



ASIA PACIFIC NEWS

PUBLIC SERVICES INTERNATIONAL

April 2012

Asia Pacific Regional Organisation

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Massive general strike by workers in India

PSI affiliated union members in India were among more than 10 million workers who participated in a one day general strike on 28 February 2012. Eleven national trade union centrals backed the strike, which affected the functioning of many sectors including electricity, insurance, municipal functions, public sector banks, ports, road transport, mining and aviation. The common demands were: gaining the same rights and protections for temporary and contract workers as that for permanent workers, raising and extending the minimum wage, resisting the attacks on trade unions, stopping price rises, creation of a national social security fund, better pensions, and combating corruption. Read more about the strike at: <http://tiny.cc/nv9qbw> or listen to the news from RadioLabour: <http://tiny.cc/6w9qbw>

Pakistan: Union fights to protect public power

On 4 March 2012, leaders of the Pakistan Wapda Hydro Electric Labour Union threatened to suspend the supply of electricity in Sindh in the first phase of their protest if the government does not shelve plans to privatise Wapda, end load-shedding and bring down the power tariff. Union president Abdul Latif Nizamani, addressing a gathering of workers, said the negotiations held with the government showed that it did not honour its promises. He charged the government with not providing coal, gas and oil to its own power houses, thereby creating an artificial shortfall of electricity in order to justify the purchase of much more expensive electricity from private power houses "to earn commission." He urged the government not to destroy Wapda to meet demands by the IMF and the World Bank. General secretary Khurshid Ahmed said the government was purchasing a unit of electricity for Rs40 to Rs50 from a Turkish company's power house based in Karachi and Wapda was selling the same unit for Rs8 to Rs10. "How can this organisation be run? It is purchasing power on cash and selling it on credit," he said. He demanded that the government revoke agreements for purchasing expensive power and upgrade Wapda's power houses to provide inexpensive power to people. Further information, please see: <http://tiny.cc/j69qbw>

Implementing the right to water in a green economy

Water justice activists, including PSI unions, have successfully pushed the human right to water and sanitation (RTW) onto the global agenda. The UN General Assembly Resolution 64/292 of 2010 has set the standard for government obligations in ensuring universal access. Many national campaigns insist that governments adopt RTW and implement universal access to water and sanitation. Unions are working with a broad range of allies at the global, regional, national and local levels. Despite this progress, a number of countries and lobby groups continue to push a market-focused agenda. Further information, please see: <http://tiny.cc/zharbw> and read the PSI Statement on World Water Day 2012: <http://tiny.cc/kjarbw>

Public Services International is a global union federation representing 20 million members in 150 countries. AP News is published and electronically distributed every two months by Public Services International Asia and Pacific Regional Organisation (PSI APRO). Please send comments and contributions to: indah.budiarti@world-psi.org or mike.ingpen@psa.org.nz

Tonga: Public servants and police workers fight for continued access to their retirement funds if dismissed from work



The Tonga Cabinet, on 3 March 2012, approved a recommendation by the Public Service Association (PSA) to ensure that public servants and police workers in Tonga do not lose access to their retirement funds if dismissed from work. Sister Mele Amanaki, PSA General Secretary, said “the PSA made the petition to Cabinet as a result of their negotiation with the Retirement Fund Board (RFB) for 50% of their members’ contribution to be cashed out to them to assist them to pay their debts during the time of financial crisis.”

The RFB had only allowed the 50% to be paid directly to the members’ loans in the RFB, their loans from commercial banks (after subtracting the loan balance in the RFB) and school fees upon presentation of invoices from schools. The PSA said this position by the RFB disadvantaged approximately 80% of the public servants and police workers in the lower levels in government because most of them can only obtain loans from small and private financial institutions and/or credit accounts in stores. In view of the recommendation approved by the Cabinet, the PSA is asking the RFB to follow through by allowing members to cash out their 50% to help pay their debts. The PSA is holding meetings with an RFB Committee and the government to discuss the issue. If they do not support PSA’s demands, the Association will take further action. For more information, please contact PSA General Secretary: psa_secretary@yahoo.co.nz

Philippines: Trade unions face violence and intimidation

ITUC has released a report on core labour standards in Philippines that spotlights an environment of violence and intimidation against trade unions – including harassment, dismissals, false criminal charges, arrests, threats and even murder. The authorities often fail to bring the assassins and those who order the murders to justice. The report also finds frequent use of anti-union practices by employers and state authorities, including impeding union elections, setting up yellow unions, and refusing regularisation of workers. The full report is available at <http://tiny.cc/4kfrbw>

Big business pockets billions of dollars in consulting fees while public sector jobs and services are cut in Australia

The Community and Public Sector Union is calling on the Australian government to crack down on spending on consultants after it was revealed more than \$2 billion has been pocketed by firms such as KPMG, PriceWaterhouseCoopers and Ernst & Young over the past four years. The revelation came as public sector agencies cut both jobs and services as part of a \$2.2 billion government austerity drive. “I think most Australians would be outraged that such a huge amount of taxpayers’ money is going to a handful of high-flying, multi-national companies at the same time as essential frontline services and jobs are disappearing,” said CPSU National Secretary Nadine Flood. “These big firms first got their claws into government during the Howard years. Now, with such huge amounts of money at stake, you can see why they want to keep their good thing going. The federal government appears to have developed a long-term dependence on expensive contractors to do work much of which could - and should - be done in-house. The government knows it has skill gaps and shortages in key areas. Now is the time to get serious about addressing them. Surely it’s smarter in the long term to invest in and develop our own people rather than continue to be fleeced by the big end of town.” For more information, please see: <http://tiny.cc/09grbw>

PSI celebrates International Women’s Day 2012



On International Women’s Day (IWD), 8 March 2012, Public Services International recognised and applauded the work of women trade unionists, who are always at the very heart of our struggle for human and labour rights and equality. PSI expressed solidarity with our sisters who place themselves on the front line, delivering vital public services to the most vulnerable in our communities. PSI called on governments to recognise their contribution and to guarantee, respect and strengthen their human and trade union rights. To read PSI’s 2012 IWD Statement, please see: <http://tiny.cc/snhrbw>

Japan disaster one year on: remembering the earthquake and tsunami victims

On 11 March 2012 a minute of silence was observed across Japan to remember the victims of the earthquake and tsunami which killed thousands and left communities devastated. The PSI General Secretary and the Asia Pacific Regional Secretary were in Tokyo for a meeting of the PSI Sub-Regional Advisory Committee for East Asia. Together with PSI Japan affiliates, committee members bowed their heads in silence and prayer to remember the people who passed away, and the thousands who suffered personal tragedies in the disaster.

PSIRU: Public financing of water and sanitation

A new publication by the Public Services International Research Unit reveals that private sector investments in water and sanitation have been negligible, whether in OECD or in developing countries. Public finance and public management is responsible for the vast majority of new connections in the past 20 years, despite privatisation pressures from the development banks and OECD countries. To read the full report, please see: <http://tiny.cc/zb5sbw>

Frozen in time: Gender pay gap remains unchanged for 10 years



A new report from the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) reveals that worldwide, women are paid an average of 18% less than their male counterparts at work. The report, “Frozen in time: Gender pay gap unchanged for 10 years,” was released on the eve of International Women’s Day and looks at women’s wages in 43 countries.

The extensive report finds that: Asia has greatest wage difference between men and women, a new industry ranking shows that domestic workers face the largest gender pay gap, and women in unionised sectors are less likely to be discriminated against.

Japan: Continuing employment until age 65



On March 9, the Japanese government submitted a bill to amend the Act Concerning Stabilization of Employment of Older Persons to the National Diet. It had previously received approval at a cabinet meeting. From the perspective of ensuring a linkage between employment and pensions, the amendment is aimed at realizing a society in which all people who wish to do so can continue working until 65 years of age. The bill is based on a report submitted by the government's Labour Policy Council, a tripartite panel consisting of representatives of labour, management, and public interests. The current law stipulates that the mandatory retirement age is 60 years or over and obliges employers to guarantee employment until 65 by lifting the retirement age, introducing continued employment schemes, or taking other steps.

The reality, however, is that most companies have introduced a continued employment scheme under which employees retire when they reach the age of 60 and then are re-employed by the company from the following day. In the case of re-employment, wages after the age of 60 often drop by as much as 20% to 40%. The main thrust of the proposed amendment is to abolish a clause in continued employment schemes which says that “the setting of criteria for eligible persons shall be conducted through a labour-management agreement.” Because of this clause, there are many people aged 60 or over who cannot work, even though they wish to do so, because they do not meet the set criteria. After abolition of this clause, it will become possible for people who wish to do so to continue working until the age of 65. With the aging of society, the government has already decided to increase the age at which people can begin receiving pension benefits in phases starting April 2013. To read the report, please see: <http://tiny.cc/x57sbw>

Sponsor a participant to the PSI World Congress



Following a proposal made by the Nordic constituency, the PSI Executive Board (per EB-141 meeting 23-25 November 2011 in Geneva, Switzerland) has decided to establish a special fund for our next World Congress, which will be held in Durban, South Africa, 27-30 November 2012. This Congress Sponsorship Fund will be used exclusively to strengthen participation of PSI affiliates from countries that are below the 100% index which is applied for PSI affiliation fee calculations. This Congress Sponsorship Fund is aimed at ensuring more equity, diversity and democracy in representation at Congress. It will also enable PSI to strengthen the participation of young people and women at a Congress that takes place in the midst of unprecedented economic and financial crises.

PSI appeals to our affiliates, where possible, to make a gesture of solidarity and fund or co-fund a delegate from a member union that might be unable to afford participation. According to PSI calculations, the average participation of a fully-sponsored delegate will cost about 2,800€. Please check the PSI website for more details: <http://tiny.cc/1fctbw>

New Zealand: Modern Public Services



“Modern Public Services” is a series of policy papers which discuss the challenges facing the state, including ways to give citizens more control over policy-making, encouraging public servants to be more innovative, and restructuring the laws and practices that govern the public service. The policy papers, prepared by the New Zealand Public Service Association, are available at: <http://tiny.cc/4metbw>

PSI Japan Council donates to ASHINAGA



The PSI Japan Council has decided to give the donation from PSI AID-Japan to an NGO in Japan whose name is “ASHINAGA.” Hideaki Tokunaga, JICHIRO President, made the presentation to the Executive Director, Kazuhiko Yoshida (photo: left).

Ashinaga is a non-profit educational foundation headquartered in Tokyo. It provides financial and psychological assistance in support of high school and higher education for children who have lost one or both parents, or children who have a parent with a serious disability resulting from events such as illness, accident, disaster, or war. For more information, please contact PSI East Asia Sub-regional Secretary: inagaki@jichiro.gr.jp

KGEU 10 year anniversary: Move forward together



The Korean Government Employees' Union (KGEU) celebrated its 10th anniversary at a ceremony on 24 March. “We will do our best to resolve recognition of KGEU and win reinstatement of dismissed or disciplined workers this year,” said KGEU.

“I am very proud of our past 10 years, which are a history of tears and a long road for hope. We will take another big step to write a new history of our society with a strong struggle for recognition of KGEU and reinstatement of dismissed or disciplined workers,” said Kim, Jungnam, the 6th president of KGEU.

On the day before the ceremony, KGEU held a joint press conference with KCTU, KPTU, PSI and NSO to urge Korea to ratify ILO Core conventions and recognise KGEU. More info, please contact Ms. Sunghee Oh, KGEU International Relations: kgeu.inter@gmail.com