

Sri Lankan public health employees strike over pay and conditions;  
Cambodian garment workers walkout over unpaid wages

## Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

25 November 2017

### **Sri Lanka: Public health sector workers strike**

More than 50,000 government health workers, including nurses, paramedics, pharmacists and medical lab technicians, struck for 24 hours across Sri Lanka on Wednesday. Apart from emergency, child care units and the cancer hospital in Colombo, the action paralysed all government health services.

The health workers are demanding rectification of salary anomalies, payment of overtime allowances and promotions. The strike was called by the Government Nursing Officers' Association and other unions representing paramedics.

### **Sri Lankan valuation workers protest against outsourcing**

Sri Lanka Government Valuation employees demonstrated outside the department's head office in Colombo on Wednesday in opposition to government plans to outsource valuation work. Workers said the demonstration, which stopped field work, would continue until there was an acceptable solution to the issue.

### **Cambodian garment workers strike over unpaid wages**

Around 300 workers from the Korean-owned Gawon Apparel factory in Takhmao walked off the job on Monday after management failed to pay wages in full. Managers distributed \$US50 to \$100 to workers, claiming they would pay the rest later.

Workers told the media that they frequently had to strike over unpaid 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.

### **India: Udupi wind turbine factory workers remain locked out**

Around 500 workers, including 326 permanent employees, have been locked out at the rotor blade plant of wind turbine manufacturer Suzlon Energy in Udupi since November 14. Management pinned a notice to the front gate with a list of employees who would not be allowed to return when the lockout was supposed to be lifted on November 29.

Management claims the lockout was in response to ongoing industrial action that had slowed production. One hundred and thirty contract workers at the factory were dismissed earlier this month as punishment for protesting over low wages.

The locked-out workers established a 24-hour protest outside the Suzlon Special Economic Zone (SEZ) after a court order prohibited any protest within one kilometre of the plant.

Fearing an escalation of the dispute, factory management and officials from the SEZ met with the workers on November 17. Workers ended the protest after accepting a vague promise that the factory would be

reopened, but management now claims it needs permission from the board of directors before that occurs.

### **Tamil Nadu village health workers protest**

Almost 200 contract village health workers demonstrated on Directorate of Public Health premises in Teynampet on November 16 over 20 demands. Members of the Tamil Nadu Village Health Nurses Association, which covers 10,500 nurses at health centres throughout the state, want better working conditions and the reimbursement of job-related expenses.

Nurses are also demanding permanent jobs, timescale salaries and eight-hour work shifts. They have complained about excessive workloads, 12-hour shifts and having to travel long distances between clients.

### **Bengaluru electronics workers fight factory closure**

Over 70 workers from the electronics parts manufacturer, OEN India, in Bengaluru, were terminated and the plant permanently closed without notice on November 10.

The mostly female workers discovered their plight that morning, via a note on the factory gate announcing the closure. Some had worked at the factory for over 20 years. Workers are maintaining a protest outside the plant.

The OEN India Employees Union issued a statement accusing management of shutting the factory to avoid an outstanding court order mandating a pay rise. A union spokesman claimed that wage increases, bonuses and promotions should have been implemented six years ago.

### **Bathinda rural health workers continue protest against privatisation**

Close to 100 rural health (anganwadi) workers demonstrated outside the state government finance minister's office in Bathinda on Wednesday over the Punjab government's plans to privatise Anganwadi centres and shift pre-nursery classes to primary schools. Union leaders claim that 52,000 anganwadi workers' and helpers' jobs are at risk.

Protesters said they would hold daily demonstrations until November 30 in line with state-wide protests organised by the All India Anganwadi Association. The rural health workers are demanding that the government recruit them for the pre-primary classes, or revive the anganwadi centres by releasing funds for extra staffing and qualifications.

### **Uttarkhand municipal workers on strike**

More than 1,000 Dehradun Municipal Corporation (DMC) workers in Uttarkhand began an indefinite strike on Tuesday to demand a salary increase included in the seventh pay commission recommendations. All services were affected, including garbage collection, house tax collection and the issuing of birth and death certificates.

Workers pointed out that although other government employees across the state were receiving pay rises stipulated by the commission, the DMC was stalling. They said they would not return to work until the issue was resolved.

#### **Gurugram sanitation workers protest**

Sanitation workers from the Municipal Corporation of Gurugram (MCG), Haryana demonstrated outside the MCG building on Tuesday to demand safety equipment. The protest was sparked by the death of three workers last month, while they were cleaning a sewerage line.

The workers demanded masks, gloves, and boots, and compensation for the families of the dead workers. They have threatened indefinite strike action if their demands are not met within 15 days.

#### **Bengaluru jail inmates protest over non-payment of wages**

About 50 inmates at the Bengaluru Central Jail protested on November 20 over the non-payment of wages for the past six months. Inmates who work while in prison are entitled to a wage. Skilled workers are supposed to be paid 50 rupees (77 US cents) per day and unskilled 40 rupees.

The protesting prisoners complained that without this daily wage they could not support their families. They also called for the reinstatement of parole facilities.

#### **Pakistan: Punjab government clerks strike**

Tens of thousands of All Pakistan Clerks Association (APCA)-Punjab members stopped work across the province on November 15 over several outstanding demands.

The strikers want payment of a utility allowance, job permanency for contract workers, upgrades, restoration of abolished posts in the departments of health, education and local government and other demands.

#### **FATA poverty-survey workers demand wages**

Workers conducting a poverty survey in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) demonstrated in Ghalanai on November 17 for two months' unpaid wages. The survey is part of the Benazir Income Support Program for the "eradication of poverty." The workers are employed by the Mohmand Agency, a non-government organisation (NGO).

Demonstrators said that the NGO closed its offices when they asked for their outstanding pay. They have also accused the income support program of rejecting applications from 20,000 needy families.

#### **Punjab college professors and lecturers continue protest**

Punjab Professors and Lecturers Association (PPLA) members at government colleges are maintaining a protest which began on November 6 against restrictions on leave, teacher monitoring and for a pay-scale upgrade and timely promotions. They began limited strike action on November 12 by observing a daily one-hour boycott of classes.

The Punjab government has banned teachers from taking casual leave, except where there has been the death of a close relative. Teachers are also monitored over their class attendance, punctuality, discipline and performances. The new measures impact over 19,000 teachers across 560 colleges in Punjab.

The PPLA has planned a demonstration outside the Civil Secretariat in Lahore on November 29 if the government continues to ignore their demands.

#### **Australian federal court workers strike**

Hundreds of staff at the Federal, Family and Federal Circuit courts and the National Native Title Tribunal held rolling half-day strikes from November 13 to 17 over the federal government's proposed enterprise

agreement (EA). Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) members have held two strikes over the issue since October 20. Courts in all state capital cities and large regional centres were impacted.

According to the CPSU, the Liberal-National government wants to cut entitlements and conditions and increase the working day in return for a 1 percent annual pay increase, which is well below inflation. The court workers have not had a wage rise since 2013 and are adamant that they will not accept cuts to existing conditions. Some 90 percent of CPSU members voted against the proposed EA.

The CPSU wants the dispute heard in the Fair Work Commission, the federal industrial court, as a means of isolating these workers.

#### **CSIRO deep space communication workers strike**

More than 70 employees at the Canberra Deep Space Communication Complex stopped work for an hour at 2.20 p.m. on Wednesday in protest over a proposed enterprise agreement. The workers are opposing management attempts to reduce their pay and conditions.

The centre, which monitors 30 NASA spacecraft in a daily rotation system with facilities in California and Spain, is managed and operated by the CSIRO. It is fully funded by the US as part of the NASA Deep Space Network.

The industrial action involved members of the Electrical Trades Union, Professionals Australia and the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, who included operational, engineering and administrative staff.

#### **Papua New Guinea port workers strike**

More than 1,000 port workers from Port Moresby and Lae in Papua New Guinea (PNG) walked off the job for 48 hours on Monday, after the government refused to address concerns over job security. It followed the awarding of stevedoring contracts to Philippines-based International Container Terminal Services Inc. (ICTSI).

PNG Transport and Maritime Workers Union members fear that ICTSI, which will be servicing the country's international ports, will axe their jobs. A union spokesman claimed that ICTSI plans to employ 40 Filipino workers in Port Moresby and Lae, and possibly Indonesian workers, to replace sacked PNG maritime employees.

The government and PNG Ports Corporation has attempted to appease the maritime workers by offering to transition locally-affected communities into an equity ownership deal with terminal operating companies.

#### **Tahiti: Air France flight attendants strike enters third week**

Air services in French Polynesia remain restricted after Air France flight attendants stationed in Tahiti began strike action on November 11. Air France has hired aircraft from Air Tahiti Nui and Hi Fly, a Portuguese carrier, to break the strike.

The stoppage began after the breakdown of talks between the carrier and the UFSA-UNSA, the flight attendants union, on a collective agreement and changes to the distribution of wages. While negotiations between the union and the carrier resumed on Friday, the media has reported that more than a dozen work-related issues remained to be resolved.

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