

Thousands of Assam tea workers demand lockdown wages in India; Protests continue in Bangladesh over wages, factory closures and safety

Workers Struggles: Asia and Australia

2 May 2020

India: Assam tea workers demand coronavirus lockdown wages

Tens of thousands of tea plantation workers in India's north-eastern state of Assam protested on April 28 to demand payment of wages during the coronavirus lockdown. The demonstration involved workers from tea gardens across the state.

Workers said that they have not received their wages even though the central and state governments had ordered on March 29 and April 2 respectively that they should be paid in full during the lockdown period.

The protest was called by the All India Central Council of Trade Unions and supported by Asom Sangrami Chaah Shromik Sangha. Protesting workers said that Tea Board India was silent on the outstanding pay.

Gujarat diamond cutters demonstrate against being forced to work in lockdown

Workers from the Diamond Bourse in Surat, Gujarat stopped work on April 28 in protest against being forced to work during the coronavirus lockdown. They accused management of not being concerned about their safety and demanded that they be sent back home to their original towns and villages.

Migrant workers in Tamil Nadu demand safe transport home

Around 100 workers affected by the coronavirus lockdown protested on April 24 outside the Revenue Divisional Office (RDO) in Sriperumbudur. The workers, most of whom are from Jharkhand state, north of Tamil Nadu, gathered near the office in the morning and demanded safe transport to their family homes.

The protest ended after a RDO official told them that the

workers could not be sent back to their homes in Jharkhand state because of the lockdown but claimed they would be provided food and water during this period.

Municipal sanitary workers in Ramanathapuram demand time off

Sanitary workers from Ramanathapuram, Tamil Nadu held a sit-down protest outside the Ramanathapuram Corporation on April 26 to demand time off during the coronavirus pandemic. They told the media that they needed it because their workload had been increased during the pandemic and that were risking their lives.

Bangladeshi jute mill workers demand unpaid wages

Mesars Arnu Jute Mill workers demonstrated outside a mill in Hili, Dinajpur district, on Sunday to demand unpaid wages and reopening of the plant. The protest restricted traffic in the area. The protest began after mill management failed to make a scheduled payment of wages on April 26.

Hili employs about 800 people. While authorities closed the mill last month, as part of the government's coronavirus lockdown, workers were not paid and instead given 10 kilograms of rice, 3 kg of potato and a kg of edible oil. Mill authorities said workers would be paid after the mill reopened during the week.

Bangladesh sugar mill workers and farmers demand overdue pay

Around 500 workers from the Rangpur Sugar Mill in Gaibandha district in northern Bangladesh demonstrated in front of their

factory this week to demand four months' unpaid wages. They were joined by local sugarcane farmers demanding outstanding payments.

One mill worker told the media: "We spent all our savings to maintain our families during the corona lockdown and grocery shops had declined to provide us with essentials on credit during the pandemic."

According to authorities, a total of 120 million taka (\$US1.4 million) is owed to workers and sugarcane farmers. A mill official claimed that the mill could not sell sugar because of the lockdown and said the government should provide the required funds.

Protests continue in Bangladesh over wages, factory closures and safety

Tens of thousands of workers from 770 factories, including 280 garment plants, in industrial estates across Bangladesh are continuing protests begun in early April. The demonstrations erupted after workers found their factories shuttered on April 4, following the lifting of the government's coronavirus lockdown. The protests escalated after April 16, the day the government claimed that factory owners would pay all outstanding wages.

On Tuesday, garment workers at a factory in Jessore walked off the job and demonstrated warning they would not return to work unless their safety was assured. The protest occurred after workers discovered that a fellow employee had tested positive with COVID-19.

Thousands of garment workers at Gazipur and Ashulia demonstrated on Monday and Sunday to demand the factories be reopened with safe working conditions and wages be paid. Several protesting workers were injured when police attacked with tear gas. Factory authorities announced lay-offs from April 1 without paying any salaries.

Other protests over unpaid wages were held last Sunday in Dhaka, Narayanganj, and Savar. Some factories have not paid wages for February and March. The workers were supposed to be paid on April 16 but it was postponed to April 25.

Pakistani utility store workers strike for pay rise

Workers from the state-owned Utility Stores Corporation (USC) struck across the country on April 24, ahead of Ramadan holidays, to demand increased pay. Over 4,200 stores, which sell food and other essential goods, were closed by the walkout.

The All Pakistan Workers Unions suspended the strike later that day for at least ten days after talks with the government.

The USC reportedly agreed to raise daily wage workers' monthly pay from 15,000 rupees (\$US92.88) to 17,500 starting from July and to pay an annual increase due in monthly instalments since last December. The government has failed to

implement a pay increase agreed to in 2018 for USC workers.

Taiwan medics protest for greater hazard compensation

At risk healthcare workers treating COVID-19 patients demanded hazard subsidies on Tuesday, in line with payments made during the SARS outbreak in 2003.

The protest was held outside of the Center of Disease Control headquarters in Taipei and involved representatives from the Taipei Doctors Union and National Taiwan University Hospital Union.

Hazard pay rates announced last week by the Central Epidemic Command Center are lower than amounts paid in 2003. At that time doctor could receive up to \$NT10,000 per day and a nurse \$6,000.

The new measures also stipulate that only one doctor per ward and one nurse per shift in a ward could apply for the subsidy. The measures also limit the number of patients being treated by health workers. Doctors can only treat 10 COVID-19 patients per day whilst nurses could only treat 5 patients in one shift.

Thousands of Cambodian construction workers leave sites, fearing coronavirus infection

The Cambodia Construction Association (CCA) has reported that over the last two months over 90,000 workers have left building sites in fear of contracting COVID-19. The CCA said 300,000 workers are usually employed on construction sites.

Meanwhile, thousands of Cambodian garment workers who have been forced back to work have complained that employers are not providing additional protection against the virus.

The Cambodian embassy in Thailand has urged the two million Cambodian migrant workers in Thailand not to return home fearing that they will spread the highly infectious virus.



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