

Korean longshore workers vote to strike; India: BMW locks out Tamil Nadu autoworkers; Australia: Ambulance paramedics threaten bans in New South Wales

Workers Struggles: Asia and Australia

27 August 2021

Korean longshore workers vote to strike

Around 450 longshore workers from HMM, South Korea's largest shipping company, have voted to strike after three rounds of failed wage negotiations. The longshore workers want a pay rise to compensate for an eight-year pay freeze imposed by management and the union. The strike will be the first since the shipper was established in 1976.

The union has demanded a 25 percent wage rise and a bonus worth 1,500 percent of the monthly wage. The company has only offered an 8 percent wage increase, plus bonuses equal to 500 percent of the monthly wage.

According to media reports, a work stoppage at HMM could trigger a major supply chain crisis because many Korean companies struggle to secure space on large-freight ships like those provided by HMM amid an all-time high in exports. HMM, which operates 48 vessels, became Korea's only large container shipper following the collapse of Hanjin Shipping in 2017.

Union members threatened to resign and switch over to MSC, a Swiss shipping company that had begun hiring workers. This week the union put the strike on hold after HMM agreed to restart negotiations on September 1.

Korean subway workers issue strike notice

Subway workers in Seoul, and four other major Korean cities, have voted overwhelmingly to strike, starting on September 14, in opposition to Seoul Metro's restructure plan.

Workers are demanding Metro drop its plan, which would eliminate 10 percent of its 16,700 employees and reduce accumulated losses of more than 1 trillion won (\$US875.81 million). The plan would also cut benefits, freeze wages, and outsource work to the private sector.

Subway workers in Seoul, Busan, Daegu, Daejeon and Incheon are also demanding that the government treat the metropolitan transit authority the same as the Korea Railroad Corporation (Korail). The government currently covers 60 percent of Korail's annual financial losses.

The unions planned to hold one-person protests at 650 subway stations around the country Thursday and other various campaigns to raise public awareness of their demands.

Health workers in the Philippines win promised COVID-19 entitlements

Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte on August 21 ordered the state departments of health and budget to pay long-promised COVID-19 payments, including risk and hazard money, to nurses, doctors and other health workers within 10 days. The decision followed mass resignations and protests by frontline health workers treating COVID-19 patients.

Nurses told the media they are exhausted and suffer burnout as COVID-19 beds reach full capacity. The Private Hospitals Association reported that 40 percent of nurses in private hospitals had resigned in the past year. The Alliance of Health Workers has set a pay deadline of August 31 or it will begin more widespread protests.

A day before Duterte's intervention, COVID-19 infections soared to 17,231 and 317 deaths. COVID-19 tests are returning 26 percent positive results. As of mid-July, 21,245 health workers had been infected and at least 101 had died. Total infections stand at 1.8 million and deaths at 31,000.

India: Uttar Pradesh childcare workers hold two-day strike

Around 150,000 anganwadi (childcare) workers across Uttar Pradesh stopped work on August 17 and 18 over a charter of eight demands including a 100-percent pay rise. There are more than 350,000 anganwadi workers and helpers employed in 189,000 childcare centres across the state.

Other demands include improved working conditions, retirement benefits and better working conditions. They called off the strike after being given an assurance by the state government that it would increase the monthly honorarium.

Workers at main anganwadi centres are only paid 4,500 rupees (\$US60) per month, while workers at small centres receive 3,500-rupees and helpers 2,250-rupees. Anganwadi workers have been demanding eight to ten thousand rupees a month promised four years ago in 2017 by the state government.

Faridabad municipal workers stage hunger protest

Faridabad Municipal Corporation workers in Haryana state held a two-day hunger protest on Tuesday over several demands, including some issues they claim the state government agreed to settle last year.

Protesters' main demand is for compensation of 5 million rupees (\$67,367) for the family of workers who have died from COVID-19. They also want payment of the Dearness Allowance, which has not been paid for 18 months, recruitment of 10,000 employees to fill vacant positions, a monthly risk allowance of 4,000 rupees and an end to contract employment with all part-time and contract civic workers made permanent.

Andhra Pradesh social health workers protest in Chittoor

Around 1,000 Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) workers from the Chittoor district in Andhra Pradesh demonstrated outside the District Medical and Health office on August 23 over several demands. These included a five million-rupee compensation payment to families of ASHA workers who died from COVID-19, inclusion in the state welfare scheme and a 300,000-rupee retirement benefit payment.

Workers alleged that the government says workers earning over 12,000 rupees (\$US161) a month in urban areas are not eligible for the state welfare scheme. ASHA workers, however, are denied these benefits even though they receive less than the said amount.

BMW locks out assembly plant workers in Tamil Nadu

About 300 workers at the BMW auto plant in Mahindra City, near Chennai, demonstrated at the plant on Wednesday after being locked out for refusing to sign a company document enforcing workplace restrictions. These included not taking mobile phones onto the premises or holding discussions with union representatives inside the plant.

The company's provocative action occurred during negotiations for a wage rise. Nine office bearers of the BMW India Staff and Employees Union were forced to take leave on Monday for allegedly holding discussions with workers during working hours. The three-year revision of wages covering 400 workers at the plant has been outstanding for over a year.

Ashok metal-casting plant workers strike in Tamil Nadu

Ashok Leyland Foundry Division-Ennore workers in Chennai have been on strike since last week to demand a wage increase. They alleged that the revision has been outstanding for over three years. Ashok management forced the dispute into the Joint Commissioner of Labour for a three-party meeting on August 23, with no resolution.

Workers accused management of discrimination and not paying Ennore unit employees bonuses given at all other Ashok units. They said two of their striking committee members were dismissed. Last month, Ashok Leyland bus assembly line workers in Hosur demonstrated and demanded "equal wages for equal work" and a yearly bonus based on the company's profit.

Rajasthan state roadway workers protest

Members of the United Front of Rajasthan Roadways' Labour Unions demonstrated in Jaipur on August 17 and 18 as part of an ongoing campaign for payment of overdue wages and other outstanding demands. Workers alleged that salaries and pensions are always late and only paid after employees protest.

Nurses at Tasmanian private hospital walk out again over unsafe staffing

About 20 nurses employed by Healthscope at the Hobart Private Hospital walked off the job for 30 minutes on Thursday morning and demonstrated outside the hospital against unsafe staffing levels. They held placards saying "Patient safety before profit" and "We're standing up for quality care."

The action followed a two-hour walkout in May over the same issue. Health and Community Services Union (HACSU) members rejected Healthscope's proposed enterprise agreement (EA) in July, saying management had failed to address any of their concerns. The latest walkout occurred after Healthscope refused to restart negotiations.

Nurses have been campaigning since February against excessive workloads and for safe nurse-to-patient ratios to be written into their EA. They complained of having to care for 10 patients per nurse on night shifts, excessive overtime and being pressured to work double shifts. One traumatised nurse who resigned because of the workload said the hospital's nurse/patient ratio failed to provide safe patient care.

Ambulance paramedics in New South Wales threaten bans if not provided with increased COVID-19 testing

New South Wales ambulance paramedics are currently voting on whether to take industrial action in support of their demand for rapid COVID-19 tests at the start of each 12-hour shift. Ambulance Division of the Health Services Union (ADHSU) members held an online meeting with NSW Ambulance Service on Tuesday. Management, however, rejected paramedics' demands that ambulance crew in COVID hot spots be given priority over office staff in the deployment of rapid antigen test kits.

An ADHSU email to members said management rejected paramedics' demand, claiming it would delay the deployment of ambulances on every shift. The tests are self-administered and only take about 15 minutes.

If paramedics vote for action, ADHSU members working in defined local government area of concern [COVID hot spots] will not respond to any patient until they have been rapid antigen or PCR tested. The bans will begin at the first shift on August 30.



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