

One million Indian bank workers strike; tens of thousands of Korean taxi drivers protest

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

29 December 2018

Indian bank workers strike over bank merger

Almost a million bank workers at Indian state-owned bank workers held a 24-hour national strike on December 26 in protest against the proposed merger of Vijaya Bank and Dena Bank with the Bank of Baroda, three leading public sector banks. The strike shut down about 100,000 branches of the 21 government-owned banks.

The walkout was coordinated by the United Forum of Bank Unions (UFBU), an umbrella organisation of nine unions, including the All India Bank Officers Confederation, the All India Bank Employees' Association, National Confederation of Bank Employees, and the National Organisation of Bank Workers.

The UFBU issued a statement declaring that the merger "is not in the interest of banks or bank customers [but] detrimental to both."

The striking bank workers have rejected an 8 percent wage rise offered by Indian Bank's Association and are demanding payment of outstanding wage increases recommended in November 2017.

Wednesday's national walkout was the second bank strike in less than a week. On December 21, members of officers union at the state-run banks held a day-long strike in protest against the merger and for an immediate settlement of wage negotiations.

The teachers, however, do not expect a favourable outcome and decided to launch their indefinite hunger strike protest. Sixteen teachers were hospitalised after they fainted during the second day of the hunger strike.

Bangladesh apparel workers continue strike action

Apparel workers in Bangladesh are maintaining their industrial action and protests in defiance of police intimidation and government and union appeals that they return to work before national elections on December 30. Police fired tear gas and conducted baton charges against the demonstrating workers on Sunday, injuring at least 11 workers.

Garment workers in Dhaka and adjoining districts, are protesting against a discriminatory wage structure. The new wage system was announced in September.

Fearing that the industrial action would spread, employers stopped production at more than 20 plants at Mirpur in Dhaka and in Gazipur on Tuesday. Seventy factories were shut down on December 13. The garment workers strikes began on December 9 in the Ashulia industrial belt in Dhaka, Gazipur and Narayanganj.

Tamil Nadu state secondary grade teachers begin hunger strike

Tamil Nadu state secondary grade teachers began a hunger strike protest on December 24 after a meeting with the state's education minister proved fruitless. Early that day over 1,000 teachers protested on College Road where the Directorate of Public Instruction is located. The demonstrating teachers were later detained by police and held in a stadium at Egmore.

More than 21,000 teachers across Tamil Nadu are protesting against the pay anomalies. Under the 6th Pay Commission teachers who began working before 2009 receive an 8,370-rupee (\$US118) basic monthly salary but those who joined later only get 5,200 rupees.

The teachers, who planned a strike earlier this month, postponed it after the Tamil Nadu school education minister, K.A. Sengottaiyan, agreed to meet them on Monday. The state government has declared that it not make any decision on teachers' demands until after an expert committee presents a report. The Tamil Nadu State Secondary Grade Teachers Association said the committee must submit its report by January 7.

Thousands of Korean taxi drivers protest in Seoul

Tens of thousands of taxi drivers stopped work nationally and demonstrated in Seoul on December 20 against a new carpooling service that threatens to destroy their jobs and livelihoods. The strike stranded commuters and disrupted traffic, and one section of the protest in the city of Daejeon blocked a road entering on to a highway.

"If the service is implemented, my income will shrink by half. I'll fall into poverty," said driver Yoon Woo-seok, 62, at the rally in front of the National Assembly. Other workers expressed concerns that they wouldn't be able to survive with the introduction of the Kakao carpooling service.

The demonstration occurred in the wake of the self-immolation of a taxi driver near parliament in Seoul on December 10.

Taiwanese labor rights advocates demand reinstatement of public holidays

A group of labor rights activists protested outside the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) headquarters in Taipei, calling for restoration of seven public holidays scrapped in 2016 and the rescinding new labor laws introduced in January.

“The DPP’s bruising losses in the November 24 elections were fundamentally caused by its decision to side with capitalists at the expense of workers’ rights,” 15 groups said in a joint statement. Local elections of November 24 saw a landslide defeat of the DPP, though they still hold government.

The groups included the Taiwan Labor Rights Pioneer Association, the Taiwan Higher Education Union’s youth action committee, the Alliance Against the Commercialisation of Education and 12 student groups.

Cambodian garment workers walkout over sacking of worker

Over 100 workers from the Prestige Garment factory in Kendal province near the Cambodian capital Phnom Penh began strike action on December 24 over the sacking on the previous Saturday of a worker for attempting to form a union in the plant.

The next day 200 of the 300 workers from the factory had joined the walkout. The workers have drawn up a petition demanding reinstatement of the sacked worker Houn Sovit and for improved working conditions. They also want their work contracts extended from two to six months and an end to the penalising of workers who need emergency leave. Workers are angry over forced overtime and earlier than scheduled starts at the garment factory.

Philippines: Rural Filipino workers protest in Manila

Three hundred striking fruit industry workers, some with family members, spent Christmas in protest camps outside Manila’s main post office some 1,400 kilometres from their work places in the Compostela Valley on the island of Mindanao.

The workers established the protest camps in late November after travelling by boat and bus to the capital to protest their treatment by the Japanese-owned Sumifru Corporation. The camps are near the national government’s Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE).

Nine hundred Sumifru workers who are members of the Namasufa-Nafllu-KMU union walked out on strike in October to demand the company recognise all workers in a collective bargaining agreement.

The employer responded with a court action against the walkout. Striking workers in the Valley were subjected to violent police dispersals and arson attacks on their homes. One plantation worker, Dany Bautista, was murdered.

DOLE stepped into the strike the day before the company’s court action against the workers failed. A conference organised by DOLE was due to begin this week.

Queensland coal haulage workers hold second strike over pay and conditions

Over 1,000 train crew and maintenance workers employed by Aurizon to haul coal from central Queensland to the east coast walked off the job

for 24 hours on December 22 in a dispute over a proposed enterprise agreement (EA). Their action followed a 48-hour strike on December 14 over the issue.

The strikes are in response to a breakdown in EA negotiations covering members of the Rail Train and Bus Union, the Electrical Trades Union, the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union and the Australian Federated Union of Locomotive Employees (AFULE). An AFULE spokesman said major disputes were over Aurizon’s refusal to back pay any negotiated wage increase, rostering, proposed changes to the “voluntary” redundancy scheme and changes to the dispute procedures, including removal of “arbitration.”

Train drivers rejected a pay increase offer from Aurizon of up to \$A26.26 per week (1.5 percent) if they refrained from taking any further industrial action until the end of the financial year on June 30, 2019. Aurizon said it would not make any fresh proposals until late January or February.

French Polynesia: Union ends Bora Bora hotel strike without agreement

On December 25, the O Oe To Oe Rima union ended strike action at the Conrad hotel in Bora Bora, an island of French Polynesia and a popular tourism destination. The strike began on December 23 and involved about 70 percent of the hotel’s 200 workers.

The union called off the strike without any agreement being reached. It is now in talks with management. Workers had demanded higher wages and conditions, including an improved retirement bonus.

Tahiti cash distribution workers strike

Workers at Tahiti Valeurs, which supplies cash to automated telling machines (ATMs) in French Polynesia, have been on strike since December 17. About 20 of the company’s 27 employees are on strike, which has disrupted the supply of cash machines in the Society Islands archipelago.

Negotiations between the company and the Atia i Mua union broke down on December 14 and have not resumed. Workers are demanding better wages and bonuses, which the union says have not been increased for nine years.



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