

India: Maharashtra health workers protest; Sri Lankan government workers demand higher pay; New Zealand casino workers extend strike

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and New Zealand

7 September 2019

India airports authority workers demonstrate

Airports Authority of India (AAI) workers held lunchtime demonstrations outside the agency's New Delhi headquarters and at airports across India on September 2. Workers were protesting the Modi government's decision to hand over the profit-making Ahmedabad, Jaipur, Lucknow, Guwahati, Mangaluru and Thiruvananthapuram airports to the Adani Group.

Protestors wearing black badges pointed out that when New Delhi and Mumbai airports were privatised, AAI employees at those facilities were asked to resign and rejoin as private employees. Most of the workers who rejected this and opted to remain as government of India employees were later transferred to different locations.

Journalists protest in Uttar Pradesh

More than 100 journalists protested outside the Mirzapur Collectorate office in Uttar Pradesh on Thursday. The journalists were demonstrating against the state government filing a case against a reporter who filmed students at a government school eating rotis with salt as their midday meal.

Journalists condemned the complaint by the local Block Education Officer who accused the reporter and a village head of conspiring to defame the Uttar Pradesh government.

A day after the journalist's video went viral, a District Magistrate ordered a probe into the incident and a teacher in charge of the school and a local government supervisor were suspended.

Uttar Pradesh teachers oppose selfie-based attendance system

Basic education teachers demonstrated on September 2 against the Uttar Pradesh state government's decision to impose a selfie-based online attendance system. The teachers claimed the system, which uses a mobile phone app, was an invasion of privacy and that photos of female teachers could be misused.

Under the system teachers will have to submit a selfie three times a day—in the morning, during lunch time and while leaving. Teachers held larger protests the following day and presented a memorandum denouncing the system to a district magistrate.

Punjab water and sanitation contract workers protest over salary non-payments

Water Supply and Sanitation contract workers in India's Punjab state demonstrated this week outside a district administrative complex over the non-payment of three month's salaries. Workers' family members, including children, participated in the rally, which was organised by the Contractual Multipurpose Health Workers' Association.

Protesters chanted slogans denouncing the state government for not reimbursing their salaries on time and workers' low pay rates. Numbers of employees have not been paid for more than three months.

Maharashtra health workers fight for higher honorarium

Around 2,000 Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) workers staged a one-day demonstration outside a Nashik golf club to call for a higher honorarium. The workers provide village-level government-funded health services. Workers criticised government authorities for not providing sufficient funding or adequate honorarium payments.

Muthoot Finance workers continue indefinite walkout in Kerala

About 220 Muthoot Finance Limited employees in the south Indian state of Kerala have been taking indefinite strike action over the past two weeks. The action, which has impacted on the operations of 300 of the company's 611 branches in Kerala, is organised by the Non-Banking and Private Finance Employees Association, which is affiliated to the Centre of Indian Trade Unions.

Workers have accused the company, which earned more than 156 million rupees (\$US2.81 million) profit last year, of not paying their employees a decent wage. Some employees have worked for the company for around 10 years but are only receiving 8,000-10,000 rupees (\$113-\$140) per month.

Bangladesh: Islamic University officers strike for salary increase

About 200 Islamic University officers struck work for a third day on Wednesday, whilst threatening to continue their industrial action if their demands are not granted. The strikers are members of the Islamic University Officers' Association.

Workers want a salary rise, a change in working hours to 8:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., instead of 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., and extension of the retirement age from 60 to 62 years. The university is located in the Khulna administrative division of western Bangladesh.

Bangladesh garment workers demand reinstatement

Workers from two garment factories in the Ashulia industrial belt began partial daily strike action on August 29 to demand the reinstatement of 58 sacked employees. ESK Clothing and Naba Knit Composite sacked 28 and 30 workers, respectively.

Management responded to the limited industrial action by closing down both factories indefinitely on Wednesday.

While about 2,000 people work in the two plants, Naba Knit Composite Ltd claimed it had sacked its 30 workers because of a fall in orders. Eske Clothing employees allege that management hired thugs to attack them, resulting in the injury of at least five workers, most of them women.

Sri Lanka development officers and executive officers protest

Around 16,000 development officers held a national one-day sick leave walkout on September 4 to demand payment of a promised 3,000-rupee allowance for recent government infrastructure programs, a proper transfer scheme and regular transport payments for field trips. Around 2,000 development officers held a protest march in Colombo to reinforce their demands.

On the same day, a group of Sri Lankan public executive officers rallied in Colombo outside the Public Administrative Ministry to demand an end to salary anomalies.

Pakistan: Islamabad teachers demand permanent jobs

Teachers working in educational institutes run by the Federal Directorate of Education (FDE) in Islamabad have threatened strikes and protests if the Pakistani government fails to make their jobs permanent by September 16.

The Young Teachers' Association issued the threat after the FDE refused to convert teachers from daily-wage workers to permanent

employees in defiance of a court order and directions from a parliamentary body, which had investigated the issued.

Last month teachers protested after the FDE announced that it had 600 vacant permanent teachers' positions but refused to make currently serving daily-wage teachers permanent.

South Korean gaming workers protest job insecurity

Workers at Nexon Korea, the country's first unionised game company, held their first demonstration last week, a year after the enterprise was launched. The protest, involving around 600 workers, was on September 3 outside company headquarters in Seoul. The union demanded an end to "excuses for reorganisation," and "job security." Nexon faces an unstable financial situation and an estimated 100 jobs are in danger.

Earlier this year, the company's founder tried and failed to sell a controlling stake. Two US offices closed, four projects were suspended and many overseas employees were also laid off.

South Korean labour group demands permanent positions for part-time workers

Around 2,000 members of the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) rallied outside Jongno Tower in central Seoul last Saturday to urge the Korean Expressway Corp. (KEC) to reinstate 1,500 toll collectors as mandated by the Supreme Court.

The toll collectors were dismissed earlier this year after refusing the state-run expressway operator's attempt to hire them indirectly through a newly established subsidiary.

The workers argued that KEC was reluctant to hire them directly because it plans to fire them and adopt a smart-tolling system by 2020. On August 29, the Supreme Court upheld the lower court's ruling in favour of the toll collectors, a decision that came six years after workers filed the suit in 2013.

Workers protest unsafe conditions in South Korean power plants

Last Saturday, some 1,000 members of the KCTU's public transportation unit held a rally outside the presidential office in Seoul to demand that public power plants stop outsourcing dangerous jobs.

The protest came after an official fact-finding committee announced that state-run power plant operators and their subcontractors failed to set up sufficient safety systems, as seen in a fatal accident that killed a young irregular worker at Taean Power Plant last December.

Besides the unsafe facilities, a high concentration of crystal quartz was found at his worksite, which is classified as a class-one carcinogen. The workers were exposed to dangerous substances including benzene and carbon monoxide on a daily basis, according to the committee.

Cambodian hotel staff protest over unpaid wages

Over 150 Great Duke Phnom Penh Hotel workers protested on Tuesday demanding management pay outstanding salaries. The action comes after months of discontent over payroll issues.

The hotel has reportedly had problems paying the salaries of its employees since June. It only paid their June and July salaries after the intervention of the Labour Ministry following complaints. Current protests are over the non-payment of August salaries.

Toch Kosal, a hotel employee and protest leader, told the media on Thursday: “It is now the third time that we have informed the ministry, but this time we decided to hold a protest because informing the ministry has become useless. We are concerned that the hotel will be shut down and they are intentionally paying employees late so that employees will leave the hotel of their own accord.”

Sydney asbestos removal workers’ strike enters sixth week

Fourteen workers from the Sydney-based asbestos and toxic materials management company GBAR walked off the job indefinitely on July 29 in a dispute over low wages and a lack of entitlements. They have picketed several business premises in Sydney owned by GBAR’s company director and multi-millionaire Barend Jacobus Stoltz.

GBAR’s workforce includes casual and permanent employees covered under an industry award agreement. Workers complained that they are on individual contracts and that hourly wage rates vary between workers. They claim that industry award entitlements are not paid, and that they do not receive annual holiday leave loading or a travel allowance.

The strikers rejected management’s proposed enterprise agreement, which they said was below award pay rates. The company sent a text message to workers threatening them with the sack if they did not accept its proposed deal.

OI Glass workers maintain strike action over new agreement

About 100 employees of multinational glass manufacturer OI Glass are taking protected industrial action over a new enterprise agreement at factories in Brisbane, Melbourne and Adelaide. The Electrical Trades Union (ETU) and the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) claim that workers have not had a real pay increase in seven years.

Industrial action began with an indefinite ban on overtime and communication with contractors. In late April, workers began 24 hours on-24 hours off stoppages which continued for three months. They are currently holding temporary pickets at OI Glass factories and the company’s headquarters in Melbourne.

While the ETU claims that OI Glass is using scab labour to maintain production at its Melbourne and Brisbane factories, it has not stepped up industrial action. Instead it is prolonging the dispute and isolating the workers.

OI Glass has 90 percent of Australia’s market share with a revenue of \$2.62 billion between 2013–17. According to the AMWU, the company’s CEO receives an annual \$11 million compensation package.

New Zealand: Auckland SkyCity workers extend strike

SkyCity Casino workers in Auckland who walked out for 24 hours on August 31 extended their stoppage for another 24 hours, ending last Monday. A Unite Union spokesman said hundreds of picketing workers and supporters severely disrupted casino operations.

Almost 900 of the casino’s employees voted by 94 percent to reject the employers’ last offer and for strike action. The initial ballot authorised a full weekend strike but the union’s first notice was for just 15 hours. The announcement to extend the strike was issued late on Sunday.

Employees want compensation for the unsociable hours they are required to work. The main union claim is for penalty rates on nights and weekends, and greater staff input in determining rosters.

Almost all low paid workers are forced onto rotating rosters irrespective of their personal or family situation. Unite says it has been trying to negotiate more “humane” rosters for years but SkyCity refuses any extra pay for nights and weekends. The union has offered some undisclosed “concessions” on its claim, but SkyCity has so far rejected any movement on the issue.

New Zealand retail workers hold nationwide stop-work meetings

A series of 58 stop-work meetings are currently being held nationwide by over 12,000 retail workers as part of the First Union’s “Worth It” campaign. The meetings began in Rotorua last month, and will continue until September 20.

First Union is calling on retail industry employers to pay workers a so-called ‘Living Wage’ of \$21.15 an hour, to give workers enough hours to live on, and to lift existing pay rates relative to increases in the minimum wage. The “Living Wage,” being promoted by a number of unions, is grossly inadequate. The figure has been arrived at, not through the independent demands of the working class, but by the NZ Family Centre, a registered charity.

First Union’s general secretary Dennis Maga declared that the retail industry makes up almost 20 percent of New Zealand’s workforce and called on the Labour government’s Fair Pay Agreements (FPA) workgroup to consider what a FPA would look like in the retail sector. The misnamed FPA legislation establishes a corporatist union-employer-government framework that would entrench low pay and ban strikes across an entire sector.



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