

# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

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

## India: Karnataka Accredited Social Health Activist workers' union negotiates sell-out deal

The union representing thousands of Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) workers who have been on indefinite strike since January 7 called off the industrial action on January 10 after negotiating a sell-out deal with the government. ASHA workers in Karnataka, supported by the All-India United Trade Union Centre (AIUTUC), have been campaigning for over eight years for better wages and conditions.

The strikers were demanding a monthly wage of 15,000 rupees (\$US175), 500,000 rupees as retirement benefits, recognition as permanent employees with health insurance, accident insurance while at work, equal pay for equal work, an honorarium of 7,500 rupees for facilitators, three advanced wage payments in case of serious illness and all wages paid on time. They also wanted an additional 2,000 rupees in urban work areas, which is proportionate to their workload, and provision of basic amenities, such as toilets at workplaces.

The deal stitched up by the ASHA Union and AIUTUC involves a poverty level 10,000 rupees (\$US115) a month and additional pay for extra duties starting April 2025. This is only slightly more than their current meagre monthly honorarium of 7,000 rupees and 1,500 rupees for additional tasks performed in primary health centres.

The deal includes three months' paid leave in case of serious illness, guaranteed monthly leave and a commitment to review retirement compensation in the coming days. No reference was made to workers' demands for permanency, an additional 2,000 rupees in urban areas and provision of basic amenities.

The media has not reported whether the striking workers were given the opportunity to vote on the deal before the strike was shut down.

## Telangana ASHA workers protest for pay rise

ASHA workers from across Telangana state demonstrated on January 10 outside the home of the Jacherla local MP for a pay rise and payment of entitlements. The workers want a 26,000-rupee (\$US300) monthly wage and guaranteed fixed payment of 18,000 rupees per month.

They also called for a Provident Fund (PF), Employee State Insurance (health insurance), paid holidays, a weekly day off on Sundays, paid festival holidays, 20 days casual leave, six months medical leave, maternity leave and 5 million rupees incapacity insurance. The protest was

organised by the Centre for Indian Trade Unions.

## Victimised Maruti Suzuki contract workers demand reinstatement

Victimised contract Maruti Suzuki workers protested on January 10 outside the company's Haryana premises to demand reinstatement. On the same day the workers announced that they had formed a union called the Maruti Suzuki Asthayi (contract) Workers Union with several other demands. These included a lessening of the pay disparity between contract and permanent workers, permanent jobs and reduction of the tier wage system.

One worker told the media that there are about 35,000 workers employed in Maruti Suzuki factories. Only 18 percent of these are permanent with the rest contract, temporary workers and student trainees.

## Punjab milk processing workers in Chandigarh demand pay rise

Punjab State Cooperative Milk Producers Federation (Verka-Milkfed) employees stopped work and protested in Chandigarh on January 9 to demand a pay rise. Protesters said they would continue their action and convert it into a hunger strike if there was no increase.

## BEST bus contract workers walk out over employer's abuse of pregnant co-worker

Over 400 contract drivers and conductors from the BEST Bus Company in Mumbai suddenly struck on January 13, taking 200 buses off the road. The walkout erupted when a pregnant conductor was verbally abused by the contract employer for asking for lighter duties during the last trimester of her pregnancy.

## Bangladeshi police fire water cannon against protesting garment workers

Hundreds of garment workers from the Sharmin Group's garment factory at Ashulia, on the outskirts of Dhaka, protested on Monday to demand termination benefits. Their five-hour blockade of the Dhaka-

Tangail Highway was attacked by police and other law enforcement agencies who assaulted them with batons and water cannon.

The protest followed a week-long strike. Management responded to that walkout by suspending the workers and serving show-cause notices on 453 workers, accusing them of causing unrest in the plant. Union officials from the Sammilita Garment Sramik Federation claimed a tripartite negotiation had settled the issue and that factory owners had agreed to pay termination benefits.

Sharmin Group, along with their other garment factories, employs over 16,000 workers.

### **Bangladesh: Beximco Industrial Park workers oppose factory closures**

Thousands of garment workers at Beximco Industrial Park in Gazipur demonstrated on Tuesday with a massive 11-kilometre human chain. They were demanding the reopening of 16 closed plants in the park for loans and letters of credit facilities given to Beximco Group to restore operations. Protesters carried placards that read “Open all factories” and “Let 40,000 families survive.”

The Beximco Group laid off 30,000, 75 percent of the company’s workforce, in mid-December claiming lack of orders and banking support. The laid-off workers received half of their basic salary and allowances for only 45 days.

### **Bangladesh: Chattogram Export Processing Zone workers demand wage rise**

Premier 1888 Limited workers at Chattogram Export Processing Zone (CEPZ) staged a two-hour protest on Sunday near the factory gate and outside the CEPZ administrative building to demand a 9 percent pay rise. CEPZ officials claimed most workers returned to their workplaces after holding meetings with the factory owners. Workers from several other CEPZ factories have protested over wage-related issues over recent days.

### **Dhaka garment workers demand festival bonus**

Workers organised by the Dhaka Garment Workers’ Wage Increase Struggle Council rallied outside the National Press Club in Dhaka with six demands, including a bonus equivalent to one month’s wage for Eid-ul-Fitr, the Islamic religious holiday in March.

They also called for an increase in the minimum wage to compensate for price rises, on-time salaries payments on the 7th of each month, improved workplace safety, guaranteed job security, equal pay for female employees, health-conscious meals and night allowances.

Rally speakers denounced employers for breaching labour laws, citing instances where workers are forced to work 14- to 16-hour shifts without receiving double-pay rates.

### **Pakistan: Balochistan doctors and paramedics strike over arrests**

Doctors and paramedics at Balochistan public hospitals are boycotting outpatient department services, elective operations and other services in protest over the police arrest and charging of doctors. According to the Young Doctors Association, Dr Bahar Shah and Dr Hafeez Mandokhail from the Grand Health Alliance at Quetta’s Civil Hospital were arrested on January 11. They were charged with attacking and assaulting the director of General Health Balochistan.

The Grand Health Alliance has been campaigning over several anti-government demands. These include for the government to withdraw its decision to run hospitals as public-private partnerships, permanent employment for doctors and adequate supplies of medicines and other basic necessities.

The provincial health department on Monday directed the authorities to take measures against the protesting medics under the Balochistan Employees’ Efficiency and Discipline Act.

### **Maritime Union of Australia suspends industrial action against Qube Ports**

In a sudden move, the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) suspended industrial action at Qube Ports bulk terminals at capital cities around Australia on Tuesday and resumed negotiations for a new enterprise agreement. The MUA has been renegotiating 19 enterprise agreements covering 21 Qube port facilities and over 1,000 workers since October 2023.

The MUA issued a statement on December 10 accusing Qube of dragging out negotiations to justify an “intractable bargaining” application at the Fair Work Commission. If such an application is successful, the commission would decide on the content of the enterprise agreement and impose it on both parties.

Along with higher pay, the workers want earlier notification of shift start times, a 10-hour break between shifts and 48 hours off after maximum consecutive shifts. The union claimed that there was a workable agreement on the table, but Qube had rejected two non-cost issues that relate to discrimination against workers who took industrial action and removing the choice of workers to have income insurance.

Neither Qube nor the MUA made a public comment on the resumption of talks.

### **Smit Lamnalco tug workers begin 15 days of industrial action at Gladstone Port**

Tugmasters and engineers employed on Smit Lamnalco Towage (SL) tugboats at the Port of Gladstone, North Queensland, began 15 days of protected industrial action on Tuesday in a pay dispute. This could include unlimited work stoppages of between one hour and seven days. Other action would involve bans on working longer than 12 hours, working outside of rostered hours, plus 13 other bans. SL has filed a bargaining dispute with the Fair Work Commission hoping to get a temporary suspension of industrial action.

Australian Maritime Officers Union (AMOU) and Australian Institute of Marine and Power Engineers (AIMPE) are attempting to reach a deal with Smit Lamnalco for a new enterprise agreement. An AMOU spokesperson said the current agreement expired on December 31 and members have only received a 4 percent increase over the last eight years. The company has offered pay increases in line with the minimum award, which is only

3.75 percent.

The unions want a pay rise that compensates for eight years of real wage cuts and for the new agreement to stop Smit Lamnalco from scheduling masters and engineers up to 17 hours in any 24 hours.

### **New South Wales Ambulance control centre workers maintain work bans**

Ambulance Division Health Services Union (ADHSU) members at four NSW Ambulance control centres are maintaining work bans begun last May 15 in their dispute with the state Labor government for better pay and conditions. The bans target management and KPIs (key performance initiatives).

ADHSU has slowly escalated the number of bans and this week, on request from NSW Ambulance, union delegates were called into the Industrial Relations Commission to justify the latest additions. Workers began expanding the number of work bans on June 28, after government health representatives said they were too busy to continue enterprise agreement negotiations. Ten work bans are currently in place.

Control centre workers want a pay rise and pay parity within the centres. According to the ADHSU, the government's current pay offer will increase the gap between a Clinical and Non-Clinical Emergency Medical Dispatcher to an average of 22 percent by January 2025. The gap in 2023 was only 6.9 percent. Workers want the gap closed to an average of 6.56 percent.

Other demands are for increased sick leave, fair rostering and reduction of night shift work for workers over the age of 50 or after 20 years' service, increased allowances including a missed crib allowance, among other demands.

In a separate dispute, NSW Ambulance control centre Operations Managers put in place work bans on December 20 after negotiations for a new agreement failed to resolve the question of excessive hours. They are covered by the ADHSU and are demanding to be paid overtime for excessive hours worked, in the hope that NSW Ambulance will resolve the issue by reducing their workload.



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