

India: Bihar rural health workers demonstrate to defend jobs;  
Coimbatore textile workers protest over pay cuts

## Workers Struggles: Asia and Australia

20 June 2020

### India: Nagaland health mission workers on strike

Over 1,800 National Health Mission (NHM) employees struck on June 14 in Kohima, the capital of Nagaland state in northeast India. The workers, which include ambulance drivers, laboratory technicians, nurses, dental as well as AYUSH and allopathic doctors, are members of the National Health Mission Employees Association Nagaland (NEAN).

The strikers demanded pay parity and other basic benefits in line with other state health employees of the same rank. The union suspended the strike for 15 days on June 16 and are holding talks with the state government.

### Rubber manufacturing workers protest in Rajasthan

Around 200 contract workers from Tokai Imperial Rubber India plant in Neemrana, Rajasthan state, have been protesting to demand wages for the COVID-19 lockdown period. The workers are employed through a third-party agency at the plant.

Workers held a sit-down protest for several days outside the factory, beginning on June 9 after management shut the plant. The state labour department is currently in negotiations with workers and company management to resolve the issue.

### Ahmedabad nurses walk out again

Nurses and other health employees contracted by the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation to work at the Sardar Vallabh Patel (SVP) Hospital went on strike on June 11 to oppose pay cuts. It followed a previous strike on June 8 after their contractor slashed May monthly salaries by between 10 and 20 percent.

The strikers returned to work when the contractor later reversed the decision. The latest walk-out was sparked when the contractor failed to confirm in writing that it would restore their full wages as promised.

### Bihar rural health workers hold state-wide demonstrations

Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs) workers in Bihar demonstrated across the state on June 15 to demand permanent jobs and improved remuneration. The demonstrations were organised by the All India Scheme Workers' Federation.

ASHAs are the frontline workers who provide a key interface between the community and the public health care system in rural areas. The Bihar government heavily depends on its large ASHA workforce to reach people in remote areas, especially during the coronavirus pandemic.

ASHAs have been instructed to screen all households and identify anyone with COVID-19 symptoms. These high-risk workers are only paid 3,000-rupees (\$US39) a month.

### Tamil Nadu public transport workers protest

Hundreds of Tamil Nadu State Transport Corporation (TNSTC) workers demonstrated in Coimbatore and Nilgiris districts on Monday with multiple demands. At least 50 workers, including drivers, conductors and technicians at state public transport across 22 branches in Coimbatore and Nilgiris demonstrated for an hour, from 11 a.m. to noon.

Their demands include adequate safety measures and allowances while operating buses during the COVID-19 pandemic, proper staff levels at their respective branches to maintain personal distancing, for management to supply more masks and gloves to employees. The protesting workers also complained that in order to receive a decent wage they have to work for longer than the stipulated hours.

### Textile workers protest in Coimbatore over pay cuts

About 100 mill workers from the government-owned National Textile Corporation (NTC) occupied the corporation's headquarters in Coimbatore on Wednesday to demand full payment of their May salaries. Management has announced that the workers would only receive half their salaries because of the coronavirus lockdown. The

office protest followed demonstrations near their work places on June 16.

The National Textile Corporation, which is controlled by the Ministry of Textiles, operates 23 mills throughout India which produced around 55 million kilograms of yarn and 20 million metres of fabric per annum. The company has around 7,800 employees.

### **Migrant workers in Tiruppur, Tamil Nadu demand to be sent home**

Around 50 migrant workers demonstrated outside the Tiruppur district collectorate office in Tamil Nadu on Monday night to the state government for them to return their original family homes. The workers are originally from Arunachal Pradesh state, about 3,500 kilometres away in north east India.

The migrant workers, who lost their jobs during the COVID-19 lockdown, have no money and are trapped in cramped accommodation in Tiruppur. Tens of thousands of unemployed migrant workers have been trapped by the lockdown and cannot return to their home states.

### **Sri Lanka: Hospital workers in Southern province strike over pay cuts**

Non-medical workers at the government hospital in Balapitiya in Sri Lanka's Southern Province have been on strike since June 11. The attendants, drivers, telephone operators, tailors and other workers are demanding overtime payments pending since April. All government hospitals in the district are withholding overtime payments. The strikers were joined by workers from other government hospitals in Balapitiya and Tissamaharama on Monday.

The hospital workers have been protesting since the end of May after they did not receive their April overtime payments. The workers are only paid 24,500 rupees (\$US132) per month and depend on 10,000 rupees per month in overtime in order to buy household necessities and pay loans.

### **Bangladeshi garment workers demand unpaid wages**

More than 500 workers from the KAC Fashionwear garment factory in Gazipur, Bangladesh demonstrated on Sunday to demand last month's pay. They blocked the Dhaka-Tangail highway for more than an hour. Factory management claims it has no funds because of falling orders but keeps promising that the outstanding salaries will be paid in coming weeks.

All but 500 of the plant's 6,000 workers were laid off, with the promise of being paid a minimum salary, during the COVID-19 lockdown.

Workers said that after paying wages for the month of April, the company took their identity cards pretending they were needed for official documentation. Management, however, has refused to return

the cards.

### **Bangladeshi bidi industry workers protest tax increases**

Thousands of workers and factory owners from the bidi (handmade cigarette) industry protested across the country on Sunday against a 28.2 percent tax increase on the industry in the 2020–2021 national budget.

Protesters formed a human chain at the National Board of Revenue (NBR) headquarters at Segun Bagicha in Dhaka on Monday with five demands, including withdrawal of the tax increase and a minimum remuneration of 100 taka (\$US1.2) for every 1,000 cigarettes rolled.

Bangladesh Bidi Sramik Federation representatives have accused the government of attempting to "kill" the bidi industry, pointing out that the proposed tax increase on other cigarettes will be only 5.14 percent.

The industry employs over 400,000 people with up to 70 percent of them children under the age of 15 years. They are paid just 50 taka (\$US0.59) a day.

### **New South Wales aged care nurses in Gloucester protest**

Aged care nurses and residents from the Soldiers' Memorial Hospital in Gloucester, a rural town north of Sydney, demonstrated outside the facility on June 11. They were opposing the elimination of up to five full-time equivalent nursing jobs when aged care bed licences are transferred to a new facility run by Anglican Care.

A NSW Nurses and Midwives' Association (NSWNWA) spokesperson told the media that the job cuts would create serious staffing shortfalls including no registered nurse for evening or night shifts at the new facility.

An estimated 172 nursing hours and 142 hours for RNs would be lost per week and Assistants in Nursing (AIN) will be used to cover half the hours lost by higher qualified nurses.



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