

India: Maritime workers protest death of oil platform employees; Sri Lankan health workers maintain protests; Australia: Melbourne and Fremantle dockers strike

## Workers Struggles: Asia and Australia

11 June 2021

### Asia

#### Indonesia: Gojek ride-hailing drivers in Jakarta strike over pay cut

Hundreds of two-wheeled ride-hailing drivers on the Gojek work platform continued strikes and protests in Jakarta and Bandung this week over the company's new incentive policy which reduces their earnings.

Gojek is an on-demand, multi-service digital payment technology based in Jakarta. It was established in Indonesia in 2010 as a call centre to connect consumers to courier delivery and two-wheeled ride-hailing services. The incentive cuts were implemented on Tuesday, the same day Gojek announced its merger with e-commerce company Tokopedia.

Other workers affected by the incentive cuts are Gocar (Taxi) and Gosend (food and package delivery) drivers who have threatened to strike over the cuts. Drivers said they face incentive cuts of more than 50 percent.

A Gosend driver told the media that they would normally receive a 30,000-rupiah (\$US2.10) bonus for delivering at least eight packages a day, and up to 100,000 rupiah for delivering 15 packages. Under the new policy, drivers will only receive 9,000 rupiah for delivering nine packages, and up to 37,500 rupiah for 15 deliveries.

#### India: Maritime workers and families protest over the death of oil platform workers

Maritime workers and supporters affiliated to the Forward Seamen's Union of India (FSUI) and Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) demonstrated outside the Oil and Natural Gas Commission (ONGC) headquarters in Mumbai on Wednesday accusing management of culpable homicide over the deaths at sea of 86 offshore oil production workers and tugboat workers.

Protesters accused management of being responsible for the deaths when barge P305 and tugboat MV Varaprada sank in the Arabian Sea during Cyclone Tauktae and said the matter should be treated as culpable homicide.

They alleged that everyone had three days' notice of the cyclone and there was enough time for ONGC and the barge-owner Afcons to prevent the catastrophe.

The barge was accommodating 270 workers on the Mumbai oilfield platform. All were on board when the barge capsized and the tugboat sank

in the heavy seas. Protesters demanded that the government provide for the financial needs of the family members of the deceased.

#### India: SpiceJet ground staff strike at Mumbai airport

SpiceJet ground staff at Mumbai airport stopped work on June 3 after management told 64 employees that they had to surrender their Aerodrome Entry Permits at the end of their shifts. Workers feared they were about to lose their jobs.

SpiceJet management claimed that their actions were in line with a government directive and gave a meaningless assurance that no ground staff would be removed from service.

Workers alleged that Spicejet plans to lay off 300 of 590 ground staff and will include those employed for 3 to 15 years on fixed-term contracts. They carry out ground-handling work, such as loading/unloading cargo, baggage, and transporting passengers between terminals and aircraft.

In April, the union, Bharatiya Kamgar Sena, told Spicejet that they would strike if the company sacked workers to cut costs. The union, however, did not call a strike but entered into negotiations with the airline. The demand that workers surrender their airport pass after their shift is unprecedented.

#### Punjab power utility contract workers protest over wages and conditions

Punjab State Power Corporation Limited (PSPCL) contract workers were joined by their families in a demonstration outside the corporation's office in Patiala on June 3.

They were demanding the rehiring of terminated contract workers, permanent jobs, financial assistance to the families of those who died while on duty and payment of all outstanding monies. They alleged the government and PSPCL had previously agreed to some of these demands, but none were fulfilled.

#### Safdarjung Hospital nurses in Delhi protest against outsourcing

On Monday, nurses at the largest central government hospital in India, the Safdarjung Hospital in Delhi, protested at the facility against the outsourcing of the contract nurses' jobs. A total of 350 contract nurses work at the hospital. The protest was called by the Safdarjung Nursing Union and Delhi Nursing Union (DNU).

Hospital management has decided to abolish the contracts of nurses already working at the hospital and recruit nurses from a private agency. Nurses said that if the government does not grant their demands, they will step up their protests.

### **Haryana construction workers campaign for welfare assistance**

Construction workers in Haryana began a series of state-wide protests on Tuesday to demand welfare assistance. The poorly paid and super-exploited workers want a 7,500-rupee (\$US102) cash assistance payment per month, along with free treatment for those infected with COVID-19.

The protest was organised by the Haryana branch of Construction Workers' Federation of India, which has called for a siege of the state deputy chief minister's office in the first week of August.

### **Punjab municipal sanitary and local government workers strike**

Safai sewaks (sanitary workers) from the Tarn Taran and Patti Municipal Councils and along with Bhikhiwind and Khemkaran Nagar Panchayats (local government) employees have been on strike since May 13. They are demanding implementation of the 6th Pay Commission and permanent jobs for safai sewaks and sewermen working on contract for more than five years. The strikers have condemned the Punjab government for ignoring their demands and threatened to expand their industrial action.

### **Tamil Nadu LPG cylinder distribution workers protest**

Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) cylinder distribution workers in Tirunelveli demonstrated on June 8 over several demands. They want wages paid monthly, health care, a weekly one-day holiday with pay, and 2.5 million rupees (\$US34,500) compensation for families of employees who die on the job. The LPG delivery workers want to be officially declared frontline employees by the central and state governments during the COVID-19 pandemic.

There are about 2,500 LPG workers distributing gas cylinders to around 400,000 consumers in the Tirunelveli district.

### **West Bengal jute mill workers protest against lockout**

About 1,000 workers from the privately-owned JJI jute mill in Jaggadlal, demonstrated on the Kanchrapara-Barrackpore Road on June 2, blocking it for several hours. Workers demanded the immediate reopening of the mill, which was suddenly closed by management two weeks ago.

Management claimed there was not enough raw material to maintain production, but workers allege that this is a tactic by the mill owner to force up jute prices. The locked-out workers are facing extreme financial difficulties because they have no income and were not paid during last year's COVID-19 lockdown.

### **Bangladeshi kindergarten teachers demand government assistance**

Destitute Bangladesh Kindergarten Association members rallied outside the National Press Club in Dhaka on Wednesday. They were demanding the reopening of kindergartens on June 13, allocation of special compensation for COVID-19 affected kindergartens, and for classes to be held on rotation during the pandemic.

Many teachers are not paid by the government and have faced months without any income, forcing some to change jobs. These teachers are among the lowest-paid workers and have been badly impacted since March by the COVID-19 lockdowns and restrictions.

There are around 60,000 kindergartens in Bangladesh but around 90 percent of them operate in rented homes, employing nearly one million teachers and dependent on tuition fees.

An association representative told the media that without government funds about 75 percent of the kindergartens would stop operating. While Bangladesh's national COVID-19 lockdown was due to end on June 12 it has been extended to June 16.

### **Pakistan government sector workers protest**

Workers from the government secretariat and other departments, including Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA) workers, demonstrated outside the Secretariat building in Islamabad on June 4. WAPDA workers demanded the government end the privatisation of all public sector utilities. The WAPDA is a major target of the government's privatisation program. Other government department workers were demanding pay increases and time scale promotions.

The protest was called by the All Government Employees Grand Alliance, an umbrella group covering multiple government-sector unions. The alliance has threatened to call demonstrations outside the parliament during the upcoming budget session.

In February, the government falsely declared it would give a 25 percent pay increase in response to a mass demonstration by public sector workers. Despite a violent intervention by police firing tear gas and arresting 24 people, and a call from the unions to end the demonstration, workers stood their ground and were joined by workers from other districts.

### **Sri Lankan health workers maintain protests**

Informal and reserved junior (non-medical) health workers began an indefinite sit-down protest outside the Colombo National Hospital on June 1 but were forced to abandon it when police intervened and destroyed their protest shed on June 3, citing a magistrate's order.

The protesters were demanding COVID-19 risk allowances, proper transport facilities and for reserve employees to be made permanent.

Hospital nurses are currently refusing to perform COVID-19 specimen testing if they are not provided with personal protective equipment (PPE). They also want proper transport facilities, a holiday allowance, vaccinations of about 4,000 of their colleagues and guaranteed treatment if they are infected.

All Ceylon Health Services Union (ACHUS) members are also maintaining national protest action begun last week in hospitals and all health institutions over the government's failure to grant their demands and adequate COVID-19 protection.

Health workers' protests were held in Uva province on June 08, the Central and Northwestern provinces on June 10 and the Western and Eastern provinces on June 11. Health workers in the Southern and Sabaragamuwa provinces will demonstrate on June 14.

## **Australia**

### **Mater Hospital maintenance workers in Brisbane strike against pay cut**

About 25 maintenance workers from the privately-owned Mater Hospital in Brisbane, the Queensland state capital, walked out for 24 hours on June 3 and protested outside the hospital in opposition to management's proposed enterprise agreement.

The workers are members of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, Electrical Trades Union, Plumbers Union and the Construction Forestry Maritime Mining and Energy Union.

In April they voted for industrial action after rejecting a management agreement that contained a two-year pay freeze followed by a meagre 1 percent pay increase in the third year with reduced conditions, equating to more than a 4 percent pay cut.

Last week's strike was called after workers rejected the hospital's latest pay offer of 1.8, 1.8 and 2 percent in a three-year agreement. Demands are for annual pay increases of 3.5 percent, no loss of conditions, and consultation on rosters.

### **New South Wales ambulance paramedics defy court order and impose bans**

New South Wales Ambulance (NSWA) paramedics ignored a restraining order from the NSW Industrial Relations Court and implemented 24-hour work bans on Thursday. The Ambulance Division of the Health Services Union (ADHSU) members bans meant that they would only attend to life-threatening cases. NSW paramedics claim they are the lowest paid in Australia, compared to their colleagues in other states who received up to \$250 more per week.

As NSW public service workers their wages usually increase by 2.5 percent each year. The Liberal state government, however, has used the coronavirus as an excuse to slash that increase to just 0.3 percent last year. This year, public servants are only being offered a 1.5 percent increase, equivalent to a 3.2 percent pay cut over two years.

While the cuts affect all public servants, including doctors, nurses and health professionals, the ADHSU has not made any attempt to link up with other public sector workers in a united industrial campaign. The union is keeping the paramedics' isolated while making toothless appeals to the government.

### **Woodside offshore LNG maintenance workers in Western Australia strike**

Workers employed by contractor Legeneering at Woodside's LNG floating platforms Ngujima and Okha in Western Australia began rolling strikes on Wednesday.

Electrical Trades Union and the Offshore Alliance (OA) members, which includes the Australian Workers Union and the Maritime Union of Australia, are fighting for a decent enterprise agreement. The OA claims that Legeneering's contract wages are the lowest in the industry at \$14 per hour below industry standards.

After several attempts by Legeneering to sign up workers to its new contracts last year, the Fair Work Commission (FWC) ordered the company to begin negotiations with the unions. In May, the FWC approved the results of a protected action ballot in which 100 percent of Legeneering workers voted to take strike action. Workers want industry standard wages, negotiations on rosters and reduction of Legeneering's casual workforce.

### **LNG production workers on Barrow Island resume industrial action**

The Offshore Alliance (OA), representing maintenance and production workers employed by contract company UGL at Chevron's LNG production plant on Barrow Island in north-western Australia, has announced workers will be begin a month of industrial action beginning on June 16. It follows a Federal Court decision last month ordering the four unions in dispute over UGL's proposed enterprise agreement to call off strike action due to supposed safety issues claimed by UGL.

The workers want a new agreement that brings their wages and conditions up to industry standard. UGL cut off negotiations earlier in the year but were forced into negotiations after workers last month rejected the company's offer.

The OA claims that UGL originally demanded workers accept a 6.5 percent cut in pay and allowances, following a 10 percent pay cut in 2016. UGL's latest offer rejected by workers was no better. It included a pay freeze and cuts to travel allowances.

### **Melbourne port workers resume industrial action at VICT terminal**

About 130 members of the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) employed by Victorian International Container Terminal (VICT) at Melbourne's Webb Dock began eight consecutive 12-hour stoppages on Friday in their dispute over VICT's proposed enterprise agreement.

Workers unanimously voted for industrial action in February 2020, but the Fair Work Commission intervened, banning further industrial action declaring the strikers were essential workers and used the COVID-19 pandemic to justify the decision.

The port workers oppose excessive working hours at VICT's only fully automated facility in Australia and want additional staff and a reduction in hours.

According to the MUA, workloads were so high workers have difficulty taking meal and toilet breaks. VICT has restricted annual leave to only

those able to find someone to cover their hours. Some employees are reportedly working 50 to 70 extra 12-hour shifts per year.

The MUA wants 3.5 percent annual pay increases on top of new classifications that would lift the annual minimum salary by \$20,000 and a reduction in the standard working week to 37 hours, down from 42 hours. It is also demanding a week off every 10 weeks so that VICT's four-day-on, four-day-off roster at 12-hour shifts averages out to 37 hours a week.

VICT employs over 160 workers at its Webb Dock container terminal under the current agreement. The terminal is responsible for the movement of 34 percent of Melbourne's container traffic and central to the state's logistic network.

### **Industrial action at Fremantle Port enters second month**

Fremantle Ports Authority (FPA) dockworkers in Perth, Western Australia have been holding two-hour stoppages on each shift at the Fremantle Kwinana Bulk Terminal since early May. They are demanding the company presents an improved enterprise agreement offer.

MUA members, in defiance of management locking out workers taking industrial action, voted unanimously on June 3 to maintain the rolling two-hour stoppages.

According to the union, FPA management is restricting any pay rise above the state government's current wage cap and has rejected all demands for better working conditions. The McGowan state Labor government declared in October that wage increases for WA public servants would be frozen at \$1,000 per year, for a further two years without any opposition from the unions. The cap has been in place for three years.



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