

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

14 March 2025

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

South Korea: Hyundai Steel workers' union suspends 16-day strike

On Tuesday, union officials from the National Metal Workers' Union Hyundai Steel branch closed down a 16-day strike by its members at the Hyundai Steel plant in Dangjin, southwest of Seoul, after management agreed to re-enter wage negotiations. Workers walked out on February 24 after the 19th round of negotiations which began in September failed to reach agreement. Production at multiple integrated plants was halted.

The union wants conditions similar to those at Hyundai Motor, including a 159,800 won (\$US111) increase in base pay (excluding seniority raise), maximum performance bonuses, a two-year 10 million won interest-free loan for vehicle purchases, and a 20 percent discount on vehicles for retirees every three years.

Management proposed a plan centred on a 100,000-won increase in base pay and a comprehensive discussion of performance bonuses for 2024 and 2025. The union rejected the proposal saying that discussing performance bonuses for last year and this year in the one agreement essentially means not paying last year's bonuses.

India: Strike by ASHA workers in Kerala entering sixth week

Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA) workers in Kerala are maintaining an indefinite strike for higher pay and permanent jobs which they began on February 10. After protesting outside the secretariat in Thiruvananthapuram for a week with no response they are threatening to "lay siege" to the secretariat on March 17, meaning that they would block all work in the secretariat. The workers are gaining popular support from the public.

Workers want their monthly wage increased from a meagre 7,000 rupees (\$US80) to about 21,000 rupees, a 5,000-rupee pension, and withdrawal of the compulsory retirement age of 62. Workers complained that they only receive 4,000 to 5,000 rupees of the current monthly pay.

The health minister cynically claimed that ASHA workers are highly paid compared to their co-workers in other states and threatened to replace them with new recruits if they do not end the strike.

ASHA workers are involved in the vaccination of children from marginal and poor families, care for patients in outpatient wings, assisting pregnant women, recording births and deaths and many health awareness programs.

ASHA workers in Orissa protest for higher pay and benefits

On Tuesday, ASHA workers blockaded the Mahatma Gandhi Road in Bhubaneshwar as part of their struggle for higher pay and improved benefits. Their demands include a 10,000-rupee wage rise and an allowance of 3,000 rupees. The ASHA Karmee Association, affiliated to the Centre for Indian Trade Unions, demanded timely payments, pension and payment benefits on par with government employees. Another demand was for safety gear and health insurance, especially for ASHA workers who work in extreme weather.

IT workers protest in Bengaluru for work-life balance

IT and ITES workers from the multinational technology company Infosys protested at Freedom Park in Bengaluru on Monday demanding a "healthy work-life balance." There was a confrontation when police intervened when they began burning effigies of Infosys founder Narayananurthy and L&T Chairman S.N. Subramanyan. The protest was organised by the Centre for Indian Trade Unions.

Ajodhya municipal sanitation workers in Uttar Pradesh protest

Sanitation workers from the Ajodhya Municipal Corporation held a demonstration in Ajodhya on Tuesday to demand wages of 12,000 to 15,000 rupees a month, which were promised to them when recruited. Workers said they were asked to pay a bribe of 7,500 rupees (\$US86) to get their jobs but in the past three months were paid less than 10,000 rupees. They refused to continue working and garbage has begun piling up in the city.

Bangladeshi garment workers hold multiple protests over a range of demands

From March 7 to 11, workers demonstrated from over a dozen garment factories in Gazipur, Savar and Ashulia. They presented multiple demands, including payment of arrears, overtime, maternity leave and Eid bonuses, and for the end of assaults on workers. The police and the army were deployed. At least 15 factories declared general holidays fearing spread of the protests.

On March 7, several hundred garment workers at Savar, Ashulia and Gazipur rallied to demand maternity leave for female garment workers. On Sunday, workers from BHIS Apparels in Gazipur blocked the Dhaka-Mymensingh highway to demand two months' unpaid wages. Factory authorities issued a closure notice on Monday.

On Tuesday, workers from the Camio USA Knitwear factory in Gazipur demonstrated demanding unpaid wages for February and protested alleged assaults on workers. On the same day, workers from Global Apparels in Gazipur blocked the Dhaka-Tangail highway. They demanded reopening of the factory and justice for an assaulted colleague.

Bangladeshi spinning mill workers in Gazipur demand unpaid wages

Chandara Spinning Mill workers blocked the Chandra-Nabinagar highway in Kaliakair for three hours on Monday afternoon to demand three months' unpaid wages. Earlier in the morning they held a sit-down protest inside the factory but when management refused to meet their demand they decided to demonstrate on the highway.

Security forces forced the workers to end the protest. This was their second protest on the highway over unpaid wages.

Sri Lanka: Public sector health workers strike over sexual assault on female doctor

Thousands of doctors and other health care workers at public health facilities across Sri Lanka held a nationwide 24-hour strike on Wednesday to demand better safety measures for healthcare workers following the sexual assault of a female doctor while on duty at the state-run Anuradhapura Teaching Hospital, in North Central Province.

The Government Medical Officers' Association called on the government to immediately apprehend the suspect responsible for the alleged rape. Although the suspect has been arrested, the government has yet to initiate a safety program at health facilities.

Mental health workers at Victoria's public hospitals continue industrial campaign

About 3,900 nurses and non-medical staff at 19 Victorian public mental health facilities are continuing industrial action, including strikes, which began on February 18, in their enterprise agreement dispute with the state Labor government. The workers are covered by two unions, the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) and the Health and Community Services Union (HACSU).

HACSU members, including occupational therapists, social workers, health professionals, lived-experience workers and administrative staff, stopped work for 15 minutes across the state on February 26. Barwon Health and Austin Health employees stopped work for two hours on Tuesday and Friday respectively. ANMF members are wearing campaign t-shirts and maintaining work bans on overtime, being deployed and administrative and data entry tasks.

The state government claimed in December that its total pay offer would lift mental health nurses' wages and allowances by 28.4 percent and bring them in line with general nurses in the public health system. Wages and

allowances offered for non-nursing staff were 3 percent annual increases over the four-year agreement, with a lump sum of \$6,232 per FTE (full time equivalent).

The ANMF rejected the offer, saying there were 70 union claims that had not been addressed, including conditions related to general nursing and designed to recruit and retain mental health nurses in the public mental health system. The latest stoppages were part of a series of stoppages planned to include all facilities.

South Australian public hospital health support and disability support workers maintain bans

Over 2,100 public hospital health support workers and disability home support workers are maintaining industrial action begun on February 22 in their dispute with the state Labor government over understaffing, low wages and insecure jobs. The workers are covered by the United Workers Union.

About 1,000 health support workers at 10 government hospitals and medical facilities, including theatre orderlies, patient service assistants, central sterilised stores department technicians, menu monitors, chefs, cleaners and kitchen services workers, put in place bans on cleaning management offices, performing duties above their classification, changing in and out of scrubs only during paid time and other work-to-rule measures.

Over 1,100 disability support workers from South Australia's Department of Human Services (DHS) are demanding a "living wage" and "Safe Support Services." They have imposed bans at 240 DHS houses targeted at management, restricted administrative tasks and limiting communications during unpaid time. The UWU says DHS has difficulty attracting staff because of low pay and a reliance on agency workers to meet minimum staffing levels.

Meanwhile, in a separate dispute, over 6,000 South Australian allied health workers, including physiotherapists, psychologists, social workers and occupational therapists, have called on the government to begin enterprise agreement negotiations to better wages and conditions. They are represented by the Health Services Union which claimed these workers are paid 40 percent less than their colleagues in other states.

Coca-Cola factory maintenance workers in New South Wales resume strikes

Electrical Trades Union (ETU) members from Coca-Cola's Northmead factory in Sydney walked off the job for 24 hours on March 7 in opposition to the company's proposed enterprise agreement. The action followed two 24-hour strikes in December. The ETU, which represents over 130 workers at the factory, accused Coca-Cola of trying to drive down wages and working conditions.

Workers are demanding an end to Coca-Cola's two-tiered wage system which the union says means that some workers are paid significantly less than co-workers doing the same job. The ETU says the workers are paid a lot less than employees at the nearby Pepsi factory and want pay parity. Other demands are for improved rostering and job progression at the company.

Maintenance workers at Chevron's LNG plant in Western Australia vote to strike

Seventeen maintenance workers employed by contractor Ventia at Chevron's Gorgon LNG processing plant at Barrow Island, northern Western Australia, voted unanimously this week to begin protected industrial action on Friday in their opposition to Ventia's baseline low wage agreements. Industrial action could consist of unlimited work stoppages of 30 minutes, 1, 2, 3, and 4 hours, and work bans.

The workers are members of the Electrical Trades Union and Australian Workers Union (AWU). Their bargaining representative is the Offshore Alliance (OA) (a partnership of the Maritime Union of Australia and the AWU) which claims the "dodgy" baseline agreements Ventia intends to use were signed off by biscuit factory workers in Perth who had never worked in the oil and gas industry. The agreements include a wage offer of just \$25.75 per hour, well below the industry standard. OA is currently appealing against these agreements in the Fair Work Commission.



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Cleanaway garbage collectors in Noosa, Queensland hold second strike for pay rise

About 30 garbage collection truck drivers employed by Cleanaway at Noosa Shire Council in southeast Queensland walked out on Tuesday, to demand higher pay in Cleanaway's proposed enterprise agreement. No garbage was collected in three Noosa suburbs.

Cleanaway has rejected workers' demands for a 7 percent pay increase, improved workplace rights and retention of current conditions. The Transport Workers Union (TWU) admitted that since its last wage deal with Cleanaway was made three years ago its members' wages had not kept up with inflation and have gone backward by more than 3 percent in real terms.

The TWU threatened to put in place overtime bans on weekends and Mondays if Cleanaway fails to improve its offer.

New Zealand medical lab workers to strike

More than 850 New Zealand medical laboratory staff will strike for 72 hours this month over a pay gap with public hospital lab workers. The stoppages follow a two-day strike in February. It is the 16th strike in 18 months by the workers. The private laboratories are responsible for processing blood and other tests for patients in hospitals as well as community providers.

The Apex union issued strike notices to three companies—Awanui, Pathlab and Medlab—for rolling strike action starting on March 22, over a 30 percent pay disparity with scientists and technicians employed by Health NZ. The stoppages will be run at different times in different regions, with only Auckland and the West Coast not involved.

While the lab workers are highly skilled, entry-level position pay is little more than the legal minimum wage. A previous pay dispute, which dragged on for almost a year and involved strikes in 2023 under the previous Labour Party-led government, ended with a meagre pay settlement that did not address the cost of living.

The strikes follow stoppages in December by more than 30,000 nurses and other healthcare workers who received an insulting pay offer of 1.5 percent over a two-year period, a pay cut. That dispute remains ongoing.