

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.

South Korea: Hyundai Steel workers strike again over wages

The National Metal Workers' Union Hyundai Steel branch called a 24-hour general strike at Hyundai Steel's Dangjin steel plant, southwest of Seoul on Thursday after failing to reach a deal with management for increased wages and incentives. It followed the second general strike after negotiations broke down in January.

The union ended a 16-day strike at the Dangjin plant on March 11 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 company claimed the strike cost it approximately 25.4 billion won (\$US17.3 million).

The union wants similar conditions to 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 originally proposed 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. The union rejected a revised offer that included a performance bonus plan of an average of 26.5 million won per person, demanding higher increases in pay and incentives.

Philippines: Jeepney drivers hold three-day national strike

Jeepney (public utility vehicle [PUV]) drivers held a three-day nationwide strike on Monday affecting commuter transport in many major cities. The strike was called by MANIBELA, which covers over 100,000 jeepney drivers.

MANIBELA says the Land Transportation Franchising and Regulatory Board (LTFRB) allegedly gave the wrong figures on the status of the PUV modernisation, resulting in the non-renewal of many drivers' provisional authority to operate, with many paying heavy fines.

The government initiated the PUV Modernisation Program (PUVMP) in 2017 with the alleged aim to replace jeepneys with more modern, less polluting vehicles and replace units not considered roadworthy. The plan requires the consolidation of individual PUV franchises into cooperatives

or corporations as the initial stage of modernisation. Unconsolidated units are denied renewal of permits and licenses.

Drivers accused the LTFRB of incorrectly recording that 86 percent of jeepneys had consolidated, falsely indicating to parliament that consolidation was high, giving President Marcos the excuse not to extend the operation of non-consolidated drivers. MANIBELA claimed the real number of consolidated jeepneys is only 43 percent.

A spokesperson from MANIBELA said non-consolidated drivers are being fined 12,000 pesos for every apprehension with some fined 50,000 pesos (\$US866). "Until now, the ticket is with us as we don't have 50,000 pesos to pay for the fine as we only earn a little," he said.

One media report said a modern jeepney costs over 2 million pesos, an amount that even the state-run banks LandBank and Development Bank of the Philippines said was too expensive for PUV drivers and operators. Jeepney drivers accused the government of using the modernisation plan to force them out of the industry to make it more profitable for larger transport operators.

India: ASHA workers in Kerala maintain strike for higher pay and entitlements

Around 26,000 ASHA (Accredited Social Health Activists) workers are maintaining a strike they began on February 10 over poverty wages and poor conditions. They have been protesting outside the Thiruvananthapuram Secretariat since March 8 and maintaining a protest relay hunger strike since March 20.

Their action is causing massive disruption to the provision of rural health services throughout the state drawing a threat from the health minister who claimed Kerala 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.

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.

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.

National Health Mission workers in Haryana demand permanent jobs

Haryana National Health Mission workers demonstrated in Kurukshetra

on Monday to demand permanent jobs and Dearness Allowance. Organised by the Swasthya Karmachari Sangh, they tried to meet the Chief Minister at his residence to present their demands but were blocked by police. They ended their protest after the Deputy Commissioner issued a statement in writing that the union could meet the Chief Minister “in the coming days.”

Britannia biscuit factory workers in Gujarat strike for higher pay

Workers at Britannia’s Jhagadia biscuit factory in Gujarat began an indefinite strike on Monday demanding a “fair” wage. Management has flatly refused to accept the workers’ demands. A union delegation, affiliated to the opposition Aam Admi Party, failed to get the issue resolved at the labour commissioner’s office.

Britannia is a famous cookies/biscuit brand in India and internationally, with more than 12 plants in India. Management claimed the strike had not affected production at the factory.

Transport workers demand amended motor vehicle act in New Delhi

Thousands of transport workers from different states demonstrated at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi on Monday. The workers are opposed to the newly amended motor vehicles act, which they say makes them more vulnerable to repression. Another demand was that privatisation of the transport sector be stopped. Workers have threatened a national strike on May 20.

Pakistan: Punjab health workers protest privatisation

Scores of young doctors, nurses and paramedics, organised by the Grand Health Alliance, protested on Tuesday against the government’s decision to outsource the Basic Health Units (BHU) and Rural Health Centres (RHU) of Punjab. They held rallies in various parts of Lahore and other cities of the province then held a joint rally at The Mall outside the Punjab Assembly.

Protesters chanted slogans against the Punjab government and health authorities. Most of them were workers from the Integrated Reproductive Maternal Newborn, Child Health & Nutrition Programme. A banner carried by the women protesters read, “Outsourcing of BHUs and RHUs by the Punjab government is not acceptable.”

Protesters said many had worked with the department for 15 years, but the government now wanted to deprive them of their jobs. They demanded permanency.

Protesting Bangladeshi garment workers hospitalised after police attack

On Tuesday, police in Dhaka baton-charged a peaceful demonstration by garment workers marching from Shrom Bhaban towards the Secretariat to demand unpaid wages and Eid bonus. Several severely injured workers

were admitted to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

According to one protester, a union leader from the Biplobi Chhatra Maitree was targeted, badly beaten and dragged into custody. He was later released. Several student organisations condemned the police action and demanded punishment for those involved, some student groups held a march and rally.

Hundreds of garment workers continue protests Gazipur and Savar

Thousands of garment workers in Gazipur and Savar held demonstrations between March 22 to 25 over several demands, including payment of unpaid salaries, Eid bonuses, reopening of closed factories and better working conditions. The police and the army were deployed. Fearing the protests would spread authorities at 15 factories declared a holiday on March 22.

On Tuesday morning, workers from a garment factory in Kaliakoir blocked the Dhaka-Tangail highway to demand three months’ unpaid salaries and Eid bonuses. On the same day, Jeans Manufacturing Company workers in Hemayetpur Rishipara blocked the Hemayetpur-Singair regional road, protesting the indefinite closure of the factory. Factory authorities issued an indefinite closure notice on Tuesday. The army intervened and forced an end to the protest.

On Sunday morning, about 2,000 workers from Giant Knit Garment Factory in Gazipur blocked the Dhaka-Mymensingh highway at the Chowrasta intersection to demand unpaid holiday pay and Eid bonus. Police intervened and after talks with factory management the workers suspended the protest.

On March 22, workers from Zaian Knitwear Fashion Limited in Gazipur blocked the Dhaka-Mymensingh highway for half an hour, erecting barricades at the Chandona intersection. They protested the closure of the factory without clearing unpaid salaries and Eid bonus. The police and army forced the workers to end the protest.

Healthscope nurses in New South Wales continue rolling stoppages

New South Wales Nurses and Midwives Association (NSWNMA) members at Healthscope hospitals in New South Wales are continuing rolling stoppages begun on March 20. Nurses and midwives at Northern Beaches Private Hospital and Norwest Private Hospital stopped work for 26 hours on Monday and Friday, respectively and imposed an overtime ban.

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.

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

NSWNMA members want pay parity with their colleagues at Healthscope hospitals in Queensland, who they say are paid 16 percent more. They also receive less annual, maternity and personal leave than if they were working in public sector hospitals. Understaffing is a major issue.

The NSWNMA is 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.

Bluescope steel workers strike enters fourth month in Victoria

About 400 Australian Workers Union (AWU) members at BlueScope's Western Port steel manufacturing plant in Victoria are maintaining rolling stoppages begun on December 20 to demand an improved pay rise offer. Workers walked off the job again on March 20 and rallied outside the plant.

Workers rejected BlueScope's offer of 12 percent over three years saying it did not compensate for years of minimum 2 percent pay rises, when inflation peaked at over 7 percent. Workers want an 18 percent increase over three years saying it will help close the significant wage gap between them and their higher-paid counterparts at Bluescope in Port Kembla, New South Wales.

Alstom Metronet train-building workers in Western Australia strike again over pay

Over 40 workers at Alstom Metronet's train-building plant at Bellevue in Perth walked off the job for the second time in two weeks on March 21 in response to Alstom's refusal to continue negotiations for a new enterprise agreement. Alstom responded to their March 7 strike by applying for a Bargaining Dispute in the Fair Work Commission, an indication it had no intention of continuing bargaining directly with the workers.

The Electrical Trades Union and the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union members want a 23 percent pay rise over three years and a 36-hour week. Alstom has only offered a 12 percent pay rise over three years and afternoon-shift loading of 20 percent. It rejected all other union claims.

Frankston Concrete Products workers strike for better pay and conditions

About a dozen workers at the Frankston Concrete Products precast concrete plant in Dandenong South, Victoria walked off the job for two hours on March 21 to demand improved pay and conditions. Management responded by locking them out for the rest of the day. Workers responded saying they intended to hold a four-hour stoppage on March 27.

The Australian Workers Union is seeking annual 4 percent pay increases, better redundancy protection, appropriate classification rates and basic workplace standards.

Noosa council workers in Queensland strike again for better pay

For the second time in a week, over 150 workers from the Noosa Shire Council, in southeast Queensland, walked off the job to demand an improved pay offer in the council's proposed enterprise agreement. Negotiations between the council and The Services Union (TSU) and Australian Workers Union (AWU), 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 claimed that some members are paid \$4,000 a year less than at neighbouring councils. The union 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 high-cost housing and rentals, forcing many workers to live 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.

New Zealand medical lab workers strike

More than 850 New Zealand medical laboratory staff struck this week over a pay gap with public hospital lab workers. The week-long stoppages that began on March 22 followed a two-day strike in February and were the 16th in a series of strikes over 18 months. The private laboratories are responsible for processing blood and other tests for patients in hospitals as well as by community providers.

The Apex union issued strike notices to three companies—Awanui, Pathlab and Medlab—over a 30 percent pay disparity with scientists and technicians employed by Health NZ. The stoppages ran 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.

One senior lab scientist told the media that many workers were either resigning or avoiding the profession because it is under-paid and undervalued. According to an Apex union spokesperson, negotiations were ongoing despite the week-long walkouts.

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.



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