

Indian health workers demand COVID-19 protection; Sri Lankan estate plantation workers demonstrate; Frigate maintenance workers clash with police in Western Australia

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and New Zealand

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Asia

India: Tamil Nadu sanitary workers protest to demand protective equipment

Sanitary workers in Coimbatore demonstrated on June 9 to demand that they be treated the same as frontline health workers and receive proper COVID-19 protection gear. The protest was organised by the All India Trade Union Congress and the Tamil Nadu Ambedkar Sanitary Workers Union. The workers have been not provided with any coronavirus safe equipment or even gloves.

Protesters also demanded municipal corporation officials check workers' oxygen levels every morning and ensure that they are provided with safety gear before deploying them to work.

The sanitary workers said that nine of their city colleagues have died from the infectious disease but only one was officially noted to be a COVID-19 death. The workers also demanded that a 2.5 million rupees ex-gratia payment be made to the family of the deceased worker.

ASHA workers' strike continues in Maharashtra

Thousands of Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) workers who walked out on June 15 in Maharashtra remain on strike after talks between their union and the state government on June 16 failed. The workers' action committee has decided to remain on strike indefinitely until their demands, including an increase in their honorarium, are granted.

ASHA union officials said that the state's public health minister has refused to increase the honorarium and failed to offer any assurances on workers' other demands. ASHA workers receive a 5,000-rupee (\$68) honorarium each month. They want this increased 18,000-rupees because they have been working eight to nine hours since the pandemic began, instead of their usual two to three hours. ASHA activists are the backbone of COVID-19 care in India's rural areas.

Vijayawada Municipal Corporation employees walk out

Vijayawada Municipal Corporation workers began a two-day strike at Dharna Chowk in Andhra Pradesh on June 14. They are demanding permanent jobs for outsourced workers, a 5,000-rupee (\$US68) pension for retired workers, housing facilities and a 6,000-rupee health allowance.

The workers alleged that the state government has ignored them for the past four months even though they risk becoming infected with COVID-19 every day at work.

The protest was organised by the Vijayawada Municipal Corporation Workers' and Employees' Union, which is affiliated to the Centre for Indian Trade Unions.

Junior doctors hold state-wide strike in Andhra Pradesh

Junior doctors in Andhra Pradesh boycotted out-patient services at non-COVID-19 hospitals in the state on June 9. The protest strike was organised by the AP Junior Doctors' Association. Its demands include ex gratia health insurance for all frontline workers, COVID-19 incentive payments to all junior doctors (post-graduates and interns) and increased security measures in hospitals.

The union threatened to intensify its agitation by blocking all coronavirus related emergency services on June 12 if the government failed to respond. The Health Minister and Principal Secretary (Health) held talks with the junior doctors and they later called off their strike after the state government agreed to their demands.

ICDS workers in Jammu & Kashmir demand three years' outstanding wages

Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) workers on June 14 demonstrated in Srinagar to demand the release of three years' wages. The ICDS workers assembled at the Press Enclave in Srinagar chanting slogans and expressing their demands.

Protesters told the media that whenever they ask for their salaries, officials claim their positions are not sanctioned, even though there are 850 women working as helpers in the department. The workers said that if their long-outstanding wages are not paid within 15 days they will protest

outside the Civil Secretariat.

Police attack protesting Bangladesh garment workers

Police attacked 600 demonstrating garment workers from Lenny Fashion and Lenny Apparels plants in Savar on June 13, injuring 35 people and leading to the death of another. The workers blocked the Dhaka-Tangail Highway for several hours to demand outstanding payments.

Police baton-charged the protest and used rubber bullets, water cannons and tear gas to break up the protest.

The dead female worker, Jasmine Begum, worked as a swing operator at Goldtex Garments after losing her job at Lenny Fashions. She died from serious head injuries at Dhaka Medical College Hospital. The industrial police in Ashulia claimed she received the injuries after she crashed into an iron pole while fleeing the demonstration.

The two Lenny company plants, which employed 6,000 workers in Dhaka Export Processing Zone, were shut down in January without paying workers any of their entitlements. Factory authorities claim they had settled some of the outstanding entitlements and that the balance would be paid when they sell the factories.

Sri Lanka: Welioya Estate plantation workers protest

Around 1,000 workers from Welioya Estate in Hatton, Nuwara Eliyah district, about 122 km from Colombo demonstrated on the main road to the estate on Tuesday.

The workers, who face severe economic hardship, were demanding relief payments for those placed in COVID-19 quarantine for nearly a month. They allege that a promised government subsidy of 5,000 rupees was not paid to the workers in the most isolated locations. They also called for the immediate release of relief food packages.

Australia and New Zealand

Frigate maintenance workers clash with police in Western Australia

Workers at BAE Systems (BAE) defence ship repair facility in Henderson, Western Australia, held a 24-hour strike on Tuesday. Police attempted to move about 100 strikers picketing the shipyard off the road. One worker's foot was caught under a car and another man was charged with obstructing police. The Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) claimed that barricades erected by BAE outside the facility had made it harder for workers to protest.

BAE workers are concerned about the company's increasing use of contractors and the elimination of permanent jobs. The union want a 3 percent annual pay increase. The last enterprise agreement signed by the AMWU locked in a below-inflation 1.5 percent annual wage increase for three years. Enterprise agreement negotiations have been dragged out by the company since July 2020.

BAE is one of Australia's biggest defence contractors with a 30-year agreement with the federal government for the maintenance of Navy

frigates. BAE secured the \$35 billion Hunter Class frigate program in 2018.

UGL Barrow Island workers in Western Australia begin four-week strike

Maintenance and production workers employed by contractor UGL have commenced a four-week strike at Chevron's Barrow Island LNG production plant in north-western Australia. The company has threatened to redirect work to its competitor AGC.

Last month, UGL used a federal court decision ordering the unions to cancel previously planned strike action because of supposed safety issues.

The Offshore Alliance (OA), which called the Barrow Island strike action, is an oil and gas industry union alliance which involves the Australian Worker's Union, the Maritime Union of Australia, the Electrical Trades Union and the AMWU. Negotiations with UGL for a new enterprise agreement recently resumed after workers last month rejected UGL's proposed enterprise agreement which included a pay freeze and cuts to travel allowances.

Food delivery riders protest NSW government's proposed new safety laws

Food delivery riders protested the New South Wales (NSW) government's new safety laws in Sydney on Wednesday. Last year five delivery riders were killed. Working conditions for delivery riders are dangerous, with pay that falls below minimum wage and does not include training or safety equipment. The riders, who are paid per delivery, can lose their job if they do not deliver on time, incentivising risky practices.

While the proposed laws would require delivery companies to provide workers with protective equipment and induction training, it also includes workers being issued identification numbers by NSW police for penalising "repeated unsafe practices."

The task force that drafted the laws was established by the NSW government following last year's deaths. The Transport Workers Union (TWU) and riders withdrew from the task force in April over the government's "continued silencing" of concerns about exploitation, time pressures, minimum pay and conditions.

The union claims the new laws will make riders and drivers the targets of increased fines from the police, punishing vulnerable workers who are under extreme pressure to make deliveries while letting the food delivery platforms off the hook. Eighty-four percent of food delivery riders polled by the TWU said the laws would make their jobs less safe. Over half of the workers had been fined by the police, which meant that they had to work longer hours and take more dangerous risks in order to pay the fines.

Disability support workers begin industrial action in South Australia

Over 1,200 disability support workers employed by the Department of Human Services (DHS) in South Australia began workplace actions on Thursday in opposition to the state government's privatisation measures.

The work bans, which were called by the United Workers Union (UWU), include not filling out vehicle logbooks, wearing campaign

material at work and distributing campaign material on their claims to visitors and family.

Workers want guaranteed job security because the South Australian Liberal government is increasingly moving to privatise parts of the state's health services, foreshadowing cuts to jobs and services. Health workers were pressured into accepting a roll-over of their previous workplace agreement last year, locking in low wages and insecure work.

New Zealand bus drivers' union reaches deal in pay dispute

A planned bus drivers' strike has been called off after the Tramways Union and NZ Bus announced this week that they had struck a deal in a long-running contract dispute.

Two weeks ago, Wellington drivers voted 204 to 3 to reject the company's last pay offer and passed a unanimous motion of no confidence in the management, declaring the company was not fit to run public transport services.

The NZ Bus offer would have raised the base wage rate but slash overtime pay and additional benefits, such as double-time pay on weekends and after midnight, worth thousands of dollars a year.

A previous 24-hour strike in April was stopped when NZ Bus locked the drivers out, in a move that the Employment Court subsequently ruled unlawful.

Drivers were prepared to strike again, but the union went back into negotiations. The company was meanwhile in discussion with the Greater Wellington Regional Council (GWRC), which runs the region's public transport network. The GWRC subsidises NZ Bus so that drivers can be paid above the minimum wage of \$20 per hour.

The company said in a statement that the Labour-controlled council had played a key role in mediating the recent talks. Tramways Union secretary Kevin O'Sullivan would not reveal details of the new offer. He said the union would recommend the deal when it is put to drivers on June 23, and he is "confident" it will end the dispute.



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