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INDIA

MORE THAN ONE MILLION PUBLIC SECTOR WORKERS STRIKE

February 24 more than one million government employees across India stopped work to protest against a Supreme Court order banning their right to strike. Due to national and international pressure, 100,000 employees dismissed for taking industrial action in 2003 were reinstated (10 February). The workers involved in the strike action were calling on the Government of India to recognise the fundamental right for all workers to strike.

SRI LANKA

HEALTH FAST ENDS

The two-week long protest fast by Government health workers has ended with the Health Ministry issuing an official circular meeting the demands of the Health Services Trade Union Alliance (HSTUA). The HSTUA launched a hunger strike which later advanced to a death fast to force the health authorities to rectify health sector salary anomalies. Immediately following the calling off of the strike, the fasting health workers were rushed to hospital in ambulances in order to carry out the necessary medical checks to ensure that they were in good health. They were taken in a convoy of ambulances from the Ministry premises to the Colombo National Hospital to the loud cheers of health workers who gathered outside the Ministry.

RAIL STRIKE ENDS

The 11-day-old railway strike has ended. The decision was announced at a joint media conference at the Gramodaya centre, attended by Transport Minister Tilak Marapana and Railway Trade Union leaders. It was decided to call off the strike following a pledge by the Government that the Railways Department will be allowed to function for an interim period of two years. During this period, the Railways Authority will have no powers over the Railways Department's Head. Minister Marapana also promised not to take any disciplinary action against the 17,500 railway workers who went on strike on January 26. The Government has promised to take steps through the Parliament to legalise the new powers within three months. Both parties have also agreed to set up a joint administrative committee in the Railways Department comprising both Government and Trade Union members. The trade union representatives, however, warned that they would resort to another nationwide strike if the Government fails to keep their promises. Over 30 trade unions representing engine drivers, railway guards, locomotive engine assistant drivers, technicians, train controllers and clerks joined in the strike.

INDONESIA

EMPLOYERS, TRADE UNIONS OPPOSE SOCIAL SECURITY BILL

Employers and workers joined forces on 12 February to oppose the bill on national social security (SJSN) which they said would cause legal uncertainty and confusion among the public.

The opposition was expressed in a bipartite meeting between the Indonesian Employers Association (Apindo) and major labour unions, including the All-Indonesian Workers Union Federation (FSPSI), the Indonesian Prosperity Trade Union Federation (FSBSI) and the New Indonesian Labor Union Federation (Gaspermindo Baru). Apindo deputy chairman Hasanuddin said the government and the House of Representatives should drop the bill because it had created confusion among employers and workers and overlapped with existing laws on social security programs for workers, civil servants and servicemen.

"We oppose the bill because the stake-holders, in particular Apindo and labour unions, were not involved in preparing it and that is why its submission by the government to the House

has created confusion among us," he said, adding that the government should not make any legislation unilaterally without consultation with the relevant stakeholders.

The government proposed the mandatory social security system to provide social security protection for all 230 million people since existing insurance schemes only cover 20 percent of the population.

FRENCH POLYNESIA MORE AUTONOMY

The French parliament has approved a statute giving French Polynesia new powers and a measure of autonomy. The two chambers of the French legislature approved a text that was finalised by a joint committee. Under the new statute, French Polynesia will be given more powers to decide labour and land issues, as well as powers over civil aviation, and in representing itself overseas. France will retain control over money supply and defence. An opposition Member of Parliament in the territorial assembly, Loic Brigato, is critical of the new statute, saying it gives the government led by Gaston Flosse too much power. "This will create a sort of high council," he said. "This high council will have the power to propose laws. Laws normally come from the territorial assembly." An appeal has reportedly been lodged with the French constitutional council in Paris over the autonomy statute for French Polynesia that was adopted by the legislature in late January. This was announced by Jean-Claude Gaudin who is a senator of the UMP party. The news agency AFP reports Gaudin as saying the move is backed by about 60 legislators. For the statute to come into effect, it must be signed by the constitutional council. The new autonomy statute was opposed in parliament by the Socialist Party and some members of French Polynesia's assembly who claim the change gives too much power to the territorial president.

FIJI

LABOUR MINISTER THREATENS THE USE OF CASUAL WORKERS TO BREAK THE STRIKE

Fiji's labour minister, Kenneth Zinck, has vowed to use casual workers in a bid to overcome a threatened dock strike. The dockworkers, who are members of the Fiji Public Service Association (PSI Affiliate), have given 28 days' strike notice to the Ports Authority after talks over pay and other conditions ended in a deadlock last week.

NURSES' DEATHS PROMPT STUDY

The Fiji Nursing Association's (FNA) (PSI Affiliate) Education and Research Committee has begun a study to find out the health risks to nurses in their working environment. This follows concerns by Association members on the number of deaths of nursing staff. FNA General Secretary, Kuini Lutua confirms that three nurses have so far died of cancer this year while another nurse died of hypertension. Last year two nurses also died of cancer. Kuini adds that the members also experience stressful situations due to the shortage of nurses.

CORRECTION TO THE AP NEWS JANUARY 2004.

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