

# **Major LuLu hypermarket strike ends in Oman - The strike received widespread support in the country**

Sunday 29 June 2014, by [Gulf News](#) (Date first published: 29 June 2014).

## **Negotiations begin between workers, employers and government mediators.**

Dubai: An Omani labour official has said that work at a major hypermarket facing a large-scale strike by employees has resumed after negotiations began between unions, the employers and mediating figures.

LuLu hypermarket, one of the region's major supermarket operators, faced a strike by employees all over the sultanate last weekend.

An official at Oman's ministry of manpower told the state-owned *Oman daily* that negotiations had begun between the labour union engaging in the strike and the employer with the presence of representatives from the Chamber of Commerce as well as the General Federation of Oman Trade Unions (GFOTU).

Local media reported that an intimation letter signed by the Lulu Workers Union and submitted on June 5 had stated that the workers would go on strike on June 26 if their demands were not met.

The striking workers' demands included the implementation of a previous agreement signed by the company that had allegedly not been respected, a pay rise, a cost of living allowance, a bonus and more Omanisation, or nationalisation of jobs, as per Omani media.

As'ad Al Hadhrami, LuLu's lawyer however said on Twitter that the company had implemented the agreement fully, and that the ministry of manpower had asked the LuLu union to list the articles of the agreement that had not been implemented, but that the union did not respond "since there was no evidence". He added that the company was not legally obliged to provide a cost of living allowance.

He later tweeted: "I was shocked to see that some of the striking workers did not know that striking days are without pay".

The lawyer also said that "some are trying to turn this into a racial dispute, forgetting that we live in a country of equality". Some on social media have condemned expatriate workers at the hypermarket, most of whom are from South Asian countries, for filling in for the striking workers. LuLu Hypermarket is owned by Dubai-based Indian tycoon M A Yousuf Ali.

The head of the GFOTU, Eshaq Al Kharousi, told Al Shabiba that strike was within the employees' rights considering that it came after several earlier attempts at resolving the issues between the employees and the workers. He blamed the employer's "intransigence" for the escalation of the matter.

"There were 16 demands made by the workers, but the company had only agreed to three of them," Al Shabiba quoted him as saying. He accused LuLu of procrastination.

Ali Al Bida'i, a member of the LuLu labour union, said that the union met with the company, the ministry of labour and the GFOTU eight times in a period of more than one year to no avail.

The strike received widespread support in the country, with many taking to social media to call for a boycott of the store.

LuLu has 110 stores in Oman, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, Yemen, Egypt, UAE, Saudi Arabia and India.

Labour unions were legalised in Oman in 2006 but the GFOTU was established in 2010, as per the requirements of the Oman-US free trade agreement which was signed in 2006 and came into force in 2009. Oman became the second Gulf state, after Bahrain, to legalise labour unions. Bahrain also has a free-trade agreement with the United States. US talks on such an agreement with the UAE have stalled

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\* Published under the title "Major LuLu hypermarket strike ends in Oman". Gulf News Report.

Published: 14:45 June 29, 2014:

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/oman/major-lulu-hypermarket-strike-ends-in-oman-1.1353571>