

India: Maharashtra social workers still on strike; West Bengal civilian defence workers protest; Australia: NSW ambulance paramedics maintain work bans

## Workers Struggles: Asia and Australia

25 June 2021

### Asia

#### India: Social workers remain on strike in Maharashtra

Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) workers have been on strike in Maharashtra since June 15. They are demanding a fixed monthly income and an increase in remuneration from their current meagre 5,000-rupee (\$US67) monthly pay. The workers, affiliated to five different Maharashtra unions, marched to the zilla parishad (district level) office in Nagpur on June 21.

ASHA workers said their workload has increased due to the COVID-19 pandemic. They are required to visit people in home quarantine, follow up on their health status and distribute medicines. During the vaccination drive, ASHA workers were also involved in collating data and coordinating with beneficiaries in rural areas.

Workers said they will remain on strike until the government provides a written assurance that their demands will be met. They said that they will not accept verbal commitments by the government.

#### Doctors in Andhra Pradesh protest

Indian Medical Association doctors demonstrated near the offices of the Greater Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation, Andhra Pradesh, on June 18 over ongoing attacks on healthcare professionals. They wore masks and held banners reading, "Save the Saviours" and "Save the Doctors."

The association claimed that 700 doctors had died whilst working during the second wave of COVID-19 infections and called on the central and state governments to address the issue. The Andhra Pradesh Medical and Sales Representatives Union supported the protest.

#### Telangana hospital health workers demand pay rise

Telangana Medical Contract Employees' and Workers' Union members from state government hospitals demonstrated in Hyderabad on Tuesday

to demand a wage increase. Sanitation, patient care and security staff gathered outside the King Koti Hospital to demand a minimum monthly wage of 19,000 rupees (\$US282).

They alleged that all other categories of government hospital workers had received a pay rise. Hospital sanitation workers are paid between 15,000 and 17,000 rupees, depending on which hospital they work at.

#### Andhra Pradesh contract nurses threaten strike action for permanent jobs

Contract nurses from government hospitals and medical centres across Andhra Pradesh demonstrated outside hospitals and various area headquarters on June 18 to demand equal pay and conditions with permanent nurses. They threatened to strike on June 28 if their demands are not met.

Protesters included hospital nurses employed on contract since 2016 and medical centre nurses employed in 2006.

A major issue is insurance. Protesters said around 11 contract nurses had died from COVID-19 in the past year but were not covered by the same insurance as frontline workers. They are demanding that ex-gratia payments and insurance be provided along with compensation for families of the victims. Nurses complained that their monthly salary was only 22,000 rupees (\$US296) compared to a newly recruited permanent nurse who receives 34,000 rupees per month.

Nurses in Vijayawada and Tirupati withdrew their protest after an oral commitment from the director of medical education (DME) that their demands would be met. Other nurses did not accept this and want a government order or a written assurance from the DME.

#### West Bengal civilian defence workers protest privatisation

Defence department civilian employees protested outside Ordnance Factory Board (OFB) premises in Kolkata on June 19 as part of a national campaign against the Indian government's decision to corporatise the OFB. All India Defence Employees Federation members burnt effigies of the government and Prime Minister Modi.

The government wants to break down the 246-year-old OFB into seven corporate entities. The union federation has threatened that the defence sector's over 400,000 workers will stage an indefinite national strike if

the government does not withdraw its corporatisation plans.

When the government announced last year that it planned to privatise the defence sector over 99 percent of defence civil workers voted for national strike action.

### **West Bengal port workers walk out in Kolkata**

Around 750 contract workers employed by the Five Star Shipping Corporation (FSSC) at Kolkata's deep-water Haldia port stopped work on June 17 over unpaid provident fund and ESI (employee state insurance). Unloading operations were stalled affecting two large vessels.

FSSC is contracted by Ripley, the cargo-handling agency. Ripley demanded that FSSC immediately resolve the issue but FSSC accused Ripley of not paying five years' outstanding wages and benefits worth 85 million rupees (\$US1.15 million).

### **Sri Lankan hospital nurses walk out over forced transfers**

Nurses from the Peradeniya Teaching Hospital, in Peradeniya, walked out on June 22 against the government's attempt to send a group of colleagues for two weeks to the military-run Kotalawala Defence University Hospital and Neville Fernando Hospital, more than 100 kilometres away.

Hospital management initially threatened that the nurses would be signed off as absent from duty if they did not follow the transfer order. Authorities withdrew the threat after nurses insisted that they would continue the strike.

An upsurge in the number of coronavirus infected patients has forced frontline health workers to endure unsustainable and back-breaking workloads. Hundreds of health workers have been infected with COVID-19 during this time.

### **Samsung workers in South Korea strike**

About 40 union representatives from the Samsung display manufacturing plant in Asan, South Korea, walked out on Monday after negotiations for a wage increase became deadlocked. The union was formed last year and signed up nearly 2,400 members, roughly 10 percent of the company's total workforce. Although more than 90 percent of union members voted in favour of a strike or production slowdown the union has not yet called on all its members to strike.

The union has called for a 6.8 percent base pay increase. The company has only offered a 4.5 percent rise. The strike was the first ever at the Samsung Group.

## **Australia**

### **New South Wales ambulance paramedics continue work bans**

New South Wales Ambulance (NSWA) paramedics took 24-hour industrial action for the second time in two weeks on Tuesday. The action involved only responding to calls for life-threatening emergencies. The NSW state government had offered paramedics a 1.5 per cent wage increase before its budget on Tuesday, and then increased it to 2.5 percent.

Paramedics rejected the new offer. The NSW Health Services Union (HSU) claims NSW paramedics are paid less than in other Australian states by hundreds of dollars a week. This would still be the case after a 2.5 percent rise. The HSU, however, has overseen this disparity and ensured low wage growth for paramedics.

Last year the NSW government imposed a wage freeze on the entire public sector. The unions responded by reducing industrial action to its lowest level in decades.

The HSU says that 4.7 percent will be needed to account for last year's pay freeze, indicating it will accept a return to the status quo. The union has isolated paramedics and opposes a broader campaign of health workers and other public servants who face the same attacks on wages and conditions.

### **Keppel Prince workers hold community protest in Portland Victoria**

Workers who manufacture wind-turbine towers for the federal governments' Snowy Hydro 2.0 wind-farm projects protested in Portland, following the arrival of imported steel towers at the regional Victorian port.

Keppel Prince, which manufactures wind turbines in Australia, fired 15 percent of its workforce after it lost contracts for two regional Victorian wind farms. Danish company Vestas, which secured the contract, has sought cheaper imports for its wind towers.

The Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU), which promotes economic nationalism and opposes the unification of workers across Australia and internationally to fight the profit system, is appealing to the federal government and Vestas to set local steel procurement policies on the wind farm projects. The AMWU has collaborated with management for decades to destroy tens of thousands of manufacturing jobs.



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