

Hong Kong Port Workers to Hold Talks as Strike Enters 13th Day

Friday 12 April 2013, by [LAI Ying-kit](#), [WANG Jasmine](#) (Date first published: 9 April 2013).

Striking dockworkers at Hongkong International Terminals Ltd., the port operator backed by billionaire Li Ka-shing, will hold talks with their employers today amid signs that the stoppage may be losing support.

Union negotiators will join the talks, Wong Yu-loy, a representative of the Union of Hong Kong Dockers, said by phone yesterday. Hongkong International Terminals executives will also attend the meetings, according to a transcript of remarks by Matthew Cheung, Hong Kong secretary for labor and welfare, published on the government's website yesterday. The government arranged the meetings, he said.

The dockworkers, who are employed by contractors instead of the company directly, have been on a strike since March 28 to demand an increase of about 25 percent in wages. Shipping lines including Evergreen Marine Corp Taiwan Ltd. (2603) and Japan's Mitsui OSK Lines Ltd. (9104) have diverted vessels or skipped calling at Hong Kong, as the strike threatens the city's reputation as a trade hub for China.

"I appeal to all parties concerned to really seize this opportunity," Cheung said in his remarks, adding that a solution "must be in the interest not only of employees and workers, not only in the interest of the companies concerned and contractors, but also in the overall interest of Hong Kong. It is very very important because the port itself is very important to Hong Kong's economy."

A vessel currently needs to anchor outside of Hong Kong port for two to four days before berthing, compared with no waiting period before the strike, said Paul Tsui, chairman of Hong Kong Association of Freight Forwarding and Logistics Ltd., which represents 345 freight forwarders in the city.

Wage Demands

About 250 workers remained on the street outside the entrance of the port terminal in Hong Kong's Kwai Tsing district, the union's Wong said. Labor discontent has risen as the former British colony's wealth gap widened the most since records started in 1971.

Hongkong International Terminals is now running at about 80 percent of usual operating levels as an increasing number of workers are returning, the company said in an e-mailed statement yesterday. Daily loss narrowed to HK\$2.4 million (\$309,100) on April 5 from HK\$5 million earlier, the company said.

The workers are demanding that hourly wages rise by HK\$12.50 from about HK\$50, the dockworkers' union said earlier. Strikers won't accept an offer of a 5 percent pay increase, RTHK reported on April 3, citing Lee Cheuk-yan, a lawmaker from Hong Kong's Labor Party.

The government plans to preside at talks including the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions, its unions, two contractors and representatives of Hongkong International Terminals starting at 10

a.m. today, it said on its website yesterday. The Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions and the Federation of Hong Kong and Kowloon Labour Unions are set to take part in a separate discussion from 2:30 p.m.

Hongkong International Terminals is operated by Hutchison Port Holdings Trust (HPHT), whose largest shareholder is Li Ka-shing's Hutchison Whampoa Ltd. (13) Hutchison Port controls more than half Hong Kong's port capacity with its partner Cosco Pacific Ltd. (1199)

Jasmine Wang

To contact the reporter on this story: Jasmine Wang in Hong Kong at jwang513@bloomberg.net

To contact the editor responsible for this story: Anand Krishnamoorthy at anandk@bloomberg.net

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High Court allows dock workers back to terminal to picket

Labour commissioner trying to bring sides together in dock strike

Commissioner for Labour Cheuk Wing-hing. Photo: Felix Wong

The High Court on Friday ruled that dock workers could return to the Kwai Tsing Container Terminals to continue their strike under an amendment to the injunction already granted to the port operator that previously barred striking workers from entering or blocking the port operator's terminals.

The head of the Labour Department said on Friday he hoped a meeting could be arranged between striking dock workers and the contractors that employ them as early as Saturday.

Commissioner for Labour Cheuk Wing-hing's remarks came after a scheduled meeting was aborted on Thursday.

Hundreds of dock workers remained outside the Kwai Chung Container Terminal as their strike for a pay rise entered its ninth day. The workers have vowed to continue their action until the contractors agree to a 17-per-cent pay rise.

Cheuk said both sides had shown a willingness to settle the dispute despite Thursday's aborted meeting.

"The most important thing is that they went to the venue, though at different times. I believe this is a step forward and shows that both sides intended to talk," he said.

Cheuk also said his department was trying to bring the port operator, Hongkong International Terminals (HIT), to the next meeting along with the contractors.

The dockers have demanded a meeting with HIT management to help settle the dispute, but HIT has

refused to get directly involved in the labour dispute.

HIT managing director Gerry Yim Liu-fai said earlier in the week that the workers should settle the dispute with the contractors, who hired them, not with the port operator.

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