

India: Petrol refinery and agricultural marketing workers strike against privatisation; Pakistani government workers strike against pay freeze

Workers Struggles: Asia and Australia

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India: Madhya Pradesh State Agricultural Marketing Board employees strike

Over 35,000 employees from the Madhya Pradesh State Agricultural Marketing (Mandi) Board and over 50,000 labourers dependent on Mandi for work began an indefinite strike in Bhopal on September 3. The walkout is in protest against a planned model Mandi Act, which they alleged would benefit private operators over the government's operation.

Workers said that they were protesting to save the Mandi Act 1972 and to ensure economic security of employees. They alleged that police caned protesters at their peaceful demonstration near the state secretariat.

Petroleum refinery workers in Kochi strike against privatisation

Over 1,000 workers from the government-owned Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL) refinery in Kochi struck for 48 hours on Monday in protest against a long-term wage settlement that includes clauses for a speedy privatisation of the company. A protest meeting was held at the Kochi Refinery gate.

The strike was called by the Cochin Refineries Workers Association, the Cochin Refineries Employees Association, the Refinery Employees Union and the BPCL Mazdoor Sangh as part of a national campaign against privatisation. A section of workers from the Mumbai Refinery also walked out in defiance of a court order.

Tamil Nadu sand-carters in Tiruchi protest

The Tiruchi District Sand Bullock Cart Labourers Association demonstrated near the Collector's Office in Tiruchi on September 3 demanding that the Public Works Department open exclusive sand reaches for bullock cart operators on the Kollidam River. Protesters want five riverbank sites opened as agreed during tripartite talks held in July.

The sand-carters said that the quarry on the Cauvery River has remained closed since the COVID-19 lockdown and now river water flow is endangering the livelihood of over 4,000 families. The bullock cart operators and labourers ended their protest after Revenue Department officials held talks with their representatives and claimed they would take steps to implement their request.

Patna Municipal Corporation sanitation workers strike

More than 4,000 sanitation workers from the Patna Municipal Corporation in Bihar state went on strike on September 3 to demand improved wages. Strikers also demanded standardised jobs for daily wage workers, appropriate income for jobs, accident insurance of 2.5 million rupees (\$US34,060) and the payment of salaries and pensions on the 5th day of every month.

Kerala Glass workers demand government takeover

Workers from the privately-owned Excel Glasses factory in Pathirappally, Kerala state, held a sit-down demonstration outside the plant on September 4 to demand that the state government take over the defunct company. The protest was organised by the Excel Glass Employees Union.

The company is a manufacturer, exporter and importer of flint glass bottles and jars mainly for the liquor, food and pharmaceutical industry. Excel Glasses Ltd is a public incorporated company classified as a non-government company established in 1970 and has a workforce of over 500 employees.

West Bengal tea plantation workers protest

The Bharatiya Terai Dooars Workers' Union (BTDWU) called demonstrations at over 200 tea plantations in West Bengal on

September 3 with several demands. The major demands were a 20 percent bonus ahead of this year's Durga Puja, an annual nine-day Hindu festival, land rights to plantation residents and fixed minimum wages.

Pakistan: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government employees demand pay rise

Government employees in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, in Pakistan's northwest, demonstrated across the province on Tuesday to demand a pay increase, an end to the labour contract system and for other benefits. Protests were held in Peshawar, the provincial capital, and other districts of Lower Dir, Upper Dir, Shangla, Bajaur and Khyber.

The government workers denounced the government budget pay freeze and pointed to the skyrocketing cost of living. They demanded pay rises ranging from 50 to 100 percent and to include the ad hoc allowances in the basic pay along with the substantial revision of pay scales across the board. They also want the medical allowance to increase to 10,000 rupees (\$US60.09).

The workers are hostile to the contract labour system and want it repealed. The system is increasingly being adopted by the government to slash costs and reduce job security. Retired workers also joined the protests and demanded an increase in the pension rates.

The All Government Employees Grand Alliance, an umbrella union that includes over 30 trade union organisations, called the protests. The alliance announced a province-wide strike for September 24.

Sri Lankan garment workers strike against pay cut

About 300 shirt factory workers in the Katunayake Free Trade Zone walked out on strike on September 8 and 9 against a pay cut imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic. The strike followed ongoing ad hoc protests over the last three months against salary deductions and layoffs announced by the management.

The strikers are demanding to be paid the proper minimum basic wage. During the pandemic, the factory was reopened on the basis that workers would be paid just 400 rupees (\$US2.2) a day. Workers said they are destitute and unable to pay rent or pay for food.

South Korean doctors' union ends one month of industrial action

The Korean Medical Association (KMA) has ended a month long industrial action, including strikes, by general hospital interns and resident doctors after reaching an agreement with the Health Ministry on Monday. The agreement puts a hold on the government's controversial healthcare reforms. A key group of trainee doctors, however, were excluded from the final negotiations because they vowed to continue the walkout.

About 16,000 members of the Korean Intern Resident Association at general hospitals struck on August 21, following weeks of walkouts

that started on August 7. The 130,000-strong KMA, covering resident doctors and practitioners from regional clinics, joined the strike on August 26.

The strike erupted over proposed medical reforms which doctors claimed failed to address insufficiencies in medical training, intensive workloads and work conditions and poor medical infrastructure in rural provinces. Doctors also opposed proposed subsidies for traditional medicine which they said is unscientific medical practice.

Offshore gas platform workers in Western Australia resume strike action

Caterers and cleaners working on Shell's giant Prelude offshore liquefied natural gas (LNG) platform in north Western Australia struck for 24 hours last Friday in their long-running dispute for a better enterprise agreement (EA). The action followed three-hour stoppages in the morning and afternoon on July 23 and August 20, plus bans on baking and laundry services.

The workers are employed by Sodexo, a food services and facility management company headquartered in Paris. The company employs over 60 workers on five LNG platforms off northern Australia. The Prelude floating platform is owned by Royal Dutch Shell, KOGAS and INPEX, and managed by Shell.

The Offshore Alliance, a coalition between the Maritime Union of Australia and the Australian Workers Union, claimed that Sodexo is being influenced by Shell and as a result has reduced its original pay offer by \$17,000 per year, refusing to pay industry rates and conditions. The alliance originally sought pay increases up to \$25,000 a year to bring these specialised workers into line with most other offshore workers. It has now scaled the claim back to between 6 and 10 percent.

Offshore Alliance has threatened to extend the stoppages to other offshore platforms such as Stag and NTP which utilise Sodexo caterers and cleaners.



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