

Conflict Weekly

An initiative by NIAS-IPRI and KAS India Office

A brief review of conflict and peace processes across the world

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Workers strike in the UK

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(Rail, maritime and transport workers union members observe a strike.
Image Source: Reuters/Henry Nicholls/abc.net.au)

The UK: Conservative party put to test as worker strikes continue

In the news

On 13 December, 40,000 workers of the National Union of Rail, Maritime, and Transport (RMT) along with 14 train operating companies, staged a 48-hour walkout. The strikes were held in England, Scotland, and Wales demanding an increase in pay on par with the rising cost of living and better working conditions. Network Rail which owns 50 per cent of the UK's railway infrastructure, announced the shutdown of railway services during the strike days. Along with the rail workers, teachers, postal workers, border force officers, ambulance staff from the Unison, GMB unions, nurses, university staff, baggage handlers, driving examiners, and bus drivers from different labour unions announced to hold strikes through December and January.

On 13 December, in a firm response to these strikes, UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said that the government will not be able to shift its position on a pay rise. He said: "While the government will do all we can to minimise disruption, the only way we can stop it completely is by unions going back around the table and calling off these strikes." According to Chancellor of the Exchequer Jeremy Hunt: "Any action that risks embedding high prices into our economy will only prolong the pain for everyone, and stunt any prospect of long-term economic growth."

Issues at large

First, the nature of the strikes. This can be viewed at three levels. At the geographic and industry level, the strikes which began in June 2022 have been held across England, Wales, London, and Scotland by the RMT workers. This has now spilt over to workers from other critical sectors such as health (non-life-threatening division), education, and aviation. At the workers' level, although the striking group was predominantly blue-collar, to begin with, it has now come to include white-collar workers such as civil servants, junior doctors, teachers, university staff, and nurses. In terms of the total working days lost as per the data from the Office for National Statistics, the private sector has been impacted the most with a loss of 369 days, the highest since November 1996. At the demand level, it has increased beyond the initial call for a pay rise to better working conditions, job security, and more investments in infrastructure.

Second, reasons behind the strike. One, the clash between the demand for a pay increase and the government's hold on public spending and its plan to increase taxes is seen as the major trigger behind the strikes. Two, the participation of the white-collar employees from administration, health care, schools, and universities was due to budget cuts resulting in a lack of beds, home health aides, shortage in staff to attend backlogs and prevented delays in healthcare, schools, and universities. Although the current allocated budget and existing reserve in 2022 will keep the educational institution afloat, sustaining the same for the next year remains to be seen.

Third, government response. The UK government has not been reluctant, however, prioritising the economic pressure and addressing the demands for a pay rise has gone slow. Thus far, the government's response to the strikes in December has not been in the favour of the labour unions from railways, baggage handlers, universities, public and commercial services, and bus drivers. The governments in England and Wales have given an average rise of 4.75 per cent to NHS (National Health Service) staff, up to nine per cent to the royal mail workers, and 6.85 per cent to the lowest-paid category of teachers. Since the offered pay rise does not match the inflation, it has been rejected by the workers, furthering the chaos inside the country. Further, the government has followed stricter rules such as a strike can be organised only if a majority in

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the union agree through an organized vote. The restrictions also apply to certain professionals such as nurses (who will not risk the immediate health of patients), ambulance workers, and firefighters, while police officers are not allowed to strike. The government is expected to propose tougher rules in the coming weeks.

In perspective

First, a troubled public service atmosphere. The increasing strikes amongst the railway, airport baggage, university, and to some extent the NHS staff can disrupt key services and lead to public resentment. Increasing energy prices, cost of living, and cutting down on public service will reduce the public's support for the conservative party.

Second, a wait-and-watch game for Sunak's administration. Worker strikes are nothing new in the UK since the 17th-century industrial action is well known amongst the worker groups, but the government's response to such strikes has varied over time. Taking the 1978 "Winter of Discontent" period as an example, Harold Wilson's Labour Party failed to address the pay rise demand of the workers which triggered more strikes and no concrete decision. This eventually led to the Margaret Thatcher administration (Conservative) to introduce rules to control the power of trade unions in the 1980s which resulted in silencing the miner's strikes who returned to work without any negotiation. Similarly, Sunak's administration can also be expected to wait and watch the strikes weaken, but it is going to be a long wait.

Also, from around the world

Avishka Ashok, Sai Pranav, Joel Jacob, Sethuraman N, Akriti Sharma, Bhoomika Sesharaj, Rashmi Ramesh, Apoorva Sudhakar, Anu Maria Joseph, Padmashree Anandhan, Harini Madhusudan, Madhura Mahesh and Ankit Singh

East and Southeast Asia

China: Hong Kong demands Google to remove protest anthem from search results

On 13 December, Hong Kong's Chief Executive John Lee announced that he would urge Google to remove the Hong Kong protest anthem from the search engine and instead show the Chinese national anthem. Google's parent company Alphabet, however, rejected the appeal. Lee's push to replace the protest anthem comes after it was played at an international rugby event in South Korea and a powerlifting event in Dubai.

Taiwan: China send record number of nuclear bombers in 24-hour period

On 13 December, Taiwan's Defense Ministry reported that the Chinese PLA had sent a record number of nuclear capable aircraft into its air defence identification zone (ADIZ). A total of 21 aircraft entered the ADIZ within 24 hours, of which 18 were nuclear-capable H-6 bomber aircraft. The incursion is considered to be the largest in a 24-hour period since China began its military aggression in 2020. The action also comes after China banned another set of imports from Taiwan, worsening the economic crisis in the country.

North Korea: The EU sanctions Pyongyang's nuclear development enablers

On 13 December, the EU sanctioned eight individuals and four entities for unlawfully financing and supporting North Korea's nuclear and missile tests. North Korea's Rocket Industry along with its subsidiary trading company, Korean Rounsan Trading Corporation, were among the entities under sanctions. The sanctions were imposed following North Korea's recent development in missile and nuclear technology violating the UNSC resolution.

Australia: Gunfight kills six people in Queensland

On 12 December, six people including two police officers were shot dead in a gunfight at a remote property in Wieambilla, 300 kilometres northwest of Brisbane in Queensland. The police issued an emergency declaration under Public Safety Preservation Act and quarantined the nearby area, warning residents to stay inside. Sixteen specialist police officers and PolAir besieged the property and two men and a woman, and the three perpetrators were shot dead. Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said that the incident shocked the entire country. This was the first major gun violence since gun laws were introduced in Australia in 1996.

South Asia

India-China: Clashes reported at Arunachal Pradesh border

On 9 December, Indian soldiers were injured in a clash with the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in Yangste, along the Line of Actual Control in Arunachal Pradesh. According to The Hindu, the Indian Army said: "On December 09, 2022, People's Liberation Army (PLA) troops contacted the LAC in Tawang sector, which was contested by own troops in a firm and resolute manner. This face-off led to minor injuries to a few personnel from both sides. Both sides immediately disengaged from the area." A PLA Senior Colonel said that they were conducting a regular patrol in the Dongzhang area when the Indian Army blocked them.

Bangladesh: Jamiat-e-Islami leader arrested as anti-government protests increase in the country

On 13 December, the leader of the Jamiat-e-Islami (JeI) or the Bangladesh Islamic Assembly

Shafiqur Rehman was arrested after the party joined the opposition's rally demanding the resignation of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Party Secretary General Maulana ATM Mausum said that the JeI "vehemently condemns" the arrest and that they want the chief's "immediate" release. This arrest preceded the party's previous trials and criminal vindication against the current government and maintained that the country does not "believe" in democracy and that the BNP's demands are in line with their political actions. The party also announced that they would hold joint rallies with the Bangladesh Nationlist Party (BNP) in the coming days.

Sri Lanka: Cyclone Mandous kills three, damages many houses

On 9 December, the Disaster Management Centre said that three people died and more than 13,000 houses were damaged in a landfall by Cyclone Mandous. The Meteorological Department warned of increasing waves from 2.5 metres to 3.5 metres in the offshore waters from Kankesanturai to Batticaloa through Trincomalee and up to 2.0 metres to 2.5 metres from Galle to Batticaloa through Hambantota and Pottuvil.

Maldives: Health Minister call for awareness among citizens on high risk of HIV infection

On 10 December, Maldives' Health Minister Ahmed Naseem, observing World AIDS day, said that even though Maldives has few HIV patients, numerous people are at the risk of getting affected by HIV. Naseem said that the Government would engage in diagnosis and facilitate treatment for the infected citizens. The Health Protection Agency report stated that there are 22 Maldivian AIDS patients diagnosed in December 2022. The Ministry of Health said that the main motive of celebrating World AIDS Day is to protect Maldives from HIV, raise awareness and to help prevent risk factors. Meanwhile, the President Office Special Advisor on Social Policies launched a national strategic plan on HIV, Hepatitis and STIs.

Central Asia, Middle East, and Africa

Syria: US holds raids against the Islamic State

On 11 December, the US Central Command (CENTCOM) issued a statement that the forces "conducted a successful helicopter raid in eastern Syria at 2:57am (23:57 GMT)... killing two ISIS officials." The statement however, did not mention the specific location of the overnight operation. The CENTCOM's initial assessment confirmed that the raid caused no civilian casualties.

Iran: Public execution of a protestor

On 12 December, Iranian judiciary's news website announced that Majidreza Rahnavard, a protestor convicted of killing two members of the security forces was publicly executed in an unidentified location in Mashhad. The judiciary claimed that Rahnavard "waged war against God" and carried out a terrorist act against two Basij (a para-military force affiliated with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)) members on 17 November.

Chad: 27 migrants found dead in desert

On 13 December, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) said 27 migrants, including four children, had been found dead in a desert in Chad; the IOM said the migrants died of thirst after the truck they were travelling in from west-central Chad broke down. The IOM said that in the last eight years, 5,600 people have either died or gone missing while crossing the Sahara Desert to north African countries like Libya, which serve as a transit to Europe through the Mediterranean Sea.

South Sudan: Nearly 40,000 people displaced in Upper Nile, says UN

On 12 December, the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said

that nearly 40,000 people have been displaced following the renewed fighting in Upper Nile. It added that the increasing violence is hampering humanitarian response, while thousands are living in dire conditions and in need of urgent humanitarian assistance. The fighting between the national army and the Maiwut opposition forces had resumed in November.⁶

Somalia: IPC warns of famine in early 2023

On 13 December, the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) assessment said that Somalia narrowly avoided a full-scale famine this year. It added that avoiding famine doesn't mean avoiding misery, hunger, and deaths and that millions of people living in worse humanitarian conditions would triple in 2023. This means over 700,000 people will face dire hunger unless timely assistance is provided. It further added, if the dire condition continues, famine could be declared as early as April 2023.

Democratic Republic of the Congo: Floods claim over 120 lives in Kinshasa

On 14 December, BBC reported that over 120 people had been killed in the floods and landslides in the capital city of Kinshasa. Major roads, including the N1 highway connecting Kinshasa to the Matadi port, are submerged. On 13 December, Prime Minister Jean-Michel Sama Lukonde visited the affected areas and said the search for more bodies was continuing. Meanwhile, President Félix Tshisekedi who is in Washington for the US-African Union summit said the floods were something that the DRC had been deplored; outlining the impact of climate change, Tshisekedi said: "The DRC is under pressure but unfortunately it's not sufficiently heard or supported."

Europe and the Americas

Europe: IEA report warns of gas shortage in EU

On 12 December, the International Energy Agency (IEA) published a report warning that the EU will face a shortage of 30 billion cubic metres of natural gas in 2023 due to the reduced import of Russian natural gas. To avoid the shortages, the IEA proposed that Europe can invest more to increase energy efficiency, renewables, install heat pumps, boost gas supplies and promote energy saving. The IEA also recommended measures to simplify the permit process for renewables, change tax laws that penalise electrification and expansion of existing energy efficiency programs.

Europe: EU's CSDP mission to fight against armed terrorism in Niger

On 12 December, the European Council approved the creation of a Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) military partnership mission with Niger to combat armed terrorist groups. The CSDP will help Niger contain the threat of armed terrorist groups. The Nigerien Armed Forces' ability will also be bolstered through the partnership. The EU military partnership mission to Niger (EUMPM Niger) will support the creation of the Centre for Training Armed Forces Technicians. The EU will train and advise Nigerien forces on combat terrorism within Niger to ensure peace and security within the region. The estimated cost of the EUMPM Niger is EUR 27.3 million.

Ukraine: UK official reveals the deployment of troops in Ukraine

On 13 December, The Times reported a statement by Lieutenant General Robert Magowan admitting to the UK's conduct of high-risk operations by the Royal Marines during the Ukraine war. The development comes as Moscow has been claiming that NATO's military troops have actively participated in the region; the West had dismissed the claims. While Magowan did not elaborate on the missions carried out by the commandos, his statement marks the first time that the UK has admitted that its troops conducted special operations in Ukraine. About 300

members of the elite Royal Marines unit were sent in April to reestablish the British mission in Kiev. Following this, Magowan wrote in The Globe and Laurel that they are known to have conducted "other discreet operations."

Kosovo: Serbs attacks on police and EULEX

On 11 December, Kosovan Serbs launched a blockade opposing the arrest of a former Kosovan Serb who was part of the police force. The blockade in northern Kosovo led to the forceful closure of two border crossings between Kosovo and Serbia. The Kosovan Police reported that the Kosovan Serbs had opened fire against the police units and had also attacked the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX) with a stun grenade. Both these attacks drew criticism from the EU and NATO with the EU Foreign Policy Chief condemning: "This attack, as well as the attacks on Kosovo Police officers, are unacceptable." EU Chief Diplomat Joseph Borrell condemned the incident: "EU will not tolerate attacks on EULEX Kosovo or use of violent, criminal acts in the north." Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić said that he would be requesting the NATO peacekeeping mission in Kosovo to allow the deployment of Serbian troops and police in Kosovo.

Peru: Thousands protest against the government over the arrest of Pedro Castillo

On 13 December, thousands took to the streets against the arrest and impeachment of former President Pedro Castillo. The two main centres of protest are Lima and Andahuaylas where protesters demanded fresh elections. Peru's ombudsman reported that six people were killed during the protests out of which five were teenagers. In response to the protests, President Dina Boluarte announced that she has tabled a proposal in Congress calling for fresh elections. Defense Minister Alberto Otarola said that the government will be declaring a state of emergency on the highways and added that Peruvian armed forces will protect infrastructure.

Brazil: Bolsonaro supporters protest as electoral results were certified by the electoral court

On 12 December, supporters of Bolsonaro protested near the official residence of the president as the federal electoral court certified the election results declaring President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva the winner. The protests were also sparked by the arrest of indigenous leader José Acácio Serere Xavante on the charge of engaging in anti-democratic activities. Protesters also attacked the federal police headquarters in Brasilia where they reportedly burned down cars and buses. The police responded by firing stun grenades and tear gas.

The US: Biden signs The Respect for Marriage Act Biden

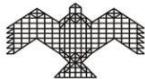
On 13 December, President Joe Biden signed the Respect for Marriage Act. Biden said "This law and the love it defends strike a blow against hate in all its forms." Under the Respect for Marriage Act, same sex marriage will be provided protection; LGBTQ+ allies while celebrating the development, maintained that there is more scope for LGBTQ+ in all social spheres of life than just marriage and claimed legal protection under the Equality Act.

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National Institute of
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About NIAS-International Peace Research Initiative(IPRI)

The International Peace Research Initiative (IPRI), initiated in 2018 at the National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS), is a part of the Conflict Resolution and Peace Research Programme at the School of Conflict and Security Studies.

IPRI undertakes research on various issues relating to peace with special emphasis on radicalisation, sustainable peace, gender roles in peacebuilding and global protest movements. IPRI research are published as briefs, reports and commentary.

About Konrad Adenauer Stiftung

The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) is a political foundation. Established in 1955 as “Society for Christian-Democratic Civic Education,” in 1964, the Foundation proudly took on the name of Konrad Adenauer, the first Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany. KAS cooperates with governmental institutions, political parties and civil society organizations, building strong partnerships along the way. In particular, KAS seeks to intensify political cooperation in the area of development cooperation on the foundations of its objectives and values. Together with the partners, KAS makes a significant contribution to the creation of a global order that empowers every country to determine its own developmental priorities and destiny in an internationally responsible manner.

KAS has organized its program priorities in India into five working areas: Foreign and Security Policy; Economic, Climate, and Energy Policy; Rule of Law; Political Dialogue focused on Social and Political Change; and Media and Youth. The India Office of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation takes great pride in its cooperation with Indian partner institutions that implement jointly curated projects and programmes.



About Conflict Weekly

The Conflict Weekly an academic endeavour to bring every Wednesday/Thursday a weekly analysis of the conflict and peace processes in the world; aiming to look at the larger peace picture. It is published by the NIAS-IPRI in collaboration with the KAS India Office.

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