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# LABOUR RESISTANCE IN ASIA

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A REPORT OF RESEARCHERS MEETING

November 27-28, 2014  
QUEZON CITY, PHILIPPINES

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## Executive Summary

The two-day meeting focused on understanding and mapping the landscape of labour resistance in Asia in the past decade or so, with a special focus on identifying, in each country, (1) emerging forms of labour resistance, (2) emerging actors and players in new labour movements, and (3) trends in emerging alliance building and collaborative initiatives. The method of exploring these subjects is mainly through the presentation of relevant case studies from each country, contextualized within the larger framework of that country's current labour situation and the history of its labour movement. After which, there was a synthesis and consolidation of the presentations, with attempts to identify (1) commonalities, (2) peculiarities, and, finally, (3) lessons from each experience which could be useful for participants, especially in terms of strategies and tactics in organizing and other modes of engagement, all toward further empowering the ranks of the labour movement.

## Day 1 (November 27, 2014)

Fahmi Panimbang (AMRC) opened the meeting by laying out broad questions that the discussion will try to answer: (1) how to understand the dynamic of resistance of working people across Asia, (2) what are the ways to look and analyse these phenomena, and (3) what is the response from state and employers to these resistance movements.

In particular, the presentations and synthesis will work toward: (1) analysing why the labour movement has grown increasingly separated from the larger social movement, considering that it has historically been a key player in several countries' fight against colonialism; (2) identifying new forms of labour resistance and protest, vis-a-vis the prevailing political environment, such as in China, which only recognises one union, and new strategies that other countries can use; and (3) identifying new players, such as the youth, migrants, and informal workers.

On the second day, the presentations by individual countries will be consolidated toward creating a comprehensive map of working class resistance in Asia, exploring the emerging actors, forms of resistance, and emerging alliance building and collaborative initiatives.

### Country Presentation

#### Indonesia

The labour movement in Indonesia saw an increase wave of protest actions--still the most dominant form of resistance--in its post-authoritarian era. All in all, it witnessed not less than 6,659 protest actions participated in by some 5.4 million people. On average, there are more than two labour actions every day. Recently, there was a high intensity of actions between 2011 and 2013, with 100,000 people going to the streets to campaign to increase the minimum wage. This campaign was successful, as the minimum wage was increased by, depending on region, 40 to 70 percent. Other factors in the continuing unrest include the economic crisis, informalisation, outsourcing, and labour legislation.

Other trends include: (1) increase in union alliance as percentage of protest actions from 4.5 percent in 2007 to 62 in 2011; (2) wage as still top demand; and (3) government buildings, not the workplace, as the top location of protests.

In its last general strike in October 2012, 2 to 3 million workers participated, spread over 37 cities in 12 provinces and 80 industrial zones. The action succeeded in forcing different levels of collapse, from industrial zone level to semi-collapse. The main seaport in Jakarta was totally collapsed. Methods included (from industrial zone, regional, to national level) factory raids,

blockades, mobilisation tactics, "sweeping," and taking advantage of political mourning. Always, the tactic and strategy emanates from the ground.

Methods of state labour control include (1) mobilising officers to break up strikes, (2) hiring local thugs and gangsters, (3) producing conflict between trade unions in factories and local businessmen, (4) the New Order Soeharto Ideological Reproduction of Labour Relation, (5) bringing the military back to factories and industrial zones, (6) ban in use of motorcycles, and (7) option to buy object vital certificate for some big factories.

The main lessons from the Indonesian experience include (1) the validity of the street as a political sphere to challenge authority and the new mechanism when formal institutional mechanisms fail and (2) the potency of alliance building especially in distribution of responsibilities in big strikes.

Question: How do the differing political orientations of unions affect the formation of many trade union centres in Indonesia?

Answer: Local alliance is more consolidated, and unions work together based on issues. Members of most alliances are minimum wage workers so they are united on wage and outsourcing issues. Fragmentation is an important issue but alliances still manage to work.

Question: Which sectors are growing and which sectors are declining? Are there linkages between industrial workers and small factory workers?

Answer: Out of 100 million in the labour sector, 60 million are in the informal sector. 11 million are in textile and government, and the rest are in automotive, metal, and mining. Linkages between sectors are present. In the case of Samsung, for instance, 85 percent of their supply chain is in one city so a strike can disrupt the whole supply chain. In Bekasi, almost everyone is integrated in the formal sector, except for a small percentage, which also participates.

Question: In multinational companies, are there industrial characteristics peculiar to countries? How do Samsung and Hyundai conduct industrial relations outside their home countries?

Answer: It's a common knowledge in Indonesia that Korean and Taiwanese companies are notorious and harsh. Japanese companies tend to be more benign.

## Philippines

The labour movement in the Philippines has suffered a great crippling by the neoliberal route of development that the state has pursued since the early 1980s to the present. The state's pursuit of this neoliberal policy, enshrined in existing legislation promulgated in the 980s, has largely worked against the interest of workers. These national laws codified anti-worker and anti-union policies, such as the prohibition of picketing, the difficulty of organising a legal strike, giving

jurisdiction to the secretary of labour to rule on sectors of "national interest," and the abolition of nationally mandated wages. All these legislation have been fatal to the labour movement.

The country's membership in the World Trade Organization also precipitated the plunder of its natural resources, also enshrined in laws like the Mining Act of 1995, the Special Economic Zone of 1995, and the Downstream Oil Deregulation Act.

Its impact on the country mainly manifests in the lopsided development, in how (1) the growth of the country's Gross Domestic Product barely impacts the unemployment rate and (2) this mode only pushes the services sector, in which 75 percent of the labour force is informally employed. In labour relations, the impact of these trends manifests on (1) the shift to tripartism, (2) the integration of the labour movement in the government's anti-insurgency campaign, and (3) the clear decline in strikes.

In 2012, the Department of Labor and Employment only recognised three strikes. This cannot be taken as indicative of the resistance movement. For instance, armed rebel raids in mining companies and agro-industrial areas. Responses include either (1) adjusting to neoliberal policies by participating in policy-making or (2) rejecting these policies via mass protests and lobbying through the party list system.

These laws and policies have not only destroyed regular jobs but trade unions as well. Out of the 36-million labour force, only 1.8 million belong to unions and only 280,000 are covered by collective bargaining. Trends include (1) government encouraging the formation of aligned workers' association that do not have the right to strike and collective bargaining and (2) workers building solidarity with other sectors, like women and peasants. A successful case were miners in a mine run by Nickel Asia, who have won substantial wage increase via collective bargaining with the help of the Kilusang Mayo Uno (May First Movement), the first time in the mining industry.

Question: Can you elaborate on the reduction of strikes?

Answer: Main reason is the extensive use of flexibilisation. On paper, all workers have a right to organise but this is not done in practice. Downsizing and restructuring has massacred jobs and unions. There are also very stringent strike laws in place, which, for instance, recognise only two valid issues: flagrant violation of the CBA and union-busting. Both require strike notices of anything between two weeks to 30 days. Striking workers are also threatened with charges of economic sabotage, which used to carry the death penalty prior to its abolition. Elsewhere, several union leaders have been assassinated, as in the case of two union presidents of Nestle.

The last general strike took place in 2006 against the oil deregulation law and the mining act, which paralysed the country. Labour movements also routinely took part in broader mass protests, such as those during President Aquino's State of the Nation Address in 2005 and the

anti-corruption campaign in 2013.

Question: What is the role of women in the labour movement?

Answer: The women's movement in the Philippines is relatively strong and weak. As a sector, the women's movement is strong. In labour, however, for instance, although 70 percent of the workforce in electronics are women, they constitute few leaders in the national level.

Question: Are there spontaneous strikes?

Answer: In plantations, yes.

## Cambodia

The labour sector in the country is concentrated on agriculture, garments, and the state. Trends in the labour movement include (1) the absence of cooperation between unions, (2) the alliance of unions with political parties (some with government, some with the opposition), and (3) the ineffectivity [sic] of unions in wage negotiations.

The \$177 Minimum Wage Campaign was a noteworthy case. Minimum wage in the Cambodian garments sector, at \$45 in 2000, remained outpaced by the inflation rate and notoriously low vis-a-vis the ballooning profit of multinational companies. Labour conditions endure long hours, and the courts supposed to handle complaints were ineffectual.

2013 and 2014 proved to be decisive years for labour resistance in the country built around the minimum wage issue. On September 17, 2014, non-violent protests took place in nine areas. All in all, 100,000 workers in 55 factories participated in protest actions. Positive points include (1) good strategising in the campaign, (2) strong leadership, (3) non-violence, and (4) the pressure it had exerted on both buyers and government. Challenges were (1) lack of unity among three coalition unions, (2) lack of industry relations, and (3) missed opportunity to build memberships.

Question: How much does the garments sector contribute to the GDP? What are the other industrial sectors?

Answer: Main sectors include agriculture, tourism, and garments. There is no mandated minimum wage for sectors other than the garments, in which 40 percent are unionised.

Question: Has the percentage of unionised workers increased after the minimum wage campaign? Did it impact the labour movement in other sectors?

Answer: There are unions in other sectors but not as strong as in the garments sector. The government-sanctioned unions don't do anything. No impact in other sectors. In the construction industry, wage agreement is on day-to-day basis.

## Malaysia

One of the major trends in the labour situation in Malaysia is the tremendous increase in migrant workers, which latest data put at 5.8 million out of 13.6 million total work force. Of these, only 1.8 million are registered, with about 40 percent in manufacturing, 16 percent in construction, and 13 percent in farming. Indonesia had the highest number of registered migrant workers at 50 percent, followed by Bangladesh, Nepal, India, and Vietnam. Women are another group currently playing a significant role in the Malaysian workforce, now up to 37.8 percent of the total. Growing sectors are manufacturing and service, both of which employ a lot of migrant workers.

The main player in the labour resistance movement in Malaysia is civil society, not trade unions. In the campaign against the proposed imposition of a 6 percent Goods and Services Tax, seen to decrease the buying power of ordinary citizens.

Only 6.7 percent of the Malaysian workforce today is unionised, a far cry from the late 1940s, seen as the golden age of unions in Malaya, when 600,000 members in 100 unions joined the MTUC, approximately 67 percent of the total work force. The stagnant membership in trade union membership is attributed to factors like state policies regarding multinational entities; restructuring of businesses toward outsourcing, mergers and acquisitions, and downsizing; unfavourable amendments to labour laws; and the general disinterest of so-called "knowledge workers" or "Generation Y."

In particular, relevant labour laws and policies that hamper unionism include the Industrial Relations Act of 1967, which has enshrined union-busting tactics. A noteworthy case was the National Employees of Bank Union. It launched a successful campaign to increase maternity leave to 90 days, despite attempts at union-busting.

Informalisation and casualisation are important issues. A pilot study put the size of the informal sector at 1.3 million. Another is the minimum wage policy. A campaign across sectors began in 1998. Even with the increase in the minimum wage, implementation remains a struggle. Overall, resistance is not there.

Question: Why is civil society more active than trade unions? What is the relationship between trade unions and civil society organisations? Are there efforts to organise migrants?

Answer: The leadership of the trade unions is more inclined to negotiate, not to go to the streets. Some exhibit phobia of radical ideas. They don't appreciate the value of going to the streets as a bargaining tool.

There were few attempts to establish an alliance. Trade unions don't show any interest in building an alliance with other movements. Even the May Day celebrations are always organised



and led by civil society organisations.

The National Union of Plantation Workers, which is dominated by migrants, is the largest union in the country.

## Vietnam

In the context of the Vietnam General Confederation of Labor's ties with the communist party, an emerging and recommending method of organization is the bottom-up. Instead of requiring owners to establish trade unions, the responsibility is passed to upper grassroots union officials without the intervention of enterprise owners. This has been very effective in terms of ensuring representation of workers, which in the predominant set-up is not being achieved, as VGCL is being used as a tool of dictatorship of the proletariat in leading the working class. A peculiar organisation method is the owner nominating a list of candidates for interim trade union executive board, to be voted on by workers. As expected, the bottom-up method faces a lot of obstacles and resentment from management.

Grassroots trade union in industrial relations include (1) participation in the resolution of labour disputes and (2) instituting dialogue and cooperation with employers to develop labour relations "harmoniously, stably, and progressively." Overall, Vietnamese workers resistance is waged spontaneously and without a broad framework of effective bargaining strategy. So far, no strike has occurred under the leadership of a trade union. Because there is little collective consciousness among workers, claimants and demands are often not long-term and toward institutionalisation and instead given on the basis of spontaneous action.

In 2011, there were 734 strikes, most in the garments industry followed by wood. These are mostly prompted by violations of rights which are only resolved when a strike takes place. In particular, these include abuse and language issues in foreign-owned enterprises and unstable macro-economic situations, such as inflation. The wildcat strike is a "flash point" for the intervention by state agencies and upper trade unions. While these often result in the concession of certain demands, they encourage the recurrence of illegal strikes. Often, state authority tends to support the claims of strikers.

Currently, there are 114,000 grassroots trade unions in 63 cities and provincial federations. There are 12 national branch unions, 8 state-owned corporation trade unions. Membership in unions is at 8 million in 2013 and target is to reach 10 million by 2018. 9.1 percent of enterprises are organised, pulled down by 6.5 percent in small and medium enterprises and 14.4 percent in cooperatives.

Question: The word "harmonious" is problematic as terms of industrial relations often favour owners and not workers. How are workers responding in Vietnam? What is the form of

cooperation?

Answer: There are similarities with China. Trade unions have to listen to the communist party, especially in mediation and dispute resolution. Among the impacts of this dynamic are good negotiating power and social dialogue which in turn benefit workers. The current set-up affords upper-level trade union leaders the political mandate to really protect workers. On the other hand, workers strike without trade unions, and local authorities, including police and higher level trade unions, when strike happens.

## India

Of the 484 million in India's labour force, 92.3 percent are unorganised informal workers, so there is need to stress their protection. 33 percent, or 148 million, of these are women. There was an increase in the non-agricultural sector in informal labour, and 95.9 percent of wage workers in this group are without any formal contract. In the formal sector, there was a slight decrease in those in the service sector.

Current trade union density is 5.81 percent of the labour force; the rate is higher in the formal sector at 40 percent. Membership in central trade union organisations is up from 500,000 members in four states and four industries to 800,000 members in eight industries and eight sectors. In terms of parliament representation by labour, it is down from 21 percent of seats in 1971 to 3.9 percent in 2004. Majority of these are in the public sector, some of which are on their way to privatisation, like the rails and mining.

Consequently, majority of resistance movement is in the formal sector. In the informal sector, rural workers movements are leading the resistance, mainly on issues of land ownership, employment guarantee, forest rights. There are initiatives to organise construction workers, induced by increase in accidents that are met with spontaneous strikes. Part of the difficulty is the layers of outsourcing in the industry.

Factors that affect organising and unionisation in India include (1) the percentage of the labour force is in the formal sector (if majority is formal, sooner or later they will form a union), (2) making space for collective bargaining (there are tripartite boards in certain states and sectors that regulate working conditions, including social security), (3) integration of small economies across sector (to facilitate workers coming together), (4) regulation of working conditions of sub-sector-based institutions, and (5) legislation (trade union act, complex labor laws, no provisions for self-employed workers).

Question: What about women leadership in labour resistance in India?

Answer: Labour participation of women in India has remained low. They are concentrated in the self-employed sector, which is unprotected and where labour movement is weak. The number of

women wage workers is negligible, mainly in government. They are represented in sections and committees, which also include dalits, tribals, and the like. There is a need to first provide space to understand and develop their capabilities before we can expect leadership from the ranks of women.

Question: Can trade unions in the formal sector help those in the informal sector?

Answer: There is no industry-wide bargaining in the automobile sector, as there is no such space for linkage. The level of political consciousness necessary to forge this solidarity is nonexistent.

Question: Can you elaborate on last year's general strike, in which some 10 million participated?

Answer: There was a decline in trade union development after liberalisation, and the need to aggressively protest against restrictive policies persist.

## Bangladesh

Like most countries in the region, the growth of the Bangladeshi economy was driven by the neoliberal prescriptions, which manifested in the country in the increase in export processing zones. Some 80 to 90 percent of the garments industry is run by one organisation, which has ties to the prime minister. There are 1,000 trade unions but are often ineffective. There are 72 big federations.

The first big resistance movement after liberalisation took place in 2006 when a small fire at a factory exposed the deplorable working conditions of workers at EPZs were brought to fore. In addition, issues related to wage and health and safety were carried by the trade unions which for the first time came together and systematically launched a movement. There were 20 to 25 protest actions, and state response in all cases has been brutal and violent. Strikes eventually died down in 2013, in which no strike was recorded.

In 2011, a notorious Korean factory enlisted the help of the local police in breaking a protest action which eventually resulted in the killing of four workers. Another four were killed in similar circumstances in 2012 and three in 2012. None of the government agencies or civil society organisations investigated any of the cases inside the EPZ, which are hugely restricted area and ran by former military officials. That being said, wages and living standards inside EPZs are a still little better than those outside it.

In terms of laws and policies, there was a constructive and comprehensive change in the rules in the EPZs. There was an increase in the minimum wage and an alliance was formed among a group of buyers.

That being said, the labour movement in Bangladesh is very fragmented. A trade union congress needs to be organised.

Question: What is the result of the investigation of the Yang Wan case? Did the explosion have an impact on the operation of the trade union, in terms of occupational hazard and safety? Which level is more active in the resistance?

Answer: A fact-finding team was formed and a court case was filed in a Korean court. Nothing of the sort was done by Bangladeshi government and police. There were huge changes in the area of occupational safety. Five factories are in trouble now, as they failed to provide their workers daily wages. A whole factory was occupied for the first time in August with a hunger strike.

In the wake of the case, there were compensation and aid, token money, although legally the issue of compensation was never discussed. A privatised NGO facilitated the whole process. There was no accounting of the money that poured in to Bangladesh. There was a huge outcry in the local middle class, but token money is not compensation. There is no justice yet. No one is talking about criminal liability that the government failed to protect the victims in the first place.

## Pakistan

The challenges to the labour movement in Pakistan include (1) low unionisation rate at less than 1 percent of the labour force, or 1.04 million registered members (the agriculture sector, at 46 percent of the workforce, outside the ambit of labour laws; prohibition of industry-level unions); (2) low minimum wage and wage discrimination according to gender; (3) disregard of labour rights (heavy informalisation, insufficient workers solidarity, low capability to respond to challenges; and violence against workers); (4) state's heavy tilt toward neoliberal agenda (privatisation, withdrawal from public welfare unaccountability); (5) poor legislation (currently excludes 80 percent of the work force); (6) poor institutional mechanisms; (7) ineffectual labour judiciary; and (8) Pakistan's continuing integration into the global production system, causing competition among workers for jobs.

The labour movement currently has no street power, even as workers themselves show examples of successfully getting their agenda approved by the government. For instance, a fisher folk community's struggle against contract system by Pakistan Rangers reveal the primacy of commonalities in geographic location and agenda in building solidarity.

There was a huge outcry and weeks-long march in the wake of a couple being burned alive in the brick kiln sector. The struggle stretched to ten months, but mostly on the basis of self-agency and not in an organisation level. In the Balida factory fire case, in which the doors were locked from the outside, compensation was extended to the injured and the deceased workers' families. There were random moments against privatisation, as in the case of a steel mill, which was eventually stopped by the Supreme Court.

## South Korea

The peak of the labour resistance movement in South Korea was the June Democracy Movement of 1987, in which 126 trade unions were created in one month and 1,361 all in all, representing 220,000 workers. There was a month-long nationwide general strike in January 1996 due to flexibilisation in the run-up to the Asian financial crisis. Government has employed anti-communist measures and crushed labor unions, killing hundreds.

Legal issues in the past have included (1) multiple unionism at the enterprise and supra-enterprise level, which some employers exploit to crush independent unions by using their created trade unions, (2) the ban in payment of wages for full-time union officials, (3) freedom of association and rights to collective bargaining for teachers and public employees, (4) unemployed workers having no right to negotiate, (5) prohibition of third party from intervening in industrial relations (since abolished but effect persists), (6) law regarding interference with business as applied to industrial disputes (Article No. 314 of the Criminal Act), and (7) huge wage discrepancy by sex and employment type.

The Samsung Electronics Services case was exemplary because the company has a no-union policy in place for 75 years (the enterprises involved in its four to five-tier supply chain are required not to have unions either) despite many attempts to overturn it. Their issues include (1) indirect employment set-up, (2) fluctuating wages due to minute-based piece rate system, and (3) plundering of middle managers.

The use of social media and individual messaging was emphasized, which was used to spread stories of success. One of the major impacts was how members of other KCTU affiliates were further convinced of the legitimacy of the labour struggle. As a result, young union members developed diverse forms of struggle, winning over public support.

Risk factors included the targeted audits that Samsung conducted the closure of three customer service centres, and intimidation and bribery of union members.

Another case is the Ssangyong Motors, which exemplified a resistance movement in foreign-invested corporations. After it was acquired by the Shanghai Automotive Corporation, Ssangyong manipulated its books and deflated its revenues to justify plans to retrench 2,646 workers. For 77 days, 1,000 workers occupied the plant and waged sit-in protests. The action attracted broader social solidarity, including from writers and filmmakers.

Attempts to privatise utility and other public services like railways, plants, and gas industries, also generated some action. The Korean Railway Workers Trade Union went on a 22-day strike in 2013 to stop plans of splitting a lucrative section of the rails and allowing a private entity to run it. Despite the huge support from the general public, the plans continued.

Question: Can you elaborate on the payment of full-time union officials?

Answer: Hyundai, which has a lot of full-time union officials, continues to lobby the ban of payments. Trade union members currently have to gather the funds to pay full-time union officials.

## China

The strike of the Yu Yuen workers was the largest in China since the opening of the market in the 1980s. 50,000 workers in the company's Dongguan factor protested against unpaid many years' worth of unpaid pension. The workers occupied the main highway and, when the government failed to respond, went on strike. There were stages in the negotiation and even crackdown by the police. The strike ended with Yu Yuen agreeing to increase wages and the payment of their contributions. There was also international solidarity from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the US.

Peculiarities in the case include (1) the focus on social insurance and pension as opposed to wages, (2) the older generation as new players in the resistance, (3) lack of urge to institute collective bargaining or autonomous election of trade union, and (4) the "unorganised" character of the strike due to absence of clear leadership, aside from the participation of low and middle level management. This informal network was amassed through social media. As a result, the younger workers gained knowledge and experience on protest action.

Other trends evident in this case include the failure of trade unions and local government in policing the implementation of social insurance laws, as well as the failure of CSR system of the brands in inspection and training of relevant personnel. There was also a marked increase in outsourcing and dispatch of workers as agriculture declined.

Intra-migration is one of the results of these phenomena. Migrant workers today number up to 269 million, about a fourth of China's labour force. Of these, only 41.3 percent signed contracts, which render the rest vulnerable to non-implementation of labour laws, including the granting of non-wage benefits, like unemployment, maternity, and pension. Subgroups are the youth migrants, those who were born after 1980, and today number 125 million, mainly in the manufacturing industry. These workers are not afraid of dismissal. Long-term employment is not a top priority.

The 200 million-strong ACTFU counts some 72 million migrant workers as members. However, the union does not work on the side of workers. Bureaucrats and mediators pose a problematic role in industrial relations as they are a product of state corporatism. Essentially, workers have no freedom of association. In fact, state responses to collective action include suppression and criminalisation of union leaders, as well as restriction of space for labour NGOs.

Largely, there is institutional failure in the labour movement following the opening of China's

economy and subsequent reform in state-owned enterprises. There are many legislations to institutionalise labour policy reform, but these suffer from failed implementation on the ground, especially in southern China and in the case of migrants. There is also a new law on collective consultation and negotiation that is seen to regulate strikes. Workers were not involved in the drafting process and are, conversely, expected to trigger more strikes.

From mediation to arbitration and litigation, the process is not pro-worker. The dominance of ACFTU means the lack of representation in the structure and lack of autonomous organising.

## Day 2 (November 28, 2014)

Proceedings on the second day revolved around consolidating the country reports and mapping a bigger picture of the labour resistance movement in Asia by identifying commonalities as well as discrepancies, all toward drawing lessons from the experiences of each country and how they may be useful in understanding the labour resistance movement in the region.

### Synthesis

Initial impressions on commonalities include (1) the recurrence of informalisation across all countries, (2) high proportion of irregular and unreported workers across countries which affects unionising and workers in the lower end of the value chains, (3) lack of unity between formal and informal sectors in the same industry, (4) unfavourable labour legislation, (5) multiplicity of unions and union rivalry, and (6) primacy of minimum wage issue across sectors.

Peculiarities include (1) large-scale intra-country relocation of factories in China and Indonesia, (2) rampant union-busting in the Philippines, affecting some 50,000 in several years, (3) industry-specific collective bargaining and campaigns in Bangladeshi garments industry, (4) rise in general actions, zone-wide strikes, and industry-wide strikes in Indonesia, (5) mass protests aligned with other movements in India, Indonesia, and the Philippines, (6) radicalisation of movement in India, Indonesia, and South Korea, (7) shift to social security as prominent issue in China, (8) movement for right association in India (9), movement against union repression Indonesia and the Philippines, (10), and issue of land grabbing in India and the Philippines.

### Consolidation

Dae-Oup Chang facilitated the consolidation of reports. He emphasized the impossibility of covering all forms of resistance, especially the individual forms of daily resistance. There is a difference between small but issue-making resistance and big but failed resistance. Knowing the situation in other countries is the first step in solidarity building. He set parameters for identifying commonalities and distinctiveness in patterns and trends.

In terms of emerging **sectors** that play an increasingly important role in movements, the following have been identified per country:

#### Indonesia

- education sector (teachers' association and teachers' union) in terms of frequency of protests
- garments, electronics, automotive and manufacturing in terms of number of people
- state-owned enterprises alliance, such as electricity, highway, mining, oil and water



## India

- formal sector, mainly textile, tea, and electronics
- rural sector movement mainly on the issue of rural benefit scheme implementation
- industry-wide bargaining in textile, tea, and, recently, metal sectors

## Pakistan

- rural movement mainly struggling against land-grabbing and privatisation of public sector entities

## Vietnam

- labour-intensive industries, such as garments and textile and wood processing

## Malaysia

- private sector, mostly manufacturing and services, on the minimum wage issue

## Philippines

- rural sector, mostly plantation workers and mining company employees, including beneficiaries of failed agrarian reform
- some resistance in public sector against privatisation, including hospitals and public transport system
- emergent resistance in banking sector and BPO industry amid minimal resistance in service sector

## South Korea

- public sector workers in state-run companies like railways, gas, electricity
- urban service sector, such as the Samsung Electronics Services workers and school workers, including women catering workers

## Cambodia

- broad difficulty in organising public sector, such as teachers, and the garments industry

## China

- manufacturing sector, in footwear (Yue Yuen), electronics (TNC), automotive (Honda), toy and furniture industries
- service sectors, such as security guards, waste pickers, and Walmart supermarket workers

In terms of **issues**, wage occurs across countries, which is linked to either lack of legislation or negative labour reform, failure of implementation of such legislation, or the absence of unions and thus collective bargaining. In China, the insurance issue is linked to informalisation, and it is

worth noting that the demand in most cases is not directed to government-level policy or institution but individual enterprises. In Vietnam, strikes based on tangible issues tend to be more successful, such as minimum wage and physical abuse by foreign owners. In India, issues include wages, informalisation, and forms of dispossession, like land grabbing in rural areas and privatisation. In the Philippines, union-busting is a pertinent issue. In Malaysia, increasing anti-migrant and anti-union character of labour laws.

Unique cases, such as those that occasion an alliance with broad social movements, include state-controlled unions causing strikes in Vietnam, trade unions calling for general strikes vis-a-vis political reform protests in Hong Kong, and the labour movement's major role in the ouster of two presidents in the Philippines and anti-corruption campaigns, as well as instances of solidarity with issues such as those related to climate justice, continuing US involvement in Philippine affairs, and extra-judicial killings.

In terms of **emerging actors** in the resistance, age plays an increasingly major role in new players in South Korea, such as in the case of Samsung Electronics Service workers who are relatively young, while older generations, who are more conservative, include school janitors and metal workers. The same is true in Indonesia, which had witnessed an increase in the young generation of workers due to the popularization of collective action among young workers. Some trade unions are dominated by young people, mostly under 25. The spread of left wing elements in unions has also been observed.

In India, the rural sector is an emergent player, as well as independent movements emanating from the grassroots who are not affiliated with traditional trade unions. In the Philippines, it is community-based groups as well, in addition to international unions and organisations which have shown support in social media and pickets. Armed rebel groups supportive of the workers' case continue to be prevalent.

Women play a major role in Malaysia, mostly in the grassroots actions of trade unions but not in leadership, as in the minimum wage campaign. The civil society is the most important player by far, and there have been attempts to bring together civil society and labour movement and migrant workers. Women, as grassroots leaders, are also prevalent in India, largely in the informal sector. It has been observed in the Philippines that unions led by women are more persevering and organised, such as two of the biggest unions in EPZs in Cavite. Dae-Oup, however, cautioned against broad essentialist analyses when it comes to gender.

**Collaborative initiatives** either with other labour movements or with broader social movements sometimes include taking advantage of certain binding issues to trigger labour resistance, such as the territorial dispute with China issue in Vietnam. The event triggered the sweeping disruption of work in companies owned by Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Taiwanese

companies. In Bangladesh, the long history of women's rights movement contributed to the labour cause, particularly women factory workers. In India, automobile and electronics sector unions have come together in some cases. In the industrial sector, some unions are compelled to form industry-wide alliances. Trade unions' alliance with national movements also continued, depending on common interests. Most sectoral movements in Pakistan are in isolation, except for some cases, such as the power loom and brick kiln workers.

By far the strongest form of alliance building was witnessed in Indonesia, with alliances based on geography, sector, and issues. Of these, the region-wide alliances are most effective in disrupting work, seen as the backbone of general strike. The general spirit is compromise amid fragmentation. The most successful campaign of these alliances to date is for the minimum wage in 2012 to 2013, which has successfully resulted in the 40 to 70 percent increase. Trends include the temporary status of some alliances and the increasing politicisation of unions as an influence of progressive unions. In all cases, alliances are successful because of enough support from the grassroots.

In the Philippines, the basis for alliances is often analysis of issues and immediate action. This was seen in the case of the multi-sectoral support in the wake of the Hacienda Luisita Massacre in 2004. Sectors including youth, peasant, and the church were organised, especially in light of the issue's political dimension. It's important to note that individual unions retain independence and no single party will dictate.

In Bangladesh, differences in opinion and ideology are seen as perhaps sufficient ground not to build an alliance. There appears to be no democratic mechanism to resolve conflict, which renders movements vulnerable to government intervention. In Malaysia, the active role of civil society persists despite the common issues, which are sometimes seen as too broad.

Dae-Oup noted that the difficulty in finding patterns across region is indicative of the unevenness of development across region. Most resistance movements are concentrated on urban rather than agrarian sectors, mostly leaning toward labour-intensive industries. Overall trends match the neoliberal mode of development. There are also commonalities in terms of exploitation, such as informalisation and other effects of the globalisation of value chain.

It is also worthwhile, he said, to perhaps look out for patterns in terms of history, region, and forms of government; as well as identify the ways in which rights-based and interest-based issues are intertwined; or problematise the distinction between tangible everyday issues and institutional issues.

## Research Output

The group then drew up a plan for the research output, dividing the task of report writing. The

agreeable deadline is **15 March 2015** coordinated by Fahmi (AMRC).

Tentative title:

**Emerging Forms of Labour Resistance in Asia**

**Part 1 Emerging forms of labour resistance: Strategies and tactics**

- Chapter 1: Cambodia: lessons from minimum wage struggles
- Chapter 2: China - spontaneous labour struggles
- Chapter 3: Indonesia: Factory raid and general strikes in industrial zones
- Chapter 4: India - Maruti-Suzuki struggle
- Chapter 5: Vietnam - organising workers from the bottom up

**Part 2 Emerging actors of new labour movements (sectors and agencies)**

- Chapter 6: Bangladesh - garment
- Chapter 7: China - new generation of migrant workers
- Chapter 8: Indonesia - new generation of trade union activists and activist alliances
- Chapter 9: Malaysia - Migrant workers organizing in Malaysia
- Chapter 10: Philippines – Resistance of call center workers
- Chapter 11: Korea - Samsung Electronics Services Sector Workers

**Part 3 Breaking boundaries: Emerging alliance building and collaborative initiatives**

- Chapter 12: India - alliance building in Maruti Suzuki struggle
- Chapter 13: Malaysia - alliance building and question of inclusive unionism
- Chapter 14: Pakistan - alliance building between power loom and brick kiln
- Chapter 15: Philippines - Hacienda Luisita case (tbc)
- Chapter 16: Indonesia - alliance building amid acute fragmentation

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