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THAILAND

UNIONS UNITED AGAINST PRIVATISATION

In their unprecedented anti-privatisation campaign in Thailand, unions have demonstrated non-stop since 23 February against the privatisation of the national electricity company EGAT. Private sector unions, NGOs, academics and public managers are also supporting the campaign. The Thaksin government has tried unsuccessfully to use scare tactics against the unions, warning that the stock market will crash if they don't privatise, that Thailand won't be able to afford new investment in electricity generation, that only by privatising will the government be able to set up an independent regulator to control prices! And finally, the government has banned PSI Utilities Officer from speaking to the demonstrators, a warning that the unions will ignore.

The government then tried to pay off the workers, offering them a special deal on the shares of EGAT, and regulating the share allocation such that all Thai citizens can buy EGAT stock (in response to the previous privatisations, where the vast majority of shares went to Thaksin insiders and to wealthy foreign investors). The unions refused the offer and continue to insist that the issue of privatisation go to a national referendum, which the government is too scared to hold, especially with national elections less than one year away.

NEPAL

VIOLATION OF TRADE UNION RIGHTS IN NEPAL

The Government of Nepal Ministry of Internal Affairs has imposed the Essential Service Act indefinitely. The services in which strikes have been prohibited include postal, telegraph and telephone services, transport services by air, land or water, guarding, communications, services, electricity, drinking water, hotels, motels, restaurants and resorts, hospitals and health centers, constructions and banking sectors.

JAPAN

MEETING BETWEEN PSI -JC AND MHLW OVER GENDER DISCRIMINATION UNDER THE THEME, "HEALTH IS A HUMAN RIGHT"

On March 8th, International Women's Day, PSI-JC (Public Services International Japan Council) met with the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) to discuss a vision to eliminate gender discrimination including the wage gap between men and women.

The discussion was held under this year's theme of "Health is a Human Right." Nachiko Noda, chair of the Women's Committee (All-Japan Prefectural and Municipal Workers Union) said, "This effort will give us momentum to promptly implement measures and policies that uphold international standards," and gave an overview of actual approaches. She called for the early ratification of ILO Convention 111 (discrimination with respect to employment and occupation) and 183 (maternity protection) and requested that pay equity be included in Article 4 of the Labour Standards Law in relation to already ratified Convention 100 (equal remuneration). Taro Muraki, Director of the International Affairs Division of the MHLW answered, "We are striving for the same goal and want to work to resolve impediments."

PSI is working to improve health workers treatments under the theme of "Health is a Human Right," particularly requesting pay equity and the improvement of wages and working conditions since work by women in the health sector is undervalued.

KOREA

GOVERNMENT TO ALLOW CIVIL SERVANTS' UNION

The government will this year push for legislation that would allow the nation's civil servants to form a trade union, the Ministry of Labour in a report to President Roh Moo-hyun.

The Labour Ministry said it has decided to come up with a bill on labour rights of public servants after the April 15 general elections. Labour Minister Kim Dae-hwan reported the legislation plan to the president. The decision comes as the International Labour Organisation (ILO) recommended that the South Korean government should guarantee full labour rights for its employees. South Korea is one of two ILO members, and the only country of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), that has yet to allow the basic labour rights of government employees, including the rights to organise and to take collective action.

A piece of legislation passed in November 2002 under the Kim Dae-jung administration allowed public servants to organise an association to protect their interests. However, government workers are still banned from setting up their own labour union, taking collective action or concluding negotiations. In addition to the bill on labour rights for government employees, the ministry decided to push for two different legislations to provide more job security and a pension plan for the nation's workers.

NEW ZEALAND

PUBLIC SERVICES ASSOCIATION HAS RECOGNITION OF ITS PAY AND EMPLOYMENT EQUITY CAMPAIGN

Thirty years after the Equal Pay Act made pay discrimination illegal, women's pay still lags well behind, with average earnings only 84% of men's. For Maori and Pacific women, the pay gap is even larger. The NZPSA has incorporated a pay and employment equity agenda into their strategic plan, are developing a bargaining strategy, and aiming for a five-year time span for achieving pay and employment equity. It called for the Government to set

up a Taskforce to develop a five-year plan of action aimed at closing the gender pay gap. The Government set up this Taskforce in May 2003 to progress the issue of pay and employment equity in the public service and health and education sectors. The Taskforce was charged with reporting back to the Government by March 1, 2004 with a five-year plan of action. The NZPSA is one of the unions, which have been actively involved in the work of the Taskforce, and is one of the NZCTU representatives on the Taskforce itself. Unions have submitted a significant amount of material to the Taskforce, including data on bargaining outcomes, and members' experiences of and views on pay and employment inequities in their particular occupations and sectors. The report and five-year plan of action are now with ministers, and the Government will consider and respond to the report and plan. Progress report in the next Asia & Pacific News.

For more information on the NZPSA Campaign see: www.psa.org.nz

PHILIPPINES

UNIONS AND GOVERNMENT SIGN BENEFITS AGREEMENT

Public sector unions in the Philippines signed a Memorandum of Understanding for Quality Public Services and Performance with the government on 22 March, after several months of negotiations and consultations. PSI affiliate PSLINK led the negotiations together with other independent unions. Annie Enriquez-Geron, PSLINK General Secretary and PSI Vice -President, who was one of the signatories to the agreement, said that it was "a milestone for public sector unions, not only because we were able to negotiate for improved working conditions for government employees, but because this also contains commitments for unions on what we will do to contribute to public service delivery." The package includes a salary increase of at least 10%, the creation of a legal fund to provide protection and legal assistance to government employees involved in whistle-blowing cases, and over 25 other provisions.

CORRECTION TO THE FEBRUARY ASIA PACIFIC NEWS

INDIA

In the last edition of the AP News it was quoted that 1 million workers in India took strike action on 24 February; the true figure was closer to 30 million workers. My apologies to the 29 million workers who I did not mention and my congratulations to all 30 million who took a stand for workers rights in India.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE ASIA PACIFIC NEWS

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