

India steel workers block major highway; Karnataka underground gold miners demand proper safety equipment; Australia: INPEX maintenance workers fight for better pay

Workers Struggles: Asia and Australia

5 March 2021

Asia

India: Visakhapatnam steel workers protest again over privatisation

Thousands of Visakhapatnam Steel Plant (VSP) workers on February 26 held a roadblock protest on the National Highway (NH-16) to demand the Modi government abandon its plan to privatise the plant.

Workers sat down at Kurmannapalem Junction, which leads to the plant's main entrance, causing a three-hour traffic jam. Similar demonstrations were held in the Srikakulam, Vizianagaram and Krishna districts in solidarity. The trade unions also called for a shutdown of all businesses in Visakhapatnam on March 5.

On February 8, thousands of workers and supporters held a sit-down protest in Vijayawada over the Indian government's approval for a 100 percent disinvestment of Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Limited (RINL), VSP's corporate entity. On February 20 workers held a 24-kilometre protest march through several districts.

The VSP, under the India's ministry of steel, currently has a capacity of 7.3 million tons per annum and employs almost 18,000 workers.

Assam workers demonstrate against Modi government's labour code, farm reform acts and privatisation

Hundreds of workers organised by the Centre for Indian Trade Union and Nikhil Bharat Kishan Sabha held a bike rally from Dholia to Doomdooma on February 28 in protest against the Indian government's new labour code and the three farm acts and demanded repeal of the Electricity (Amendment) Bill, 2020.

Workers denounced steep increases in the price of petroleum products and other essential commodities.

Tamil Nadu village administrative officers protest

Village Administrative Officers' (VOA) Association members protested in Coimbatore on February 26 to demand the government negotiate with the union over long-outstanding claims.

These included the recruitment of village office assistants through the Tamil Nadu Recruitment Board, restoration of a previous pension, abolition of night duty, a special allowance for work during natural

disasters, and the reduction of seniority years from ten to six. Association members also called for the promotion of VAOs and VAO assistants which would increase their salaries by 20 percent and 10 percent respectively.

Karnataka: Hutti underground gold miners protest

Workers from the state-owned Hutti Gold Mine demonstrated during a visit by the mines and geology minister on February 26. Workers raised concerns over dangerous working condition in the underground mines and the lack of updated safety equipment, as well as proper helmets and boots and for improved medical facilities. Some workers held up their torn boots which have not been replaced in two years.

The Karnataka state government wants to double production at Hutti Gold Mine, which is currently producing 1,700 kg of gold per annum. The government wants to increase gold production to 5,000 kg per annum in the next 18 months.

Kerala transport drivers and owners strike

The Kerala Motor Vyavasaya Samrakshana Samiti called a state-wide dawn-to-dusk motor strike on Tuesday over the rising price of petroleum products and cooking gas. All trade unions except the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party-affiliated trade union, the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh, participated.

Owners of a broad range of motor classes, including trucks and other commercial vehicles, participated in the 12-hour strike. Taxis, auto rickshaws and other private carriers were also involved. The Kerala State Road Transport Corporation was also affected because members of the Transport Democratic Federation Kerala State Road Transport Employees Association supported the strike.

Karnataka childcare workers demonstrated in Bengaluru

Anganwadi (childcare) workers protested in Bengaluru on March 2 over their long-pending demands. The anganwadi workers and helpers want to

be classified as C and D group government employees and paid 25,000 rupees (\$US343) for anganwadi workers and 21,000 rupees for helpers. They also want the current contribution-based pension scheme replaced with the previous government pension scheme and to not be required to do additional work for other departments. They say that the government is treating them as free labour.

Kerala government medical college doctors continue protesting

Kerala Government Medical College Teachers' Association members held state-wide "betrayal day" protests on Wednesday to demand unpaid wages and allowances that have accumulated since 2016. It followed a three-hour walkout on January 25 over the issue and another on January 29.

Doctors marched to the Director of Medical Education's office in Thiruvananthapuram on Wednesday and staged a sit-down protest. They also began an indefinite work-to-rule, boycotting VIP, pay-ward and non-COVID duties and other additional tasks not linked to patients or academic activities. The doctors said they would protest outside the state secretariat on March 10.

Sri Lankan plantation workers' union calls off two-month strike

A two-month strike by 600 plantation workers in the Gartmore tea estate in Maskeliya was ended by the union after a negotiation meeting with estate owners on Wednesday.

The workers walked out on December 28 demanding payment of their employee provident fund entitlements before the estate is transferred to new owners. Workers held several demonstrations during the strike. No details about the deal between the estate owner and the union have been revealed.

Local government casual workers in Sri Lanka demand permanent jobs

More than 100 casual workers from local government bodies in Sri Lanka's Southern Province demonstrated outside the district secretariat in Galle, the provincial capital, this week. Most of the protesters were drivers and sanitation workers who had been employed for years without being made permanent. These workers staged a similar protest on January 4 condemning the local government administration for not fulfilling previous promises.

Australia

INPEX oil and gas plant maintenance workers strike in Darwin

About 70 maintenance workers from the INPEX-Ichthys oil- and gas-processing plant in Darwin, the Northern Territory capital, walked off the

job for 24 hours on Wednesday in a dispute over their contract employer's proposed enterprise agreement (EA). The workers, who are members of the Electrical Trades Union (ETU), Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) and the Australian Workers Union decided to strike after 10 months of failed negotiations with Trace-Broadspectrum their employer.

Strikers picketed the plant holding placards stating "Good labour is not cheap!! Cheap labour is not good." An ETU spokesman told media that wages and conditions for the predominantly local maintenance workforce were below industry standard for such facilities and 20 percent below agreements in other states.

The spokesman said Trace-Broadspectrum management had refused to negotiate on wages until the unions drop key demands, including on rostered days off.

South Australia: Nurses at major Adelaide hospital call for suspension of elective surgery

Overworked and traumatised nurses and midwives at the Women's and Children's Hospital (WCH) in Adelaide have called for suspension of elective surgery at the hospital in order to ease pressure on exhausted staff. Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) members said they were understaffed, overworked and concerned about patient care.

Nurses told the ANMF that some are working over 100 hours a fortnight, suffering from stress and fatigue and can no longer take on extra shifts.

Despite the long history of critical understaffing at WCH and other public hospitals, the ANMF has not called for any industrial action to support the nurses' demand for adequate staffing levels.

GEOVERT workers in Queensland strike again

Eight workers from the Gladstone depot of GEOVERT, an asset management contractor in mining and construction on Queensland's north-east coast, walked out on Tuesday morning to demand a better enterprise agreement. The action followed a one-hour strike on January 18 and again on January 22.

The striking workers picketed the depot holding placards stating "Workers fighting to maintain conditions" and "Workers fighting for proper wages."

The GEOVERT workers, who have not had a pay increase for five years, have been "offered" a 1 percent pay rise. They are demanding industry-standard pay, improved allowances and no loss of conditions.



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