months of failed negotiations.

While workers are currently picketing the mill, the unions have isolated the lockout, with union members at CHH's plants in Tumut and Morwell still working.

The unions' current claim is for a 3 percent pay rise annually over three years, one week's annual leave allowable in the Christmas holiday period, and better access to income protection insurance. A CFMEU spokesman said the company wanted one nationwide agreement for all its sites and has imposed a 2 percent pay increase at its Tumut and Morwell mills.

### **Queensland power workers vote on industrial action**

Workers at the state-owned Kogan Creek Power Station, in south-west Queensland are voting in a protected action ballot to decide on industrial action following stalled negotiations for a new enterprise agreement. The ballot contains questions about 18 types of industrial action ranging from limited bans through to strikes. The unions and CS Energy have been in negotiations since January.

CS Energy has offered 3 percent annual pay increases over three years plus slight improvements in entitlements such as travel allowance, bonuses and leave. The Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) claimed that the company was trying to strip workers of their rights by leaving workers with no job security, shift certainty and reduced safety standards.

### **New Zealand: Unite union makes wage deal with McDonald's**

The McDonald's fast food chain in New Zealand has negotiated a wage agreement with the Unite union. Under the deal, which only applies to members of the Unite union, workers receive a meagre \$0.10 an hour pay increase above the minimum wage for three years, 100 percent "guaranteed hours" every week, additional available shifts to be notified electronically before new staff are hired, and a two-week redundancy payment if a store closes.

While non-union staff will be entitled to some of the "improvements" in the deal they will not be eligible for the pay increase or the \$300 sign-up bonus for union members.



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