

## **Wage Differentials in Nepal: A Case of Manufacturing Sector**

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### **Abstract**

*From the experience of the developed countries it is known that industrialization is a must for the economic development of any nation. But in Nepal this sector could not gain momentum despite various efforts. Contrary to increment, the industrial units as well as employment generated by this sector is deteriorating gradually mainly after the restoration of multiparty democracy in 1990 mainly because- lack of far sighted industrial policy of the government, labour problems, conflict, supply side constraints and poor infrastructure, etc. Wage of the Nepalese workers is low that caused to declining their living standard. In the same way wage of the workers performing the same type and volume of work in the manufacturing sector differs significantly by gender, sector, enterprise and so on. Most of the workers who are directly involved in production process are even deprived from minimum wage fixed by the government that directly affects to their productivity and ultimately national economy.*

### **Background**

The Nepalese economy is characterized by a dominant agricultural sector. But proportion of employment provided by this sector is declining gradually where role of industrial sector is also not satisfactory. From the evidence of the developed countries it is known that until and unless the development of industrial sector, it is far to achieve economic development of the country.

Industrial development is undoubtedly the foundation of sustainable economic development as well as self dependent economy. Realising the fact the government of Nepal has been given emphasis since the beginning of the establishment of the democratic government in 1950 though the history of modern industries begins in 1936, during the Rana Period. The pace of industrialization was not satisfactory during the Panchayat period too though government has placed emphasis on it. Despite the formulation and implementation of several industrial friendly policies of the democratic government after 1990 to attract investment (national and international) in this sector many industrial units

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were set up on the one hand and on the other hand large number of units were closed down mainly because of unfavourable environment during the period of conflict and political uncertainty. The major constraints associated with industrial development are reported as: lack of far sighted industrial policy of the government, labour problems, conflict, supply side constraints, frequent changing government, energy crisis and rapid liberalisation of Indian and Chinese economy. Present situation reflects that there is no hope of improvement in this sector in near future.

Majority of the industries set up in the country are agro-processing. Only few are basic construction material production, import substitute and export oriented. Whatever may be the industries are also characterised by a small unit, highly disbursed geographically, low level of entrepreneurial skill and entrepreneurship, short life of the industries, etc. The share of manufacturing sector is not more than 5 percent to the total industrial units. The contribution of overall industrial sector to the national economy is confined to not more than 14 percent (Dahal & Inoue, 1994) where the contribution of manufacturing sector to the national GDP is very low and declining gradually (9% in FY 2000/01 to 7% in 2007/08 and further expected that it will be only 6% in 2009/10) (MOF, 2010). This trend reflects that economic growth through manufacturing sector is not possible in near future despite effective long term and short term plan, policies and strategies for the development of this sector.

In Nepal Census of Manufacturing Establishments (CME)<sup>1</sup> was conducted since 1964/65 at an interval of five years though the definition of this sector is changed time and again. CME is a quinquennial operation of the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) with the view to collect, manage and disseminate data on the manufacturing sector of the country. This sector occupies an important position in the Nepalese economy and has a significant role to play in the rapid and balanced economic development. The latest (2006/07) census is the ninth of this series (CBS, 2008). The slow pace of industrial development reflects from the information supplied by the CMEs. During the four decade or more (1964/65 to 2006/07) the industrial units increased by 2.7 times where during the same period employment go up by 10 times. The information also shows that the industrial units in 2006/07 is recorded less than that of three decade ago though employment has increased up to 1991/92 and starts to decline gradually (Table 1). Change in definition of manufacturing establishments, low competitiveness of the Nepalese entrepreneurs in the open economy, liberalized import policy of the Nepal government, non-protective policy (of national industries) adopted by the government and insurgency may be the major reasons for the fluctuation of the industrial units. Females are suffered much from employment loss during this period.

Table 1 highlights the employment generated from the manufacturing sector has fallen significantly during the last 15 years and no hope of improvement in this situation within short period in future. The Nepal Labour Force Survey (NLFS) 2008 reported that this

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1 Manufacturing sector is defined as the industrial unit providing employment to 10 or more workers using auto machines that excludes grain mills.

sector is contributing only 6.6 percent (14% in urban areas and 5.5% in rural areas) in the employment of the economically active population aged 15 years and more showing slightly increment during one decade (5.8% in 1998/99). Whatever may be the efforts and contribution this sector is contributing far below than the expectation. Thus needs to eliminate the limitations that hinder the growth of this sector for the fast economic growth by generating gainful employment to its people in this sector. On the other employees in this sector are working for little pay which is also varies by different factors however, is far better than the many informal sector.

**Table: 1 Status of Manufacturing Establishments in Nepal**

Census Year	No. of Establishment	Employment Generation	Intercensal Change	
			Establishment	Employment
1964/65	1260	17812	-	-
1972/73	2434	47638	93.2	167.4
1976/77	3528	50120	44.9	5.2
1981/82	4903	81050	39.0	61.7
1986/87	3633	137130	-25.9	69.2
1991/92	4271	223463	17.6	63.0
1996/97	3557	196708	-16.7	-12.0
2001/02	3213	191853	-9.7	-2.5
2006/07	3446	177550	7.3	-7.5

Source: CBS, Reports of the Census of Manufacturing Establishments.

### Wage Issues in Nepal

Wages is the major concern among of the workers employed in any sector and job. It is considered a principal cause of industrial disputes in most of the developing countries. Nepal is not an exception from it. The major wage issues raised by the Nepalese workers are: fixation and implementation of minimum wage in all sectors, timely increment on wages at least to cover the inflation, grade, allowances, overtime and elimination of discrimination on wage as well as benefits on the basis of gender as well as other probable reasons.

The wage issues are raised in Nepal since the first labour disputes in 1947 (known as the first trade union movement in Nepal) but the movement did not recognised by the then Rana government. The first Wage Fixation Committee was set up in 1965 under the Factory and Factory Workers Act 1959 to enforce minimum wage while it was noticed that the minimum wage given by the industries to the same skill category of workers differs vastly at the same area. The committee has fixed the wage rate of the workers involved in industrial sector considering the subsistence need of the workers, their efficiency and paying capacity of the industry. The rising cost of living is to be met by dearness allowance. But the subsequent increments are based mainly on the bargaining power of the workers' unions in the tripartite committee which is considered unhealthy tradition for the development of the industry in the country. After the introduction of

the multiparty democracy in 1990, the Factory and Factory Workers Act 1959 was replaced by Labour Act 1992. Following the Act, the wage of the workers is fixed by the government on the recommendations of the *Minimum Wage Fixation Committee*. But still there is variation in the market wage rate and minimum wage rate as well as intra-industry variation in wages in the manufacturing sector. The last wage revision was made in 2008.

The wage payable to the workers in Nepal is comparatively very low. The low cost of living and unavailability of gainful employment enables workers to offer their services at relatively low wage rates. The minimum wage set by the government is generally lower than the subsistence wage rates and also lower than in other developing countries. Further this differs greatly by gender, geographical location, nationalities and so on. But the extent and the nature have not been analyzed in depth through digging out grass root realities. The trade unions in Nepal are constantly trying to eliminate the discrimination on wage rate for the same type and amount of work, but far to achieve in the present socio-economic situation.

As a result of the low and discriminatory wage, workers are frequently raising voice for the increment on wage and benefits on the one hand and elimination of discrimination on wage payment for the same work based on the gender as well as other reasons on the other. From the past studies it is known that nearly 65 percent disputes were associated with wage and fringe benefits of the workers (Pant & Manandhar, 1998) which is 58 percent as of Rimal & Badal (2007). It is only because large part of profits/benefits are hold on by the employers and only a small part is distributed to other sectors including social securities and labour welfare activities (Dahal et al., 1999). Similarly, of the total demand of the trade unions, more than one third is economic demands related on wage and other benefits (Gautam, 2006).

The gap between unskilled and highly skilled workers is narrowed down in each increment since 1973 with only few exceptions. The increment after the restoration of multiparty democracy shows equal amount for all categories of workers. Highly skilled workers had got 181.25 percent more wage in the beginning (1965) as compared to unskilled counterparts. It declined gradually and came down to 7.6 percent in 2008. As of trade unionists the present skill categories are based on simply the occupation they involved rather than any other well-established norms. Thus they are willing to abolish such skill category.

### Literature on Wage Differentials

The wages are governed by several socio-economic factors. There are considerable disparities in wages between gender, regions, enterprises, type of work, sector of employment, nationality and others.

The monthly income of women in comparison to their male counterpart is low in Nepal even though involving in the same occupation. Despite legal provision, gender discrimination on wage and benefits is found high in informal sector such as agriculture,

carpet, construction, garment, though it has been declining since last couple of years. Heavy discrimination can be observed everywhere in informal sector employment and severe is the case of construction and agriculture. Not only informal sector, there is discrimination on wages among the sexes in the formal sector too. The tea estates of eastern Nepal are the example of it (Rimal et al., 2003).

The existing employment practice is not friendly to women and wage discrimination between men and women for the same work still prevailed in many formal sectors and it is further bleak in the informal sector (GEFONT, 2009). There are noticeable gender differences in daily wage both in cash and kind to the workers involved in both the agriculture and non-agriculture sector (CBS, 2004). It is evident that near the East-West Highway the average daily wage paid to a man is Rs 100 and less than Rs 75 for a woman where it is less by Rs 20 to 30 in the inner part of the villages joining with highway for both the sexes (Prasain, 2007) showing high differentials on wage by gender as well as place of work.

Average monthly earning of paid employees in 2008 was estimated Rs 5,721 for males which are much higher than that of females (Rs. 3402) in the same year. In some occupation the difference in the monthly earnings between males and females is wide and it was roughly comparable for technicians and clerks. In the occupation like agriculture, crafts and related trades and in elementary occupations females remained at a disadvantage position. Among all females in subsistence agriculture are more discriminated compared to other occupations where female employment is high (73.7%) in comparison to male (52.9). However, the discrepancy in monthly earnings between the sexes has emerged partly on account of differences in hours of work (CBS, 2009). Further, gender discrimination on wage payment is clearly visible in construction sector showing low wage payment to females compared to their male counterpart for the same amount and type of work (Gautam, 2010).

Likewise, inter-regional wage levels differs significantly. The weekly wage is highest in Central Development Region (CDR) and lowest in Far-western Development Region. Similarly, inter-industry wage of the workers also varied widely from Rs 142.26 to Rs 805.74 (Manandhar & Shrestha, 1998). Wage rate in construction sector is discriminated remarkably between the *Pahade* and *Madhesi* workers. Normally, *Madhesi* workers gets low wage for the same work (Gautam, 2010).

The wage/salary scale is not uniform among the industries. It varies widely in one enterprise to another for the workers of same skill category mainly based on the scale of the industry, the stage of its development, its age and expansion, the degree of its dependence on government policy, the strength of worker's union, the capacity to pay of the industry and the degree of prosperity. The practice of providing wage and fringe benefits in the industries were found surprisingly uneven and it is very difficult to derive a commonality of paying behaviour. Sharp contrast was found even within the same NSIC group of industries (CMIR, 1991). Wage of the construction workers differs from one company to another for the same type and amount of work (Gautam, 2010). The wage

rate is not only varies by skill category but also by the sector of employment - service, manufacturing, construction, transportation (Shrestha, 1998).

Wage and benefits paid by the enterprises differed according to the level and type of job as well as by skill category though such variation is continuously declining as a result of the continuous pressure by trade unions. The wage/salary paid by the Joint Venture/Multinational Companies (JV/MNC) is generally better than the minimum wage fixed by the government. However, it varies greatly based on the nature of enterprise, the employer, type of job and place of work. Wage of the one junior most Nepali worker varied between NRs. 1,750 to NRs. 6,500 which is sufficient to understand the level of discrimination in JV/MNC (Gautam & Prasain, 2006). FDI industries in Nepal have brought significant wage inequality from 9 percent to 46 percent in different skilled category although the contribution of such industries is positive to the community and the nation (Bista, 2005).

The operative and contract workers are the least paid workers. Their average weekly wages is below than the national average where technical and administrative workers belong to the highly paid category (Manandhar & Shrestha, 1998). Wage structure also varies widely among the daily wage workers in different industries (CMIR, 1991). The discrimination is further high in the case of casual workers (Gautam & Prasain, 2006; IRF, 1998; Shrestha, 1998).

Wage/salary variations between the Nepalese and non-Nepalese workers but not much wide (CMIR, 1991) though many employers preferred non-Nepalese workers pretending Nepalese workers are difficult to handle and they lacked industrial culture. Contrary to this Rimal & Badal (2007) found that the wage scale of non-Nepali workers is up to three fold higher than Nepali workers working the same quantity and type of work remaining at the same post. The international contractors in construction sector are paying very low to the Nepali workers compared to the foreign nationals (Gautam, 2010).

In the private sector mills the earnings of the highest paid workers as percent of the lowest paid workers was 413.73 percent in 1965/66 and stood at 235.73 percent in 1979/80. On the other in public sector mills the earning ratio has reached 214.57 percent declining from 349.38 percent during the same period. It is also evident that the wage gap between highest and lowest paid workers is high in private sector compared to the public sector (Pant, 1983). Wage and benefits paid to the workers of tea estates not only differs by gender but it vastly differs in the public and private estates on the one and on the other it also varies one estate to another, especially in the private estates (Upadhyay & Gautam, 1997). The monthly per capita earnings of the construction workers is almost half in comparison to the employees working in the financial intermediation on the one and on the other it varies largely by place of work and season (ILO, 2003).

Normally migrant workers are working for low wage in comparison to non-migrants. The mean wage per day of the non-migrant workers is 17 percent more than that of the migrant workers (Mariappan, 2009). In recent years large number of displaced people compelled to work at lower rate than the prevailing market rate. As a result, the

employers prefer the displaced workers than the native workers with the intention of their exploitation (GEFONT, 2005).

Different studies in Nepal have shown wage variation differently. This article tries to highlight the differentials in wage/Salary and other benefits based on the data obtained from the national level Census of Manufacturing Establishments 2006/2007 for the total workers (operative and administrative).

### Wage Differentials in Manufacturing Sector

Wage/Salary and other benefits of the workers received against their hard work differs not only one sector to another but also varies greatly among the workers working within manufacturing sector by place, legal status, ownership pattern, size and type of the establishment. The threshold level of wage/salary taken into consideration in this article is Rs. 3382 per months<sup>2</sup> based on the minimum wage of the operative workers revised in 2006 by the Nepal government due to unavailability of separate wage data for the operative and administrative workers. However, this underestimates the average wage because wage/salary of non-operative workers is normally higher than that of the operative workers.

### Employment and Wage by Place of Residence

In Nepal more than 54 percent manufacturing establishments are dispersed in rural areas where rest 46 percent are concentrated in 58 urban centres of the country in 2006/07.

**Table: 2 Status of Manufacturing Establishments and Employment, 2006/07**

No of Establishment	Number	Percent
Nepal	3446	100.0
Urban	1575	45.7
Rural	1871	54.3
<b>Employment</b>		
Nepal	177550	100.0
Urban	60658	34.2
Rural	116892	65.8
<b>Wage Employment</b>		
Nepal	169891	100.0
Urban	57170	33.7
Rural	112721	66.3

Source: CBS, *Census of manufacturing establishments, Nepal 2006/2007*.

- 2 Average minimum wage of the operative workers including dearness allowance. While calculating this, weight is given as: unskilled=4, semi-skilled=3, skilled=2 and highly skilled=1.



About one third employment is generated by the 46 percent enterprises located in urban areas showing less employment creation by a unit of enterprise in comparison to the enterprises running in rural areas. On an average a unit of establishment in Nepal is providing employment to 52 persons (39 in urban areas and 62 in rural areas) including 95.7 percent wage earner. The rest 4.3 percent are working as proprietors and unpaid family workers (Table 2). The proportion of working as proprietors and unpaid family workers is more in urban areas (5.8%) compared to rural areas (3.6%) may be due to the lack of entrepreneurship skill of the rural people. The information also reveals that large sized enterprises are set up in rural areas because of availability of cheap land and labour as well as avoid to urban congestion.

Table 3 explains that, of the total amount paid to the workers in the form of wage/salary and other benefits by the manufacturing establishments, 38 percent is distributed to less than 34 percent workers of urban areas while 66 percent rural workers shared the 62 percent reflecting higher wage rate in urban places in comparison to rural areas. In monetary terms on an average a worker working in manufacturing establishment earns Rs. 47,349 annually (Rs. 3,642 per month)<sup>3</sup> which is more than the average minimum wage (Rs. 3382) prescribed by the government to the operative workers in 2006. This picture clearly indicates that workers in this sector on an average are receiving more than minimum wage but while distinguishing the workers into operative and non-operative the situation may be different. The earnings of urban workers in this sector is remarkably high (more than 21 percent) compared to rural workers.

**Table 3: Wages Provided to the Workers by Place of Residence**

Place of Residence	Nepal	Urban	Rural
No. of Establishments	3446	45.7	54.3
No of Employees	169891	33.7	66.3
Total Annual Wage (in '000 Rs)	8044096	38.1	61.9
Per-capita Annual Wage (in Rs)	47,349	53,578	44,189
Average wage per month (in Rs)	3642	4121	3399

Source: CBS, *Census of manufacturing establishments, Nepal 2006/2007*.

### *Legal Status and Wage*

The workers working in the enterprises placed in the others category are receiving more than three times wage (1.2% employees shared 2.3% of the wage) than the workers of the private enterprises where 44 percent workers compelled to share 28 percent of the wage. The workers in the enterprises under partnership and cooperatives are also compelled to work at minimum level of wage. The wage in the Public Limited Company is about three times more than that of private sector workers where it is further high in the enterprises categorised as others showing high differences among the enterprises

3 The annual earnings divided by 13 month salary in a year including Puja allowance during Bada Dashain.



operated differently. This information clearly indicates the exploitation of workers in the private, partnership and cooperative sector providing wage and benefits less than minimum wage of the operative workers where more than half of the work force is involving.

**Table 4: Wage by Legal Status of the Establishments**

Legal Status	No. of Establishment	No of Employees	Total Wage (in '000 Rs)	Average Annual Wage (in Rs)	Average Monthly Wage (in Rs)
Private	70.1	43.6	27.5	29,860	2297
Partnership	8.5	7.3	4.9	31,941	2457
Private Limited	19.4	34.2	40.6	56,138	4318
Public Limited	1.2	13.4	24.4	86,620	6663
Cooperative	0.4	0.4	0.3	33,078	2544
Others*	0.4	1.2	2.3	92,087	7084
Total	3446	169891	8044096	47,349	3642

\* Manufacturing units of dairy products; animal feeds; distilling, rectifying and blending of spirits; paper and paper board; publishing newspaper and journals; pharmaceuticals and medicinal chemicals and articles of cement, concrete and plaster.

Source: CBS, *Census of manufacturing establishments, Nepal 2006/2007*.

### *Wage Differentials by Ownership*

Looking at the wage status of the employees on the basis of ownership, it varies from less than 33 thousand rupees in a year (Rs. 2527/month) to more than 110 thousand (Rs. 8506/month). The highest rate of wage is paid to the employees of government owned enterprises and the lowest rate to the workers working in others sector. The employees in the establishments under the joint ownership of Nepali and foreigners, joint ventures with Nepal government and foreigners is more or less the same that stood at the range of eight thousand per month. More than 90 percent employees are concentrated in the enterprises owned by the Nepali nationals where average wage is below the national minimum wage fixed by the government (Table 5). More than 97 percent establishments are in this category.

**Table 5: Wage by Ownership of the Establishments**

Ownership Status	No. of Establishments	No of Employees	Total Wage (in '000 Rs)	Average Annual Wage (in Rs)	Average Monthly Wage (in Rs)
Government	0.4	4.1	9.7	110,583	8506
Joint Venture With Government	0.1	0.3	0.7	102,009	7847
Nepali Nationals	97.3	90.2	78.5	41,223	3171
Nepali Nationals and Foreigners	1.1	4.0	8.6	103,271	7944
Foreigners	1.0	1.1	2.3	97,185	7476
Others*	0.1	0.3	0.2	32,848	2527
Total	3446	169891	8137313	47,349	3642

\* Manufacture of paper and paper board, publishing books and other publications and manufacturing of cement, concrete and plaster.

Source: CBS, *Census of manufacturing establishments, Nepal 2006/2007*.

### *Size of the Enterprises and Wage*

Table 6 highlights that there is no direct relation between the size of employment and wage. However, the establishments providing employment to 200 or more are paying more wage than the other size of enterprises where 42 percent workers are working. The enterprises providing employment to 10-19 and 50-199 workers (73.5%) are receiving less than the average minimum amount of wage.

**Table 6: Wage Differentials by Size of Employee**

Size of Employee	No. of Establishments	No of Employees	Total Wage/salaries (in '000 Rs)	Average Annual Wage (in Rs)	Average Monthly Wage (in Rs)
10-19	55.5	11.6	10.7	43758	3366
20-49	21.9	12.8	12.3	45445	3496
50-99	11.4	15.1	13.0	40680	3129
100-199	6.6	18.7	17.1	43295	3330
200 and More	4.6	41.7	46.9	53167	4090

Source: CBS, *Census of manufacturing establishments, Nepal 2006/2007*.

It is interesting to note that there is a positive relationship between the fixed assets and the wage/salary paid to its employees. As the fixed assets increases the wage rate also increases (Table 7). In Nepal 83 percent manufacturing establishments have their fixed assets less than 10 million rupees and 53 percent of the employees are concentrated in these enterprises. The share of these enterprises in the total volume of wage/salary and other benefits is only 34 percent. As a result, such establishments are paying far below than the national average to its employees. Contrary to this, the share of large sized establishments on the basis of fixed assets is paying 47 percent of the total amount of wage/salary to 30 percent workers. Thus these establishments are paying nearly 2.5 times more than the small sized establishments where 17 percent medium sized establishments are paying 19 percent of total wage to its employees (1.8 times more than that of small sized establishments).

**Table 7: Wage Differentials by Fixed Assets of the Establishment**

Description	Fixed Assets		
	<10 million	10-50 million	>50 million
No. of Establishments (%)	82.8	11.5	5.6
No of Employees (%)	53.1	16.8	30.1
Total Wage (%)	33.9	19.3	46.8
Per-capita Annual Wage (in Rs.)	30209	54424	73646
Average Monthly Wage (in Rs)	2324	4186	5665

Source: CBS, *Census of manufacturing establishments, Nepal 2006/2007*.

The average wage rate of the small enterprises (occupying 83% enterprises and 53% employees) is far below than the government minimum wage. But the large sized

enterprise which comprises less than 6 percent in the total manufacturing establishments are paying Rs. 5665 per month to its workers.

### *Wage Variation by Type of Employment*

Operative workers who directly involves in the production process in any type of the establishments are receiving very low wage (Rs. 2856/month) than the national average. The variation in the highest and lowest wage and other benefits is more than four times. The highest paid workers are managers followed by technical and administrative workers indicating large chunk (83%) of workers are receiving wage far below than the national average.

**Table 8: Wage Differentials by Type of Employment**

Type of Employment	No of Employees	Percent	Wages (in '000 Rs)	Percent	Average Wage (in Rs)	Average Monthly Wage
Manager	2005	1.18	313964	3.9	156591	12045
Administrative Worker	18625	10.96	1690498	21.0	90765	6982
Technical Worker	8745	5.15	822626	10.2	94068	7236
Operative Worker	140516	82.71	5217008	64.9	37128	2856
Total	169891	100	8044096	100.0	47349	3642

Source: CBS, *Census of manufacturing establishments, Nepal 2006/2007*.

### **Conclusion**

Industrialization is considered the backbone of the development of national economy. But in Nepal, this sector has not improved despite continuous efforts since last more than seven decades. The industrial sector is divided into – manufacturing sector and cottage and small scale industries mainly on the basis of employment generation and use of machine. The number of manufacturing establishments and employment generated by this sector has gradually declined after the restoration of the multiparty government in 1990 due to various reasons including weak government policy and conflict.

Wage of the Nepalese workers is very low and varied greatly by place, legal status, ownership, size of the enterprise, fixed assets as well as by the size of employment generated by it. The government has started to fix the minimum wage of the workers in this sector developing a mechanism since 1965 and this process is continuing till date although there are some problems. The majority workers working in private sector have low wage comparison to public sector enterprises. Likewise, the workers involving directly in production process are suffering more. The information reveals that the minimum wage fixed by the government is not properly implemented in this sector. Similarly, to increase the productivity of the workers building industrial peace and prosperity, the wage of the real workers involving in production process should increase at least par to the subsistence level and review it at a fixed interval of time by preparing a wage index separately for different sectors on regular basis considering the inflation rate instead of bargaining between workers union and employers following disputes.

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