

Thousands of private health care doctors strike in India

# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

6 January 2018

## India: Private health care doctors hold national strike

The Indian Medical Association (IMA), representing 290,000 doctors throughout India, called a nationwide suspension of private healthcare services for 12 hours on Tuesday to oppose the National Commission Bill being debated in parliament. Outpatient services in private hospitals ceased while some government hospitals were affected when government doctors in several states joined the protest.

The bill seeks to replace the Medical Council of India (MCI) with a new body, the National Medical Commission (NMC). Doctors claim that it will lead to further privatisation of medicine and increase medical fees. The IMA labelled the bill as anti-poor and anti-people. They also opposed the inclusion of non-scientific treatments such as allopathy in the medical profession saying it would lead to quackery and corruption in health care.

The IMA suspended the strike after eight hours when parliament decided to refer the bill to a standing committee.

## Sanitation workers protest across India

Contract sanitation workers held nationwide demonstrations on Tuesday to demand minimum pay on par with permanent workers in their respective local bodies.

Hundreds of Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board sanitation workers demonstrated in the city demanding equal work for equal pay. While regular sewage treatment workers are paid between 40,000 and 50,000 rupees a month, contract workers doing the same job are only paid 7,200 rupees (\$US113) per month.

## Punjab power plant workers protest over shutdown

Five hundred contract workers from the Guru Nanak Dev Thermal Plant and the Guru Gobind Singh Super Thermal Plant, began an indefinite sit-down protest outside the District Administration Complex in Bathinda on Monday to oppose closure of the plants. They denounced the government, which previously claimed the facilities would remain fully operational.

Both plants were shut down on January 1 with the government falsely promising that workers would be transferred to other state utilities, or at least a government job would be made available for one member from each family affected. Protesting workers are being supported by the

village farmers and surrounding shopkeepers with food, financial resources and moral support.

## Karnataka ship building workers on strike

Over 100 workers at Tebma Shipyards in Maple Fisheries Harbour downed tools on December 26 and occupied the facility demanding immediate payment of six months' outstanding salaries. A striking administrative worker said the company had not paid the Provident Fund and Employee State Insurance for the last three months, making it difficult for families to access healthcare facilities.

The workers said they would continue their occupation and not allow any work at the shipyard until the overdue wages are paid.

## Bangladesh: Teachers and workers from non-government schools protest

Hundreds of teachers and other employees from non-government schools, colleges and technical institutions have been demonstrating outside the National Press Club in Dhaka since December 26. The Non-MPO Educational Institutions' Teachers and Employees Federation, which has 80,000 members in over 5,000 registered non-government educational institutions, is demanding inclusion in the government's Monthly Pay Order (MPO) for salaries and other benefits.

Many of the protesters are on a "fast unto death" protest. By Wednesday, 87 hunger strikers had fallen sick and 24 hospitalised. The teachers have vowed to remain until their demand is met.

## Pakistan: Lady Health Workers in FATA protest

Lady Health Workers (LHW) program employees at Ghalanai in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) in Pakistan's northwest protested over the non-payment of salaries on December 28. They have not been paid for six months. A protest march was held from Mohmand Press Club to the LHW headquarters in Ghalanai.

While the LHW program plays a crucial role throughout Pakistan where health facilities are extremely inadequate, the situation in war-torn FATA

is significantly worse. LHW workers are mostly paid minimal wages and in many cases kept as contract workers denying them even the meagre benefits permanent government sector workers would receive. Wages are frequently withheld for months.

### **Islamabad teachers boycott classes**

As part of a long running campaign, teachers serving on a daily wage basis in government-run model educational institutes in the Islamabad Capital Territory boycotted classes as the schools reopened on Monday after the winter break. Teachers are demanding to be made permanent. At least 2,200 daily waged teachers are employed by the Federal Directorate of Education (FDE). The teachers demonstrated in October against the government's continued failure to pay wages on time.

The latest protest was called by the Young Teachers Association after the government advertised to recruit 230 new teachers. Pakistan is plagued by lack of properly maintained educational institutions as well as overcrowding of classrooms and poverty wages.

### **Karachi school teachers continue protest after police attack**

After being brutally attacked by the police on December 25, government school teachers in Sindh province are continuing their protest outside the Karachi Press Club. Members of the All Sindh Primary Teachers Association (ASPTA), Primary Teachers Association (PTA) and New Teachers Action Committee (NTAC) came from all parts of the province to rally in Karachi on December 25 over several demands. The three bodies represent close to 70,000 teachers.

ASPTA members want permanency for contract teachers and teachers who have been evaluated prior to being appointed to primary, secondary and high schools. They have rejected the government's offer to re-evaluate these teachers by the National Testing Service (NTS) saying they are already qualified. PTA members want the government to honour a promise given in 2014 to grant promotions into scale 16.

NTAC members want payment of overdue wages for teachers appointed in 2012. These teachers said they received their appointments in 2012 but salary payments ceased after 16 months. The teachers, who are still working, alleged that they were told by the treasury department that there were discrepancies in their appointments that had to be resolved before salary payments were resumed.

The protests were temporarily called off last week during negotiations with government representatives but resumed when the government failed to make a concrete commitment to represent their grievances to cabinet.

### **Sri Lankan postal workers protest**

Postal workers have begun a national campaign against wage cuts, reduced promotions and poor working conditions. Their demands include solving salary anomalies and introduction of a separate service constitution for the postal service to make it a closed service.

Workers complained that management had reduced the basic starting salary of a postal worker from 16,640 rupees (\$US108) to 15,005 rupees, and extended the promotions scheme from seven to ten years.

The campaign began with a demonstration outside post offices in Matara, Galle, Kandy, Kurunegala, Matale, Polonnaruwa and Jaffna on December 27. It followed a demonstration on December 18 in central Colombo. The campaign is organised by a collective of 27 postal service unions.

### **Cambodian garment workers strike**

Around 300 workers from the Korean-owned Gawon Apparel factory in Takhmao were ordered by the Kandal provincial court on December 27 to end several months of protests and return to work within 48 hours. Workers followed the order but walked out again on Tuesday. Several workers are holding a 24-hour vigil outside the factory to prevent the owner removing equipment. The dispute is over irregular payment of monthly wages.

In May, factory workers walked out and refused to return to work after they were paid between \$20 and \$50 of their \$150 April monthly salary. They walked out again in November after management failed to pay wages in full. Managers distributed \$US50 to \$100 to workers, claiming they would pay the rest later.

### **Cambodian garment workers block highway**

Nearly 7,000 workers from the Taieasy International garment factory in Pursat province's Krakor district blocked National Road 5 on the evening of December 30 demanding improved working conditions and the right to form a union.

Workers said they had 12 demands, which included leniency over employee absences in cases where workers have family problems, to be treated as human beings, the end to firing anyone without reason and to not cut bonuses.

### **Hong Kong housing estate cleaners protest**

Dozens of contract cleaners from a West Kowloon public housing estate demonstrated outside the Legislative Council in Hong Kong on December 29 over severance pay. The former employees of the Man Shun Hong Kong and Kowloon Cleaning Company alleged that they had been denied severance payments after being forced to sign voluntary resignation agreements in October, when the company's contract at Cheung Sha Wan's Hoi Lai Estate ended.

They were told that if they refused to resign they would be assigned to work in other areas around the city, incurring costly transportation fees every day. The workers were then re-employed by a new cleaning contractor, Hong Kong Commercial Cleaning, which refused to honour long service payments for their tenure with the Man Shun. Workers have since learnt that Man Shun and the new cleaning company share the same office.

A spokesman from the Confederation of Trade Unions claimed that Man Shun could owe the workers up to \$1 million (\$US128,000).

## **South Korea: Airline cleaners at Incheon International Airport on strike**

Around 380 outsourced workers from EK Manpower contracted by Korea Airport Service (KAS) to clean 130 planes at Incheon International Airport walked off the job on December 30 to demand a pay rise. KAS has recruited 170 people in an attempt to break the strike.

Workers said they are forced to work at least 12 hours a day, plus extended hours, without holidays due to daily plane schedules. “When flights are delayed, workers are tied up at the airport for 24 hours, working without time for rest,” one worker said. Others said gender discrimination exists in pay, as only male workers receive a certain form of bonus.

## **Hyundai Motor workers resume strike action**

Unionised workers at Hyundai Motor’s car assembly plants in Ulsan, south of Seoul, resumed strike action on Thursday in an attempt to push the company to offer an improved wage package. The company’s 51,000-member union planned to strike for eight to 12 hours for four consecutive days.

On December 22, Hyundai Motor workers rejected a tentative pay deal negotiated by the union. The deal followed 39 rounds of negotiations and several weeks of strike action.

Management had offered to increase workers’ basic monthly salary by 58,000 won (\$53) and give bonuses worth 300 percent of basic pay plus 3 million won in extra compensation. Workers opposed the deal, saying the increases offered were lower than last year. Last year, the base pay was lifted by 72,000 won, together with bonuses worth 350 percent of basic pay and 3.3 million won in extra compensation.

## **Queensland: Lockout at Glencore coal mine continues**

Multinational mining giant Glencore is continuing its lockout of 190 Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) members at its Oaky North underground coal mine in Central Queensland. CFMEU members have been locked out since June 9, following limited industrial action in May over an enterprise agreement.

Glencore has hired a replacement, contract-based workforce and used staff employees to maintain production. Workers fear that Glencore’s ultimate aim is to casualise its entire workforce.

According to the CFMEU, Glencore wants to axe 50 percent of existing conditions in return for annual pay increases of 2 percent. A union spokesman said management told employees that they would not be allowed to return to work until they accept the company’s demands. The CFMEU wants 3 percent per annum pay increases but indicated it would accept a two-year pay freeze if the current enterprise agreement was rolled over.

The CFMEU has kept the Oaky North dispute isolated and policed the picket line outside the mine, ensuring that scabs hired to keep the mine operating can move in and out without hindrance. The union has blocked any active industrial support for the miners by the 19,000 workers that it covers across the coal industry and production continues unhindered at Glencore’s other coal mining operations in the Central Queensland’s Bowen Basin.

## **Fiji: Nadi airport lockout in third week**

About 250 workers from the government-owned Air Terminal Services (ATS) at Fiji’s main international airport in Nadi have been locked out since December 16. Management is demanding they sign a declaration saying that a walkout to attend a shareholders meeting was wrong and to apologise and accept disciplinary action.

About 20 workers signed the declaration after management said they would not be victimised, however, on returning to work they were told that they will not be given any pay rise or promotions.

ATS provides catering, baggage-handling and engineering services at the airport with a workforce of 640. ATS workers hold a 49 percent stake in the company but have no input into its operations. They oppose the way the company is run and its treatment of staff. ATS has begun recruiting a scab workforce of 150 on three-month contracts.

Mediation talks involving the Fiji employment minister, ATS management, the Federated Airline Staff Association, the Fiji Trades Union Congress and the Confederation of Public Sector Unions were ongoing until Wednesday when the government refused to budge and walked away.

## **New Zealand meat industry maintenance workers strike**

Following a year of failed negotiations for a pay increase, 19 maintenance workers at the meat processing plant of Silver Fern Farms at Takapau, in New Zealand’s North Island walked out on strike on Wednesday.

Their union, the E tu, said workers rejected the company’s last pay increase offer of 1.5 percent as back pay for nine months, followed by a 2 percent increase at the time of settlement. The company responded to the strike by suspending the workers and withdrawing the back pay offer.

A union spokesperson said the workers needed a pay rise that reflects the 4.8 percent increase in the minimum wage that comes into effect on April 1. She added that the workers’ pay has fallen behind by about 10 percent of what other companies are paying their maintenance employees.



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