

Over 1.5 million Indian power workers protest against privatisation; Bangladeshi tea estate workers strike for higher pay: Pakistani government workers demand increased wages and pensions

Workers Struggles: Asia and Australia

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The World Socialist Web Site invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature.

Asia

India: Power workers hold national protest against privatisation

More than 1.5 million power sector workers held demonstrations across India on Monday against the Electricity (Amendment) Bill, 2020 and the privatisation of electricity distribution in Union Territories. The demonstrations, coordinated by the National Coordination Committee of Electricity Employees and Engineers, followed nationwide protests in July and August.

Workers alleged that there were plans to privatise discoms in Union Territories such as Puducherry, Chandigarh, J&K and Ladakh. Privatisation has begun in Purvanchal, Vidyut, Vitran, and Nigam, while the Odisha state government has already handed over Central Electricity Supply Undertaking (CESU) to Tata Power and plans to privatise three other discoms—NESCO, WESCO and SOUTHCO.

After mass protests in eleven states and two Union Territories on July 3, the Indian power minister promised to modify the Electricity (Amendment) Bill 2020. Workers have warned that they will take further action if the government tries to push the Bill through the next session of parliament.

North Delhi municipal hospital doctors strike over overdue salaries

Resident doctors from the Hindu Rao Hospital, the largest hospital of the North Delhi Municipal Corporation, walked off the job and demonstrated at the hospital's main gate on Wednesday to demand payment of three months' outstanding salaries. They were joined by nurses holding placards demanding unpaid wages.

The hospital is a centre for the treatment of COVID-19 patients, and many of its healthcare workers have been infected. Prior to the strike, the doctors had held a week-long, three-hour daily go slow protest.

Last week, 9,000 teachers from the North Delhi Municipal Corporation went on strike to demand wages unpaid since May.

University teachers in Odisha protest against new regulations

University teachers across Odisha state protested in front of the Utkal University in Bhubaneswar on Monday against the controversial Odisha Universities (Amendment) Ordinance-2020.

The Joint Action Committee of University Teachers in Odisha alleged that the proposed ordinance is an attempt to dilute the autonomy of the universities by appointing teachers through the Odisha Public Service Commission. Teachers claim that the measure is an attempt to slash the number of recruitments of academic staff at universities.

Contract health workers in Karnataka demand permanent jobs

Outsourced contract health workers, including doctors, nurses and other para medical staff, protested in Belagavi city, Karnataka on Monday to demand permanent jobs, a pay increase and other demands. The Association of Contract and Outsourced Workers demonstrated outside the deputy commissioner's office.

Protesting workers, who have been risking their lives treating COVID-19 patients, raised slogans like "We need wages, not claps" and "Corona warriors need justice." They called for equal pay for equal work, on par with permanent health workers. Other demands were for pension benefits, a provident fund and better working conditions.

JINSUNG workers in Tamil Nadu protest against terminations

Dismissed employees from the Korean based company JINSUNG Engineering in Sriperumbudur, Tamil Nadu demonstrated near the Sriperumbudur Toll gate on October 1 against the sudden termination of 27 employees last month. The employees had been part of the company for 5-12 years. No reasons were given for the terminations.

Puducherry hospital workers protest over police assault

Doctors, nurses and other staff from the Indira Gandhi Government

General Hospital and Research Institute in the Union Territory of Puducherry walked out for two days on October 2, in protest against a police officer who assaulted a duty doctor. They demanded that the police officer be arrested and held without bail. The strikers resumed duty after the chief minister assured them that cases would be registered against the police officer and his relatives.

Government doctors in Kerala strike over suspension

Doctors from the Government Medical College Hospital in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala state, went on strike on Monday to protest the suspension of a senior colleague who was the COVID-19 Nodal Officer. He had been accused of negligence while treating a patient.

Leading up to the strike, doctors from medical colleges across the state boycotted outpatient duty for two hours in the morning, for two days. The doctors returned to work after meeting with the health minister.

Bank of India employees in Rajasthan strike for higher pay

More than 500 Bank of India employees, at branches throughout Rajasthan state, struck on Monday over pay and conditions. Workers, including clerical staff, subordinates, cleaning staff and security guards, protested outside offices in Jaipur, Jodhpur, Kota, Udaipur, Ajmer, Bhilwara, Sriganganagar and various other cities. The workers demanded better pay and benefits, and parity between officers and employees during health check-ups.

Indian telecommunications workers hold nationwide hunger protest

Workers from the state-owned telecommunications company, Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL), held a nationwide one-day hunger protest on October 1 against the national government's neglect of the needs of the company and its customers. They condemned the government for delaying the allocation of the 4G spectrum to BSNL, which they alleged is intended to "bleed" the company of customers and benefit its competitors.

The strike followed a one-day hunger strike by BSNL workers on November 25 that included the 4G issue. Workers also demanded timely payment of wages, release of the pending wages of contract workers and the correction of pension anomalies for workers participating in the voluntary retirement scheme.

Bangladeshi tea garden workers in northern districts strike

Tea garden workers from several districts in north eastern Bangladesh stopped work this week to demand higher pay. The impoverished workers said it had been more than a year since the Bangladesh Tea Workers Union had discussed a wage increase with tea garden owners.

Workers across the Moulvibazar district struck on Wednesday and Thursday demanding a wage increase and bonus for Durga Puja—a Hindu

religious festival. Workers from 23 tea estates in the Manu-Dhalai Valley region struck for two hours on Wednesday, while workers from 14 tea gardens in Sreemangal sub-district staged a two-hour strike on Wednesday and Thursday.

Over 550,000 tea garden workers in the Moulvibazar and Sylhet districts protested in late March against dangerous and unsafe working conditions, due to the emergence of COVID-19.

Tea garden workers only earn 102 taka (\$US1.20) per day. They are demanding an immediate wage increase, insisting that they cannot afford the cost of education for their children while facing rising commodity prices.

Bangladeshi private school teachers strike

Teachers from secondary private schools, not included in the government's monthly pay order scheme (MPO), demonstrated on World Teachers' Day on October 5 outside the Jatiya Press Club, in Dhaka. The teachers' unions, Bangladesh Shikhhak Samity and MPO Bhukto Shikhhak Protisthan Jatiyakoron Liaison Forum, demanded that all private secondary schools be nationalised and brought into the MPO scheme.

Private school teachers were hard hit in March when the COVID-19 lockdown began. They were subjected to terminations and pay cuts of up to 50 percent. It is estimated more than 200,000 teachers at non-MPO secondary schools and colleges are affected. The education minister has categorically rejected the teachers' demands.

Pakistani government sector workers protest over pay and pensions

Over 10,000 government sector workers from several provinces rallied in Islamabad on Tuesday demanding higher pay, a pension increase and a 100 percent rise in the medical allowance. They held sit-down protests in the high-security area housing the National Assembly and at other government buildings.

As part of slashing the budget deficit to meet targets set by the International Monetary Fund, the government has imposed a freeze on all government employees' wages for the 2020–21 financial year. Protesting workers accuse the government of planning to completely eliminate their retirement benefits.

The All Pakistan Clerks Association ended the protest later in the day, after talks with the government. It accepted a vague government promise to establish a committee to "look into" workers' demands.

Australia

Offshore LNG platform maintenance workers in Western Australia on strike

Construction and maintenance workers at Shell Australia's giant Prelude floating LNG platform, off the coast of north-west Australia, began rolling stoppages and work bans on Friday in a dispute over wages and conditions. The dispute is between the Offshore Alliance (a combination of the Australian Workers Union and the Maritime Union of

Australia) and the Electrical Trades Union and employer Monadelphous (Monos), contracted by Shell to maintain the infrastructure.

The Offshore Alliance (OA) claims that Monos wants to impose a four-year enterprise agreement that will put workers on wages 30 percent below the industry standard. Workers want industry standard wages and better job security, citing the casualisation of workers on offshore oil and gas platforms as an issue.

Monos is currently undertaking engineering and construction work to bring the Prelude platform back online. Prelude has been sitting idle since February, when electrical engineering problems saw the vessel shut down. Monos was awarded a \$200 million maintenance service contract at Prelude in 2015. The contract expires in 2022.



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