India: Tamil Nadu state government workers protest for higher allowance; Patna municipal workers strike indefinitely; Sri Lankan health workers demand stricter COVID-19 lockdown

Workers Struggles: Asia and Australia

20 August 2021

Asia

India: Tamil Nadu state government workers protest

Thousands of workers from state government departments protested and wore black badges on Monday over several demands. The Tamil Nadu Government Employees Association called the demonstrations at various government offices in the Madurai, Trichy and Coimbatore regions.

Workers want an increase in the dearness allowance (DA), which has been frozen at 17 percent since 2019, and a return to a previous pension system which was replaced in 2004 with a contributory scheme. Protesters complained that the DA was increased to 28 percent by the Modi government in July but the state government postponed any increase for 18 months.

The demonstrators also called for the release of 2.5 million rupees ($US33,656) compensation for the families of frontline workers who were infected and died during COVID-19 second wave.

Contract power workers in Tamil Nadu demand permanent jobs

North Chennai Thermal Power Station contract workers demonstrated in Chennai on August 17 to demand permanent jobs. Protesters said they had worked at the power generating plant for several decades and wanted permanent jobs for those who had 20 years' service. They also called for photo identity cards, inclusion in bonus payments, gratuity and insurance.

The power station has been operating since 1994 and produces 630 megawatts from three units. The protest was organised by the Central Organization of Tamil Nadu Electricity Employees affiliated to the Centre of Indian Trade Unions.

Tamil Nadu government hospital contract workers fight for outstanding wages

Health workers, including nurses, sanitary staff and lab technicians from the government-run General Hospital in Jayankondam protested outside the Ariyalur district collectorate on Monday demanding three months' overdue wages. The workers were hired at the hospital on a temporary basis during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The protest was sparked after hospital management told them not to report for duty from April 16. Protesters submitted a petition to the district collector demanding that they be reinstated and for the district administration to intervene.

Punjab public sector workers fight for permanent jobs

Health workers, teachers and water utility workers demonstrated in the cities of Tarn Taran and Amritsar on August 14 and 15 to demand permanent jobs. Drug De-addiction and Rehabilitation Employees' Union members from state government-run de-addiction centres protested in Tarn Taran holding black flags and protesting that after seven years' service they were still being denied permanent jobs.

Meritorious School Teachers' Union members from all parts of the state demonstrated in Amritsar to demand permanent jobs, while members of the Water Supply and Sanitation Department's Motivator and Master Motivator Workers Union also protested across the state for job permanency.

Andhra Pradesh: Religious trust workers in Tirupati protest

Employees working in the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) religious temple held a sit-down protest at the TTD administrative building on August 12. They were demanding time-scale wages for all the eligible contract and outsourced employees. The protest was called by the Centre of Indian Trade Unions.

Workers said over 15,000 people have been employed on contract and outsourcing basis at TTD for up to 15 years. They demanded that the TTD issue bus passes to all these workers and ensure that contractors pay salaries on time every month.

Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams is an independent trust which manages the temples in Tirupati. The trust oversees the operations and finances of the second richest and the most visited religious centre in the world.

Bihar: Thousands of Patna municipal workers on indefinite strike

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Contract and daily-wage fourth-grade workers from the Patna Municipality Corporation have been on strike since August 9 demanding equal pay for equal work, job permanency and an end of the “anti-worker” policies of the corporation. The striking workers said that hundreds had been working for the corporation for last ten years on a daily-wage basis.

Nearly 7,000 sanitation workers, including 4,700 daily waged and 2,300 outsourced workers, are involved in the strike. Workers alleged that the Bihar government has been treating contract workers differently from permanent employees despite both doing the same work. Currently a contract daily wage worker is paid 9,000 rupees ($US121) per month and an outsourced worker gets 7,000 rupees. Permanent workers, however, are paid 30,000 rupees per month and other benefits.

Maharashtra COVID-19 hospital workers protest over sudden termination

Several hundred sacked contract workers from the privately-run Global Hospital for COVID-19 patients in Thane demonstrated at the hospital on Wednesday to demand reinstatement.

The workers, including doctors, nurses and ward assistants, said that they were dismissed without warning after a drop in COVID-19 patients meant they were no longer needed.

It was the second time Global Covid Hospital management suddenly terminated around 500 medical staff. They were all employed through a private agency, Om Sai Arogya Care.

Bangladesh: Retrenched jute mill workers protest

Former workers from two closed state-run jute mills in Khulna demonstrated outside the Khalishpur Jute Mill in Khulna on Tuesday to demand the reopening of all closed government plants and the payment of all outstanding entitlements. These included full bonuses from Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-ul-Azha festivals, in line with the wage commission, and the mandatory 60-day payment following termination.

Twenty-five state-owned jute mills operating under the Bangladesh Jute Mills Corporation were closed in June last year, making about 50,000 permanent, temporary and substitute workers jobless. At least 31,000 temporary and substitute workers are yet to receive their outstanding payments.

While the government introduced a compensation package at the time of closure, temporary and substitute workers were denied compensation packages even though they had worked at the mills for decades.

The demonstration was organised by the committees of the Daulatpur Jute Mill Factory and Khalishpur Jute Mill Factory. Protests over the closures have been ongoing for twelve months. Retrenched workers from the Karim Jute Mills and Latif Bawani Jute Mills demonstrated in June in Dhaka.

Sri Lanka Railway station masters strike

Nearly 1,000 station masters stopped work for 24 hours from midnight on August 12, demanding adequate health care protection against COVID-19. All trains, including the Kelani Valley line, were suspended. The strike was called by the Sri Lanka Railway Station Masters' Association.

Citing the increasing numbers of railway workers contracting COVID-19, station masters want quarantine centres established with proper safety clothing, disinfectants, and other necessary facilities, as well as proper disinfection of trains and railway stations.

An association spokesman said that 93 people, including station masters, controllers, and junior staff, have been infected with the virus. He complained that in some places where the infection was reported only the infected person was removed whilst work colleagues were told they had to remain at work.

Sri Lankan health workers demand stricter COVID-19 lockdown

Hundreds of health workers organised by a joint union alliance demonstrated this week demanding a stricter island-wide lockdown. The alliance called for increased PCR and rapid-PCR testing and a strict 10-day lockdown.

Workers voiced their concerns over the rapidly increasing COVID-19 infection and death rates across the island. The Joint Trade Unions alliance has declared that if no action is taken by the government, it will organise to lock down the country by uniting with all workers from the public and private sector from next Monday.

Australia

Lockout at QUBE Fremantle terminal in Western Australia continues

Over 120 members of the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) at the QUBE Fremantle Port container terminal in Western Australia began industrial action on July 30 to push for an improved enterprise agreement (EA).

The workers are virtually locked out. They are refusing to report for duty if management fails to allocate the following day’s workforce by 2 p.m., one day prior. QUBE management has refused to agree to this even though other terminal operators at the port have that arrangement with their workers.

The MUA claimed that QUBE is ignoring safety regulations and has assigned its management and supervisory staff to do stevedoring work in an attempt to keep the terminal operating.

QUBE management have rejected all 42 of the union’s EA claims. The MUA said workers wanted rosters that give a better work-life balance, improved fatigue management, improved job security and tightening-up of the old agreement which allowed QUBE to undermine long-standing employment standards and conditions.

Hospital workers in Western Australia walk out over unsafe staffing

Workers at the state-run Headland Health Campus at South Headland, in Western Australia’s Pilbara region, walked out for 30 minutes at 11 a.m. on August 11 in protest against chronic understaffing, which they say has

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resulted in an unsafe workplace. Their protest at the main public entry to the hospital included patient service attendants, cleaners, enrolled nurses, nursing assistants and kitchen staff.

A United Workers Union (UWU) representative said workers are reporting high levels of fatigue and burn-out as a result of working excessive hours with reduced staffing levels. He said turnover at the hospital is exceptionally high and that vacant positions have not been filled, in the meantime there are casual staff at the site who are begging for more hours and permanency.

The Headland Health Campus is under the management of the WA Country Health Service, which workers said has repeatedly refused to respond to their demands for a meeting over the issues. They threatened to take further action if the government continued to ignore their complaints.

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