Workers Struggles: Asia and Australia

30 December 2021

India: New Delhi police arrest protesting doctors

New Delhi police arrested several hospital resident doctors protesting outside the Maulana Azad Medical College on December 27. The Federation of Resident Doctors Association (FORDA) condemned the police action and threatened that all healthcare institutions would be completely shut down from that day.

The protest was a part of the ongoing national indefinite strike that began on December 21 to oppose suspension of postgraduate medical admissions, which is causing extra workloads. Resident doctors from several states across India walked out on December 6 over the issue.

This year's NEET-PG 2021 postgraduate entrance exam, which usually occurs in January, was postponed until September because of rising COVID-19 cases. Adding to the delay, postgraduate medical admissions have been stayed by the Supreme Court, which has postponed hearing petitions filed by students questioning the validity of resident seat allocation until January 6.

The striking doctors said they will not return to work until they receive a written assurance from the government that the issue is being resolved.

Tamil Nadu overhead tank operators and conservancy workers demand permanency

Hundreds of overhead tank (OHT) operators and conservancy workers employed in rural areas across Tamil Nadu demonstrated on December 21 to demand higher wages and permanent jobs. Cleanliness protectors and conservancy workers in villages said they were being exploited and paid a meagre 3,600-rupee ($48) monthly salary with no holidays or leave.

They demanded correction of a government order issued by the previous state government in February. While the government claimed the order increased all salaries, it set them at only 4,000 rupees per month and effectively cut the salary of OHT operators who earn up to 5,000 rupees a month.

OHT operators have been working on a part-time basis or on consolidated pay for several years. They allege that no proper employment records have been maintained which means they could be terminated anytime.

Punjab university teachers continue strike action

Strike action by teachers from the Guru Nanak Dev University and affiliated colleges across Punjab state has entered its fourth week.

Guru Nanak Dev University Teachers' Association members, along with members of the district unit of Punjab and Chandigarh College Teachers' Union want the University Grants Commission (UGC) pay scale revised in line with the Seventh Pay Commission. They are also demanding the government reverse its decision to delink teachers' pay grades from the UGC pay scale.

Veterinary care workers from the Guru Angad Dev Veterinary and Animal Sciences University hospitals in Ludhiana, Punjab state began an indefinite strike on December 1 over the same issues.

Haryana childcare workers demand higher wages

Anganwadi (childcare) workers demonstrated and blocked traffic on the Chandigarh-Kharar highway in Chandigarh, Haryana state on December 21 over the late payment of salaries and for a wage increase. Traffic was blocked, causing long queues of vehicles stretching almost 4 kilometres.

The protesting workers have been making these demands for the past nine months but the government had failed to respond. They warned that they will proceed with different forms of protests until their demands are addressed.

Pakistan: Islamabad teachers oppose reforms to remove them from federal government service

Teachers and non-teaching staff from government-run schools and colleges struck on December 23 to oppose a government act that removed the Federal Directorate of Education (FDE), the current authority over the schools, from the federal government hierarchy. It will instead be controlled by the mayor of Islamabad and become a local government body. Over 400 educational institutions, including 390 schools, were shut down by the strike.

A previous week-long strike begun on November 30 over the issue was called off by the Federal Government Education Joint Action Committee after the government claimed it needed time to address the educators' demands.

Teachers and non-teaching workers claimed the reforms will end their status as federal government employees and lead to the loss of current benefits. Opposition to the reform is popularly supported by students and parents.

FDE employees are also concerned that the federal government's

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persistent failure to uphold financial commitment to provisional and local governments have frequently led to delayed or non-payment of salaries. The Imran Khan government is seeking to reduce public expenditure, including for education, via reforms that transfer social budget responsibility to local authorities.

Islamabad police attack federal government workers

Employees from several federal government departments in Islamabad protested outside the ministry of finance on November 30 to demand the implementation of the 25 percent pay increase agreed by the government in February. The demand comes amidst continuing double digit inflation and stagnation of pay.

A heavy contingent of police attacked the November 30 protest with tear gas, preventing them from marching to the office of the prime minister. Police blockaded roads with truck-size containers to contain the protesters.

A similar protest was held on November 16 in which workers also demanded the inclusion of various allowances into their base pay and time-scale promotions.

The All Government Employees Grand Alliance in February shut down the workers' mass protest that brought Islamabad to a standstill declaring that the government had agreed to meet their demands. The government quickly reneged its agreement and instead implemented measures demanded by the International Monetary Fund to reduce the federal budget deficit.

Sri Lankan railway station masters protest over long-outstanding claims

Railway station masters took industrial action on December 23 to protest the railway department's lack of action on their outstanding demands. They stopped transporting or accepting parcels and issuing travel tickets. Station masters said rail authorities had ignored their demands, despite numerous appeals to rectify multiple problems.

Major demands included payment of coverage allowances if promotions cannot be provided, and overtime for station masters calculated under the same system as engine drivers.

The Sri Lanka Railway Station Masters' Union called off the action on Tuesday, claiming it had received an assurance from the state minister for transport that their demands would be addressed.

South Korean parcel delivery workers threaten strike

Union members at CJ Logistics, South Korea's leading parcel delivery company, have threatened to strike before the end of the year to demand better working conditions and against unsafe workloads. Over 93 percent of the 2,290 union members at the company approved taking indefinite strike action from December 28.

The union claims that CJ Logistics has failed to use the full amount of increased delivery charges that should have been spent to reduce workload under a January deal between the government and logistics firms. The deal called for logistics companies to hire extra workers to sort parcels and take other steps to prevent overwork.

The agreement was made after mass protests by workers following the death of 16 delivery workers allegedly caused by overwork. According to the union, CJ Logistics is spending only 30 percent of the increased shipping charges to improve working conditions for delivery workers.

Terminated workers at Cambodia's largest casino protest

Some 365 laid off workers from the NagaWorld casino complex in Phnom Penh have been holding daily protests since December 18 in front of the casino complex demanding reinstatement and an end to alleged discrimination against union members.

The dispute goes back to April when the Hong Kong-owned complex used the COVID-19 pandemic as the excuse to restructure its operations and target the union organisation. It laid off 1,329 of its 8,000-strong work force. Only 85 workers accepted a severance payout which the union claimed was less than what is required by law.

Protesters, mostly union members, want reinstatement, and review of termination packages to bring them in line with Cambodia's Labor Law. The dispute is being mediated by the ministry of labour and vocational training.

Junior doctors at hospitals in Victoria mount class action

More than 1,400 junior doctors across multiple healthcare services in Victoria have joined a state-wide legal campaign demanding repayment for un-rostered overtime as well as penalties against the hospitals for alleged breaches of the Fair Work Act. The doctors claimed they are overworked and under paid.

Coordinator of doctors in training at Australian Medical Association Victoria, Dr Gavin Wayne, said morale was at an all-time low, and the hospital system was at "breaking point." He said that health administrators and various governments have for decades relied on these doctors, who are regularly working up to 25 hours a week overtime, most of it unpaid.

Dr Wayne said the systemic exploitation of junior doctors would be the only thing keeping hospitals going in 2022, when health services would be trying to catch up with a backlog of treatments delayed by COVID-19.

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