

# Workers Struggles: Asia and Australia

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*The World Socialist Web Site invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature.*

## South Korea: Seoul bus drivers strike for pay rise

The Seoul Bus Labour Union called a city-wide early morning strike in Seoul on Thursday halting 7,200 or 98 percent of the city's buses and causing delays for commuters in the morning rush hour. About 18,000 union members at 65 companies participated in the strike.

The strike followed the last-minute failure of negotiations on Wednesday evening for a deal over the union's demand for a 12.7 percent increase in hourly wages. While employers claimed that the pay demand was excessive, the union argued that the increase was needed to stop the outflow of drivers to nearby regions.

Consumer price inflation in South Korea averaged 1.6 percent in the ten years to 2022, but the 2022 average figure was 5.1 percent following the economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. In February this year the cost of agriculture products increased 5.7 percent and petroleum products by 2.5 percent.

## India: Karnataka 108 emergency ambulance workers demand unpaid salaries

On March 22, 108 emergency ambulance workers at Mangalore, Karnataka state, gave the government ten days to distribute four months of overdue salaries before they went on strike.

A union spokesman said workers were also opposing a sudden 6,000-rupee cut in their 36,000-rupee (\$US431) monthly pay. Workers fear social media reports that further cuts are planned. The union spokesman said the annual pay increments agreed to between the government and the contract company GVK Emergency Management and Research Institute are yet to be settled.

## Almond-processing workers in Delhi end 24-day strike for a meagre wage rise

The Karawal Mazdoor Union (KMU), representing nearly 4,000 almond-processing workers at Karawal Nagar in northern Delhi who had been on strike since March 1, called an end to the strike on March 25, after accepting a meagre pay rise. Although the workers' pay had not increased for 12 years, the union accepted the factory owners' offer of a one-rupee increase for sifting one kilo of almonds taking it to 3 rupees per kilo, and

lifting packaging pay from 5 to 6 rupees per kilo.

Many workers voiced their dissatisfaction with the union. "The increment of 1 rupee really feels unfair after all this struggle on barefoot defying heat and thugs and police attacks," a worker said.

## Port Blair municipal workers in Nicobar Island group demand permanent jobs

Large numbers of Port Blair Municipal Council workers demonstrated outside the council's head office at Aberdeen Bazar, at Port Blair on March 22. They were demanding permanency for daily wage workers, a special pay grant and a dearness allowance. The demonstration was organised by the Nagarpalika Shramik Sangh affiliated with the Centre for Indian Trade Unions CITU.

## Pakistan: Baluchistan mine workers protest unsafe conditions

The Pakistan Central Mines Labour Federation protested in Quetta on Monday, calling on the government to enforce mine safety measures and improve working conditions in the dangerous underground mines.

The protest was sparked by a mine explosion last week in Baluchistan province which killed 12 miners. Safety standards are commonly ignored in the coal mining industry in Pakistan, leading to numerous accidents that kill dozens of workers every year. Miners often complain that owners fail to install safety equipment.

Despite the danger and low wages, hundreds of miners work in Baluchistan, where the 9.1 percent unemployment rate is higher than other parts of the country.

## Khyber Pakhtunkhwa education clerks strike against political harassment

Department of Education (DOE) office clerks in Haripur stopped work on Tuesday to protest harassment by a relative of a member of the Provincial Assembly (MPA). The All-Pakistan Clerks Association alleged that the MPA's relative visited the DOE office and demanded that clerical staff "illegally" transfer teachers. When the clerks refused, he verbally abused the officers, a spokesman said.

The clerks locked their offices and warned that if the external interference in the education department did not stop, they would expand their protest to other districts.

## **Sacked garment factory workers protest in Karachi**

About 1,500 sacked workers from the Denim Clothing Company in Karachi have been holding a sit-down protest at the factory gate and blocking the road for over a week. Workers said they were illegally sacked. Some had worked at the factory for up to six years. A worker told media that many of the sacked workers were owed wages.

## **Bangladeshi garment workers in Gazipur demand unpaid salaries**

More than 200 garment workers and staff employees at the TRZ Garments Industry factory in Gazipur demonstrated outside the Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments on Wednesday to demand outstanding wages.

TRZ factory authorities claimed they paid 75 percent of workers' salaries for February. Workers said that although February wages were paid in two instalments, many employees had not been paid for four months.

Bangladesh's Industrial Police estimate that 416 factories may face difficulties paying workers' salaries and bonuses in time for Islam festival Eid and warned that non-payment of wages and the festival allowance may create workers' unrest. Factory owners are notorious for withholding wages before the Eid holiday festival to ensure their workers return to the factory.

## **Bangladeshi tea garden workers protest reduced festival allowance**

About 300 tea garden workers from the Kuchai tea garden at Juri subdistrict in Moulvibazar held a two-hour protest outside the manager's office on March 22 after learning that their festival allowances for Dol Purnima, a Hindu religious festival, would be reduced.

There are 854 permanent male and female workers in the Kuchai tea garden. Their entitled festival allowance is equal to 52 days' wages. Their below-poverty daily wage is just 170 taka (\$US1.55).

Workers at tea and rubber plantations claim that their March festival bonus for the traditional Fagua festival, popular among the Buddhist tea plantation community, was not paid in all the estates. They demanded immediate payment of 3,536 taka (\$US32) as a full bonus.

## **Sri Lankan development workers demand promotions**

Hundreds of workers from public administration in the category of development worker demonstrated outside the ministry of Public Administration, Home Affairs, Provincial Council and Local Government on Wednesday with several demands, including implementation of overdue promotions.

## **Tasmanian ambulance workers begin industrial action over state's health crisis**

Tasmania's ambulance paramedics and administrative staff have voted by a large majority to take industrial action over the failure of the Tasmanian state government to fix the crisis in the health system. The Health and Community Services Union (HACSU) says underfunding and understaffing are causing ramping at hospitals, unsafe response times and fatigue among workers.

Workers say that low wages and unfilled and unfunded staff positions in the ambulance and public hospital system are putting patients' lives at risk and preventing ambulance crews from responding to emergency calls in a timely manner.

A parliamentary select committee was told in December that Tasmania had the worst ambulance response time of any Australian state, at twice that recommended for urgent calls. Ambulances are routinely tied up at hospitals for hours waiting for beds to become available. Health workers said they are exhausted and burnt out.

Earlier this month, nurses and midwives protested outside the Royal Hobart Hospital and Launceston General Hospital in opposition to the state government's 60-minute ambulance offload procedure. The procedure forces emergency departments (ED) to admit patients from ambulances that have been waiting to offload for 60 minutes. Nurses claim that forcing ambulance patients into overcrowded, understaffed emergency wards poses a safety risk to the patient and existing patients in the ward.

Paramedics began industrial action on Monday, which includes not providing additional care for patients once they have entered the hospital, a duty they currently perform.

## **Western Australian teachers threaten to strike for pay rise**

The State School Teachers' Union WA, with 18,000 members at Western Australian public schools, has been attempting to reach a new pay deal with the state Labor government. Their current work agreement expired in December.

Teachers have imposed work bans, refusing to attend out-of-hours meetings or participate in performance reviews since January 29.

Teachers rejected the government's pay offer of an immediate 4.75 percent pay increase and annual increases of 3 percent in the following two years. The union is demanding a 12 percent rise over two years, 7 percent in the first year and either 5 percent or CPI (consumer price index), whichever is higher, in the second.

This week, the union told teachers that if an agreement cannot be reached with the government by April 19, they should prepare for a half-day strike on April 23.

## **Third week of industrial action by Victorian ambulance paramedics**

Emergency ambulance paramedics in Victoria are continuing low-level industrial action begun on March 11 after overwhelmingly rejecting the state Labor government's below-inflation wage rise offer of 3 percent per annum, plus yearly lump sum payments of \$1,800.

The Victorian Ambulance Union has limited industrial action to include writing messages on ambulances, stopping work to speak to the media, refusing to collect billing details, and activating beacons if they are ramped at hospitals for more than 40 minutes.

During twelve months of negotiations the government is refusing to budge on its blanket wages policy, which is restricting wage rises in the

public sector to just 3 percent per annum. The current consumer price index for Victoria shows a rise of 3.8 percent.

Paramedics want the chronic understaffing situation resolved, which is currently forcing them to work overtime daily to ensure emergency calls are answered. Paramedics collectively work 800 hours of forced overtime a day. They complained that they are often required to work 18-hour shifts, which takes several days to recover from.

### **Simpec construction workers still on strike in Western Australia**

Over 100 construction workers, covered by the Construction Forestry Maritime and Energy Union (CFMEU) and the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, at the Simpec Kwinana building site in Perth, have been on strike for nearly two weeks. They walked off the job on March 18 for 24 hours but decided to extend the strike after rejecting Simpec's proposed enterprise agreement for the third time.

Negotiations for a new agreement began in August. The union claimed it is trying to reach a deal that includes a pay increase that compensates for the rising cost of living, an end to baseline wages, which it claims undercuts members' pay at other sites, restoration of annual leave loading and site allowance.

### **New South Wales firefighters continue protests for new work agreement**

Hundreds of firefighters demonstrated outside the New South Wales parliament in Sydney on March 20 to demand the state Labor government begin negotiations for a new work agreement. Fire Brigade Employees Union (FBEU) members across the state have been protesting since February over the issue.

The union said the current work agreement has expired and it wants the government to make an offer so negotiations for a replacement agreement with Fire and Rescue NSW can begin.

The union, which submitted its log of claims in November, wants a 20 percent pay rise over a three-year agreement, comprised of an 8 percent increase in the first year, followed by two 6 percent increases in the following years. It also wants additional types of cancer to be included in workers compensation in line with other states, increases in the workforce and training, and an update of aging trucks and equipment.

The FBEU's 6,800 members have imposed low-level work bans, including not wearing regulation T-shirts and for supervisors who are FBEU members not to take any action against members who participate in industrial action.



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