

## Thousands of migrant workers demonstrate across India; Tamil Nadu cleaners demand COVID-19 protection

# Workers Struggles: Asia and Australia

16 May 2020

### India: Tens of thousands of migrant workers demonstrate to demand passage home

Laid-off or furloughed migrant workers from various states across India are demanding to be sent back to their home towns and villages during the COVID-19 lockdown. Police have brutally dispersed the mass demonstrations.

Tens of thousands of casual or short-term contract migrant workers are mainly employed in the construction industry and in global production plants. These low-paid workers have no access to relief benefits, leaving them destitute, starving and unable to pay rent.

On May 10, over 500 migrant protesting contract workers in Amruthahalli, Bengaluru demanding passage home locked company representatives in their offices. Ten Uttar Pradesh-bound workers were also arrested for allegedly vandalising a bus in Bhavnagar after cancellation of a train in Bhavnagar, Gujarat.

On May 11, migrant workers in Jaipur, Rajasthan demanding the government organise transport back to their home towns and villages were violently attacked by police. Many workers allege that they were badly beaten. Migrant workers from Bihar rallied in Moradabad, Uttar Pradesh demanding they be returned home. The workers said they had no money and had received hardly any rations.

Migrant workers from West Bengal and Bihar held a protest march in Shastri Nagar on May 11 to demand transport facilities to return home. They are living in rented accommodation but face eviction because they have no work. Their march was attacked and dispersed by police.

### Tamil Nadu cleaners demand improved safety from Covid-19

Around 1,000 cleaning workers in Tiruppur, Tamil Nadu joined demonstrations organised by the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) on May 12. The frontline workers demanded special daily payments, regular medical check-ups and safety equipment to protect them from COVID-19 infections.

Over 400 conservation workers from the Tiruppur Corporation

participated in protests in Palladam, Udumalpet and Uthukuli, and threatened to intensify their action if their demands were not granted by May 17.

Sanitation workers in Madurai demonstrated to demand permanent jobs for around 1,700 contract and 700 daily wage employees in the city. The workers said that they have put their lives in danger attempting to contain the spread of COVID-19 and that the government must make their jobs permanent.

### Bangladesh: Nationwide protests by factory workers now in fifth week

Tens of thousands of workers from hundreds of companies across Bangladesh are maintaining protests that began on April 4 after workers found their factories still shuttered after the government ended a national coronavirus lockdown.

The workers, from six industrial zones and other locations, want the factories reopened, payment of all wages during the lockdown, the annual Eid holiday bonus and full restoration of pay rates which were cut by 35 percent in April.

On Wednesday, around 10,000 workers of Shah Fateh Ullah Textile Mills and Jalal Haji Spinning Mills in Narayanganj's Fatullah sub-district demonstrated to demand their wages and the Eid bonus. The factory authorities had refused to pay the bonus and decided to pay only 60 percent of workers' April wages. Workers alleged that they were attacked by company goons, leaving about 10 injured. Police were also deployed to forcefully disperse the protest.

On the same day Adiat Apparels garment factory workers in Ashulia demonstrated against factory closure and for full payment of their March wages.

A day earlier thousands of garment workers protested in the Ashulia, Gazipur, Narayanganj and Chattogram industrial zones and in Dhaka city, demanding their unpaid wages for March and full payment of April wages. Several hundred workers demonstrated at garment factories in Mirpur area over the same issues.

Up until Tuesday, only 997 garment factories out of the total of 7,600 in Bangladesh had paid workers their April wages.

## **Bangladeshi road transport workers demand work or wages**

Several hundred road transport workers affected by the COVID-19 lockdown demonstrated on the Thakurgaon-Dhaka Highway outside the Thakurgaon inter-district bus terminal on Monday. They demanded financial relief or lifting of the government ban on public transport.

Workers said they were rendered jobless by the lockdown but had not received any relief payments from the government or the transport owners. Armed forces and police were deployed to the area. Civil administrators intervened and gave an assurance of immediate relief distribution.

## **Pakistan: Karachi workers protest non-payment of salaries and layoffs**

A large number of workers protested in Karachi against the non-payment of salaries and continuing layoffs on Monday. Workers across multiple industries in Karachi joined the demonstration called by the National Trade Union Federation of Pakistan and Home-Based Women Workers Federation.

According to the union, six million daily-wage workers lost their jobs during the COVID-19 lockdown. The withholding of salaries of industrial workers by private companies and government entities is widespread throughout the country and a longstanding issue faced by Pakistan workers.

The unions warned that the protest campaign would be expanded if the issues are not immediately addressed.

## **Government hospital nurses in Pakistan to demand COVID-19 protection**

On Tuesday nurses from government hospitals used International Nurses Day to demonstrate outside the Karachi Press Club. They were protesting the government's failure during the COVID-19 pandemic to provide personal protective equipment (PPE) and the virus's impact on frontline health workers.

Protesters demanded that authorities immediately pay all withheld allowances, including health risk and health professional payments and to implement a previously agreed service structure. The protest was called by the Sindh Young Nurses Association which said the campaign will continue until its demands are met.

## **Cambodian handbag factory workers demand unpaid wages**

About 1,600 workers at the FMF bags and handbags factory in Takhmao city, in Cambodia's Kandal province, protested outside the plant on Wednesday to demand their unpaid April wages.

The factory suspended operations because of the coronavirus pandemic 20 days earlier and is not due to open for another 15 days. Management sacked 150 workers and failed to pay wages on May 11, claiming that this was due to the lack of orders caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Cambodian garment industry's peak body has revealed that 180 factories have suspended operations and another 80 were about to do so, leaving 150,000 employees out of work.

## **New South Wales nurses' union calls empty protest against wage freeze**

Unions covering thousands of nurses fighting the COVID-19 pandemic in New South Wales (NSW) have called on their members to send protest emails to state politicians opposing state Liberal-National government plans to impose a public sector wage freeze. Under the current enterprise agreement, state government nurses are entitled to a 2.5 percent wage increase from July 1.

The NSW government claims the freeze is necessary to pay for government spending during the COVID-19 pandemic. Nurses could lose up to \$2,000 annually if the legislation is passed.

More than 400,000 public sector workers, including teachers, paramedics, and others, as well as nurses, will be affected. The freeze will cut more than \$3 billion from the government's wages bill over four years.

According to the NSW Nurses and Midwives' Association (NSWNMA), over 93 percent of public sector members indicated their opposition to the wage freeze in a snap poll. While the NSWNMA and other public sector unions are bogusly feigning concern about the wage freeze, these pro-capitalist organisations refuse to mobilise their membership in a political and industrial struggle against the government. Like all the other unions in Australia, they are collaborating with employers to slash jobs, wages and hard-won working conditions.



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