

# 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: Bank workers plan nationwide strike over pay and conditions

The United Federation of Bank Unions (UFBU), an umbrella of nine bank unions, has called for a two-day nation-wide strike of workers from public sector banks, private, foreign, co-op and regional banks for March 24. The UFBU, which covers about 900,000 Indian bank workers, called the strike after talks with the Indian Banks' Association failed to improve pay and conditions.

The unions have put forward 12 demands. These include increased recruitment to reduce unreasonable workloads, permanent jobs for temporary workers and a five-day week. They also want performance incentives repealed, improved workplace safety, proper tax-free gratuity and other demands.

## Striking ASHA workers in Kerala joined by protesting Anganwadi employees

Around 26,000 Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA) workers are maintaining a strike they began on February 10 over poverty wages and poor conditions. They began protesting outside the Thiruvananthapuram Secretariat on March 8 to mark International Women's Day and tried to blockade the Secretariat on March 17. On Thursday, they started a protest hunger strike.

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.

Two weeks ago, the health minister claimed ASHA workers were highly paid compared to their co-workers in other states and threatened to replace them with new recruits if they did not end the strike.

While this struggle has gained wide public support, the union leadership has isolated the ASHA workers in Kerala and their protest outside the Secretariat, determined to prevent a political challenge to the Kerala state government and ultimately the BJP-led government in New Delhi.

Meanwhile, Kerala Anganwadi (rural childcare centre) workers began protesting on March 17 outside the Thiruvananthapuram Secretariat, alongside ASHA strikers. They were demanding higher pay, a 5,000-rupee festival benefit, quality food for children, a decent smart phone for communications, wages in single payments, Employee State Insurance and expansion of the welfare board's operations.

The Anganwadi protest was organised by the Indian National Anganwadi Employees Federation, which is affiliated to the Congress Party's Indian Trade Union Congress. The union leadership have kept the disputes separate and have not voiced any kind of solidarity with ASHA workers.

ASHA workers also protested in Bellampally, Telangana state on March 17 for higher pay, followed by their counterparts in Haveri, Karnataka state on March 18.

## Pakistani textile workers strike over delayed salary and bonus payments

Artistic April and Majid textile factory workers in Karachi stopped work and protested against non-payment of salaries and bonuses for two months on March 10. Management called rangers and police who violently attacked the striking workers. Workers were forced to end the protest after management threatened them with "serious consequences."

## Bangladeshi garment workers continue protests in Gazipur

From March 14 to 18, workers demonstrated from over a dozen garment factories in Gazipur. They presented multiple demands, including payment of wage arrears, overtime pay, night shift allowances, annual bonuses, and payment for Eid bonuses and extension of Eid holidays. They demanded maternity-leave benefits and the resignation of factory officials. At least 12 factories closed fearing spread of the protests.

On March 14, around 300 garment workers from SMUG Sweater in Telipara area protested with 14 demands, including payment of Eid bonuses, overtime pay, night shift allowances, maternity leave benefits, and annual bonuses. They demanded the resignation of the general manager of the factory. Workers blocked the Dhaka-Mymensingh highway in Gazipur's Basan area until Gazipur industrial police forced them to end the protest.

One worker said, "Our factory employs about 300 workers, but we never receive our salaries on time. Last month's wages remain unpaid, and some workers are owed two months' arrears. The management keeps delaying payments, forcing us to take to the streets," the worker said.

On Tuesday, workers from the Giant Textile factory in Baniarchala stopped work to demand a 12-day Eid break and resignation of the factory's general manager.

## **Bangladeshi food manufacturing workers demand unpaid wages**

Workers from food manufacturing company Fu-wang Foods blocked the Dhaka-Mymensingh Highway to demand the payment of three months' wage arrears and bonuses. Industrial police and the army were deployed to disperse the workers. The workers lifted the blockade after assurance from the factory authorities to fulfil their demands.

## **Bangladesh Railway workers demand unpaid wages**

Hundreds of Bangladesh Railway temporary workers (TLR) called off their strike on Monday following an assurance from the Ministry of Railways that their wage arrears would be paid by March 23. Workers also demanded reinstatement of 109 temporary workers who had been dismissed in Syedpur and permanent jobs for long-serving workers.

The workers began their demonstration on Monday morning outside Rail Bhaban on Abdul Gani Road. They also protested at Kamalapur Railway Station. One worker said, "TLR workers have not been paid for five months. It's become very difficult to provide for our families like this."

## **Sri Lankan postal workers strike over high workloads**

Postal services across the country were paralysed on Sunday and Monday when thousands of members of the Postal and Telecommunications Officers' Association and the Joint Postal Trade Union went on strike. They had several issues, including the failure to fill Postal Department vacancies. Workers said there have been 7,500 unfilled jobs in the Postal Department since 2018, causing excessive workloads.

## **Sri Lankan plantation workers protest exploitation**

Hundreds of tea and rubber plantation sector workers belonging to the Ceylon Workers Red Flag Union of Sri Lanka protested on Tuesday outside the Hulftsdorp court complex in Colombo. They were protesting the growing trend by companies to use the informal labour system to slash production costs.

Workers carried placards in Sinhala, Tamil and English saying, "We deserve rights not informal jobs," "We won't be cheated by company profit drive lies," and "No profit at our expenses, stop exploiting workers."

## **BAE shipyard workers in South Australia walk out again for pay rise**

Over 500 workers from British multinational BAE Systems naval shipyard at Osborn in Adelaide walked off the job at 10 a.m. on Monday to demand industry standard pay rates. The strike—the third in the last month—coincided with an "all-hands" meeting called by BAE management in response to the long-running pay dispute.

The workers are covered by three unions, the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU), Australian Workers Union (AWU) and the Communications Electrical and Plumbing Union (CEPU). The unions have allowed negotiations for a new enterprise agreement to drag on since July last year.

In September, workers rejected BAE's proposed enterprise agreement, which included a pay increase of only 9.75 percent over three years. The pay rise offer has since been increased to 12 percent over three years. Workers want a 30 percent wage increase on average over three years to keep them in line with industry rates.

The unions claim their BAE members are paid on average 20 percent less than other workers with the same skills in the same industry. Their last pay increase in 2023, negotiated by the unions, was only 2 percent when the consumer price index rate was over 6 percent.

## **Healthscope nurses in New South Wales resume industrial action**

Healthscope nurses and midwives from the Newcastle Private Hospital, north of Sydney, walked out on Thursday and imposed a 26-hour overtime ban. It was the first action since a 26-hour strike planned for February 21 by the New South Wales Nurses and Midwives Association (NSWNMA) at eight Healthscope hospitals in NSW was suspended by the Fair Work Commission on questionable safety grounds.

Negotiations with the Canadian-based health provider for a new agreement have been ongoing since May. NSWNMA members struck in November and December at several hospitals after they rejected Healthscope's pay increase offer of just 13.55 percent over three years.

The NSWNMA claims that nurses and midwives at Healthscope hospitals in NSW are paid 16 percent less than their colleagues in Queensland-based Healthscope hospitals. They also receive less annual, maternity and personal leave than if they were working in public sector hospitals.

Nurses and midwives are calling for an immediate 15 percent pay rise in line with the union's public sector pay claim, mandated nurse/midwife to patient ratios across all wards and units, night shift penalty rates increased from 15 percent to 30 percent and improved leave entitlements.

Healthscope is Australia's second-largest private hospital group with 38 hospitals across every state and territory.

## **Noosa council workers in Queensland strike for better pay**

Over 150 workers from the Noosa Shire Council, in southeast Queensland, walked off the job on Wednesday morning and marched through Tewantin township and rallied outside the council building in Tewantin. The Services Union (TSU) and Australian Workers Union (AWU) members want an improved pay offer in the council's proposed enterprise agreement.

The negotiations, which began in October, reached deadlock after workers rejected annual increases of 6.5 percent, 3.5 percent and 3.5 percent in the three-year agreement. The TSU is seeking increases of 9.5 percent from February 2025 and 4.5 percent or consumer price index (CPI) (whichever is greater) in each of the last two years of the agreement.

Noosa is a popular tourist area with its high cost of housing and rentals forcing many to move outside the area. Noosa Shire Council is not budging on its offer and has made submissions to the Industrial Relations Commission to have the dispute mediated in the commission.

## **Allied health workers at Wagga Wagga Hospital protest for better wages and conditions**

About 170 allied health professionals, including physiotherapists, psychologists, radiation therapists, pharmacists, social workers, speech pathologists, occupational therapists, radiologists and sexual assault workers, walked off the job and demonstrated for an hour outside the Wagga Wagga Hospital in southwest New South Wales on Wednesday. Workers protested against the low Award wage rates and the deteriorating workforce retention rates impacting their ability to provide patient care.

According to the Health Services Union, negotiations with the state Labor government for new Allied Health Awards are scheduled to commence in April for the first time in 15 years. The start of the negotiations will coincide with the release of the Special Commission of Inquiry outlining the urgent reforms needed in the Allied Health Awards.

## **Tasmania's Metro bus drivers protest against passenger violence and privatisation**

On Wednesday, bus drivers from state-owned Metro Tasmania protested outside the entities business office against the rundown of the commuter service and the Liberal state government's plans to privatise the wholly-owned government enterprise.

The Rail Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) allege that chronic underfunding of Metro Tasmania is aimed at preparing the public service for privatisation. Workers say the government's cost cutting has led to chronic driver shortages, unreliable services and a failure to deliver promised safety and technological improvements.

The RTBU is demanding increased funding and implementation of driver safety reforms the government committed to two years ago, including transit officers and safety screens. Drivers reported eight assaults in the past week with one assault resulting in hospitalisation of the driver. The RTBU has said Metro Tasmania bus drivers, starting Saturday, will not collect fares from passengers on the Hobart network.



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