

# A national outcry

By Mandana Ismail Abeywickrema  
Photos by Asoka Fernando and Thusitha Kumara

The increase in the cost of living and unemployment in the country have forced people to take to the streets demanding the authorities to address their grievances.

The working masses from different sectors and thousands of unemployed graduates have now become more vociferous and aggressive in demanding their rights, which they claim, are a necessity for their survival. Last week saw teachers, railway drivers, unemployed graduates and unemployed graduate ayurveda doctors protesting on the streets and holding *sathyagrahas* to win their demands.

Their common call was for an increase in their salaries, to address the existing salary anomalies and to receive permanent employment in the state sector.

## Promotions delayed

The teachers from the Ceylon Teacher Services Union took to the streets early in the week by holding a massive protest campaign outside the Education Ministry in Pelawatte to protest the delay in granting promotions and addressing the salary anomalies that exist in the sector.

They claimed that the government has not taken any steps to resolve the salary anomalies that have existed for the past 12 years. Banners at the protest queried where the Rs. 300 million allocated to the education sector to address the salary anomalies through the 2009 budget was. The teachers held the protest to coincide with the Teacher's Day celebrations.

On Thursday (8), train drivers launched a strike, calling for their salary anomalies to be resolved by the government. The strike resulted in delaying several trains during the morning rush hour.

Railway sector trade unions have also warned that they would launch a continuous strike if the authorities failed to address their demands.

Apart from members of the working sector, unemployed graduates have com-

## menced Sathyagraha

The unemployed graduates are engaged in a *sathyagraha* demanding that they be given employment without more false promises. They claim that there are currently over 25,000 graduates without any form of employment.

The unemployed graduate doctors have also launched a similar *sathyagraha* calling for the immediate implementation of the national policy on providing employment. About 600 ayurveda doctors are participating in the *sathyagraha* outside the Ayurveda Hospital in Rajagiriya.

## Unemployment

The impact of global recession has resulted in an increase in the country's unemployment level. The Census and Statistics Department has stated that there have been 155,000 jobs in the industrial sector and 99,000 in the services that have been lost in the second quarter of 2009.

Releasing the data, the Census and Sta-

tistics Department stated that unemployment was no longer "down" and that there would be a further increase in the unemployment rate if the current trends were to continue.

Be that as it may, the protests, strikes and *sathyagrahas* have seen an increase in recent times and a further delay to address these grievances by the authorities could result in many more agitated individuals or groups taking to the streets to win their demands.



Ceylon Teacher Services Union: "Where is the Rs. 300 million?"



Unemployed ayurveda graduate doctors holding a continuous *sathyagraha* outside the Ayurveda Hospital in Rajagiriya



Teachers under police supervision



An outcry outside the Ministry of Education



Unemployed graduates protesting