

# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

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## South Korea: Industrial Bank of Korea workers maintain protest for higher pay

Workers at the state-owned Industrial Bank of Korea (IBK) are continuing their early January outdoor tent protest outside the bank headquarters in Seoul. The action followed IBK union members' first-ever general strike on December 27 to demand higher pay and performance bonuses. Ninety-five percent of the union's 8,300 members who voted approved industrial action.

The IBK union, a branch of the National Financial Industry Workers' Union, argues that despite generating substantial profits IBK employees earn approximately 30 percent less than other commercial bank counterparts while working overtime without proper compensation.

IBK operates as both a state-run bank supporting small and medium enterprises, and a listed company on the stock market. Tensions escalated when IBK and the Ministry of Finance and Economy distributed 500 billion won (\$US370 million) in dividends to the government and shareholders on 26 March, while ignoring union demands.

The union wants payment of special performance bonuses, an increase in the amount for employee stock ownership plans and cash payments for accumulated compensatory leave (overtime pay). It also claims that overtime pay, totalling about 6 million won (\$US4,118) per employee, has not been paid.

## Korean delivery riders and truckers demand fair pay and rights

About 600 food-delivery riders and truck drivers held a demonstration convoy in Seoul on Tuesday calling for fair pay and protection of rights for platform workers. The Korean Public Service and Transport Workers Union organised the protest followed by a rally at the headquarters of major platform operators Coupang Eats and Baedal Minjok (Baemin), a subsidiary of the Germany-based multinational Delivery Hero.

Both groups of workers are classified as independent contractors, denying them basic employment protections under industrial law. Protesters demanded reinstatement of the Korean Safe Rates System, and that it be expanded to include all road transport workers, including those working via digital apps.

The Korean Safe Rates System was established to improve road safety and working conditions for truck drivers who owned and operated their own vehicles setting minimum pay rates. It aimed to prevent unsafe

practices like overloading and fatigue driving by guaranteeing drivers a minimum wage that covered their operational costs. The system was established by the government in 2020 and scheduled to expire at the end of 2022. Strikes by truckers were unsuccessful in extending the system.

## Nepal: Striking teachers brutally attacked by police in Kathmandu

Thousands of Nepal Teachers Federation (NTF) members have been on strike since April 7 across the nation. They are demanding implementation of the School Education Act., which provides improved pay and conditions. Teachers gathered in Kathmandu on April 2 and have been holding demonstrations and sit-ins in the Maitighar-Naya Baneshwor, in the city centre, defying government instructions to end the strike to begin student enrolments for the new academic year.

On Sunday, police used batons and water cannons to try and disperse their 26-day peaceful protest in Maitighar-Naya Baneshwor. At least 60 protesters were injured and 27 were hospitalised. The NTF said some protesters were in critical condition with injuries to the head.

The teachers are protesting the government's failure to endorse the school education bill which has been in a parliamentary committee for over 18 months. The bill contains improved conditions for teachers, such as regular payment of monthly salaries, equal pay and entitlements with civil servants, retention of teachers under the federal government and an increase in entry age of teachers to 40. Teachers also want a dedicated hospital for teachers in line with army, police and civil service hospitals.

The media reported that a Supreme Court order was delivered to the government on April 18, directing it to immediately address the demands of the striking teachers and for teachers to return to school within three days (Monday). The teachers' federation claimed it immediately responded to the call from the government on April 18 to attend talks, but their representatives were denied entry to the Ministry of Education by police who forced them to leave, claiming they had not been given permission to let them enter the government complex.

## India: Telangana university assistant professors protest for higher pay

Contract assistant professors from Osmania University in Hyderabad are protesting on campus to demand permanent jobs, wages on par with other government employees and allowances with annual increments of three percent. They complained that despite submitting representations to government officials for the past 15 months, nothing had been achieved. They began the protest on April 20.

### **Blinkit grocery delivery workers in Uttar Pradesh strike against poor working conditions**

Around 150 gig workers from Blinkit, who receive work via the Zomato-owned grocery delivery platform in Varanasi, stopped work for two days on April 26 to protest poor working conditions. Demands included an end to mandatory work hours between 12 to 4 pm, cotton shirts in summer, an increase in minimum wage, and basic amenities like shaded waiting areas and drinking water.

The protest was organised by the Gig and Platform Service Workers Union. Workers told the media that the company responded by blocking their IDs—citing the strike as the reason—and forced them to sign an agreement to have their IDs unblocked. According to the union, the company threatened legal action and forced workers to sign affidavits promising not to strike in future.

### **Indian dockers to hold national strike against privatisation**

Unions at India's 12 major sea and river ports have called a nation-wide strike for May 20 in opposition to government moves to place the ports in private ownership. An estimated 18,000 workers would be involved in the strike.

Although the government claims it has no intentions of privatising the ports it is allowing public-private partnerships for specific projects at berths and terminals on a fixed tenure. It claimed that on expiry of the "concession period" the asset is handed over to the Major Port Authority.

### **Pakistan: Municipal workers in Kohat, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa protest overdue wages**

Fixed-wage workers at Kohat, in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province's Tehsil Municipal Administration, staged a protest sit-in on Tuesday against the non-payment of wages for the last three months. They carried placards and chanted slogans against the government. A union spokesman threatened that if the wages were not paid within a week, they would suspend all civic services.

### **BAE shipyard workers in South Australia continue rolling stoppages**

Over 500 tradesmen at the BAE Systems naval shipyard at Osborn in Adelaide are maintaining rolling stoppages and work bans begun in February to demand industry-standard pay rates. They want pay parity with workers doing the same job at the neighbouring ASC shipyard who, the tradesmen say, are paid 20 percent more.

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

The unions have dropped all other claims to just a 30 percent pay increase on average over three years, while BAE is offering only 12 percent over three years. Faced with only minimal industrial action BAE is refusing to improve its pay offer, has ended negotiations and applied to the employer friendly Fair Work Commission to mediate the dispute.

The workers' last pay rise in 2023, negotiated by the unions, was only 2 percent when the consumer price index rate was over 6 percent.

### **Operating theatre technicians at Royal Hobart Hospital strike over staffing**

Close to 20 perioperative technicians from the Royal Hobart Hospital walked off the job on the morning of April 24 to demand safer workloads and increased staffing. Workers held placards saying, "Theatres stop without us," "Staff all roles, save lives," and "Patient safety over savings!"

The workers, who prepare and clean surgical suites and assist theatre nurses, are members of the Health and Community Services Union who said the campaign against the chronic staff shortage has been ongoing for over a year. The union claimed the dispute is subjected to the job hiring freeze applied to the public sector by the state Liberal government.

One technician wrote on social media "All we want is a better service to our patients. The government needs to listen to us. We are all tired and exhausted and stressed. People in this day and age shouldn't have to work like this."

### **Striking Noosa council workers in Queensland locked out**

Over 150 workers from the Noosa Shire Council, in southeast Queensland, have been locked out for 48 hours after striking and protesting outside the council's offices at Tewantin on Thursday. The Services Union (TSU) and Australian Workers Union (AWU) members have held several strikes since late March to demand an improved pay offer.

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.

An AWU spokesperson said the council CEO has refused to continue negotiations, preferring to force the dispute through the Queensland Industrial Relations Court (QIRC). Council and the unions are to resume conciliatory talks with a meeting before the QIRC on May 7.

### **UGL Transmission construction workers in Queensland strike for improved offer**

High voltage power line construction workers in Queensland employed by contractor UGL Transmission stopped work for an indefinite period on Wednesday to demand an improved offer in the company's proposed enterprise agreement. After rejecting UGL's pay offer, the 26 Electrical Trades Union (ETU) members voted unanimously on March 28 to take protected industrial action and walked off the job for several hours on

April 16. The ETU has not given details of demands and unresolved issues.

### **New Zealand rest home support workers strike**

Nearly 1,000 New Zealand home support workers walked off the job for two hours on May 1 to protest chronically low pay and an attempt by their employer to claw back staff conditions. The strike follows a two-hour stop-work meeting on 15 April.

The workers are employed by Access Community Health, one of the country's largest home support companies. Most are on the minimum wage of \$23.50 per hour, or slightly above, but none have received a pay raise for nearly two years. A recent increase to the legal minimum was below the rate of inflation, running at 2.2 percent.

A Public Service Association (PSA) spokesperson said despite receiving increased public funding, Access Community Health "have put up an insulting offer: no pay increase, introducing 90-day trials, reducing sick days, and taking away qualifications pay steps undermining the integrity of the 2017 care and support worker pay equity settlement."

One worker said that their work is hugely under-valued. "We are paid minimum wage to deliver essential care, 24/7 and 365 days a year. Our phones are always ringing because our employer cannot attract and retain staff at their current pay rates," she declared. Their duties include using hoist equipment, managing hygiene, administering medication, personal care and liaising with other healthcare professionals.

The strike is part of a wave of industrial action against underfunding and understaffing in the country's crisis-ridden health system. On the same day 5,500 senior doctors held their first ever 24-hour nationwide strike while Auckland City Hospital's perioperative nurses also walked out.



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