

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

10 July 2026

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

South Korea: Public sector workers rally in Seoul against pay restraints and restructuring

Thousands of South Korean public sector workers rallied in central Seoul on July 4, demanding direct negotiations with the government over wages, staffing and the restructuring of public institutions.

Around 10,000 workers gathered on Sejong-daero outside Sungnyemun Gate, according to the Korean Public Service and Transport Workers' Union (KPTU). The demonstration was organised by the Joint Committee of Public Sector Labour Unions of the two main union federations, the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) and Federation of Korean Trade Unions (FKTU). Workers chanted, "Stop unilateral decision-making! Open labour-government negotiations!"

The immediate focus of the rally was the government's "total personnel cost" system, under which central authorities cap the total amount public institutions can spend on wages and related labour costs. Workers denounced the system as a mechanism for suppressing pay, blocking staff increases and overriding collective bargaining agreements. Speakers also condemned government guidelines imposing job-performance pay and wage-peak systems, as well as plans for mergers, consolidations and relocations of public institutions to provincial areas.

The unions are demanding formal labour-government negotiations, the immediate creation of a Public Institutions Compensation Committee, democratic reform of the Public Institution Management Committee, "fair" wage increases, the expansion of frontline staffing and public sector jobs, the abolition of anti-labour government guidelines, and a halt to unilateral mergers and rushed relocations.

The struggle reflects broader anger among South Korean public sector workers over years of government control of wages and staffing. In 2022, the KPTU and PSI lodged a complaint with the International Labour Organization over the government's interference in wage bargaining at public institutions. The ILO subsequently recommended that the government establish regular consultation with public sector unions to prevent such interference.

India: Karnataka garbage pickers protest over outstanding wages

Around 190 workers protested at the Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA) head office on Monday to demand timely pay and equal work-equal pay. Over 150 garbage pickers in Bengaluru have not

received their wages of 14,600 rupees (\$153) since April. Many have been employed for decades, initially in health awareness campaigns (like polio vaccination drives), later shifting to garbage management, monitoring littering, and coordinating with inspectors.

Maharashtra doctors and nurses strike after physical attack by Shiv Sena official

Doctors and nurses in Kalyan-Dombivli halted work on Wednesday after a Shiv Sena corporator [councilor] allegedly attacked hospital staff quoting delay in treatment. Footage shows the local government official slapping and punching doctors and nurses during the dispute, prompting outrage and calls for stronger hospital security. The Indian Medical Association threatened a private doctors' shutdown if arrests are not made, intensifying pressure on civic and police authorities.

Andhra Pradesh municipal workers protest in Vijayawada over jobs

Municipal employees demonstrated in Vijayawada to demand jobs for the kin of retired and deceased workers on Tuesday. They want the government to provide employment opportunities to family members of those who have either retired or passed away, ensuring continuity of livelihood. Workers argue that such a measure would support families who lose their breadwinners and recognise the long service of municipal employees.

The protest was directed at state officials, urging them to take immediate action and implement policies that guarantee these jobs. The All India Trade Union Congress led this protest by the Municipal workers.

ASHA workers in Punjab fight for higher wages

ASHA (Accredited Social Health Activist) workers protested outside the SDM office complex, burning an effigy of Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Tuesday. They were demanding fair wages, arguing that their honorarium is meagre despite handling workloads greater than many permanent employees. The protest was led by Manjit Kaur, Gurwant Kaur and Balwinder Kaur, with several other union members addressing the gathering.

Union leaders accused the Punjab government and its health minister of ignoring their concerns, calling the government's attitude arrogant. The

union announced continued protests across Punjab, including burning effigies in multiple districts until July 16. The workers said their wages are far lower than the permanent workers though their workload was not any less.

Punjab teachers protest attack on fellow worker

On Tuesday, members of the Democratic Teachers' Front (DTF) demonstrated outside the deputy commissioner's office in Patiala following the assault on a booth-level officer (BLO), who is also a government schoolteacher. The teacher was attacked while conducting a door-to-door survey under the Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls in Patiala. Teachers have demanded the arrest of the accused and called for safer working conditions.

The teachers object to being assigned non-academic duties, such as surveys, arguing they already face immense pressure. They demanded a safe, pressure-free environment. The unions threatened to intensify their agitation if their demands are not addressed promptly.

ASHA workers hold statewide protest in Haryana

ASHA (Accredited Social Health Activist) workers across Haryana demonstrated on Monday to demand better pay and job security. Their demands include an increase in monthly honorarium, recognition as permanent employees rather than contractual staff, and social security benefits such as pensions and health coverage.

Workers accused the state government of ignoring their contributions, despite their crucial role in rural healthcare delivery. The unions have threatened to intensify their agitation if their demands are not met, signalling possible larger mobilisations.

Bangladesh garment workers hold highway blockade and protest in Dhaka over unpaid wages

Hundreds of Bangladeshi apparel workers mounted two major protests this week against factory owners' continued refusal to pay legally mandated wages and benefits, and against factory closures that threaten thousands of workers with layoffs.

On Wednesday morning, workers of an unnamed factory blocked the Dhaka-Aricha Highway at Nabagram in Manikganj district, bringing traffic to a standstill and stranding hundreds of vehicles. The protesters allege that management has long refused to pay salaries and benefits stipulated in the government gazette and that workers who demand their rightful wages face dismissal threats. Factory authorities had reportedly promised wage and allowance increases before the Eid holiday but failed to deliver.

The highway blockade followed a demonstration on Sunday by over 500 workers from Lithe Group outside the department of labour in Dhaka. The group's five garment factories—Apparel-21 Ltd, Fonkom Fashion Ltd, Fonkom Dyeing Ltd, Fonkom Printing Ltd, and Fonkom Knitting Ltd—were shut down indefinitely on July 3. The company cited gas supply disruptions, declining export orders, labour unrest, and mounting financial losses, but workers say the closures were carried out in phases without

settling outstanding entitlements. Staff members are reportedly owed three months' salaries, while production workers have not been paid for two months.

The owners have offered only five to ten days' service benefits, which workers have rejected. No senior Department of Labour officials were available to address the protesters, and the Lithe Group Managing Director could not be reached for comment. Factory owners' actions underscore how they systematically flout even the meagre protections contained in the country's labour laws.

Mining workers set to strike at BHP Port Hedland for first time in decades

Around 250 workers plan to stop work for eight hours on July 16 at BHP's Port Hedland Bulk Export Terminal in the iron-rich Pilbara region of Western Australia. The company claims that strike action, shutting down the world's largest iron ore loading port, would potentially mean \$126 million a day in lost revenue.

The workers are currently employed under individual workplace agreements, with widely differing pay and conditions. They are seeking an enterprise agreement with annual cost-of-living wage increases, a fair classification structure and better living arrangements for fly-in, fly-out workers.

More than 150 workers covered by the Electrical Trades Union and Australian Manufacturing Workers Union voted near-unanimously to strike last month. Within hours of the ballot results being announced, it emerged that labour-hire firms had been recruiting strikebreakers.

Last week, the Australian Workers Union announced its 87 members at Port Hedland had also voted overwhelmingly to strike.

The unions responded to BHP's scab labour initiative by pleading for more backroom talks. No action was called, as the union bureaucrats insisted workers must wait for further negotiations with the company on July 7.

The delay allowed the company to push through a real-wage cutting enterprise agreement at its Mining Area C and South Flank operations, also in the Pilbara, by the narrowest of margins—just 938 of 1,814 workers voted in favour.

Only after the possibility of legally protected simultaneous action across the two sections of BHP workers was off the table, have the unions called strike action at Port Hedland, and even now it is limited to a single stoppage, from 2 p.m. to 10 p.m. on July 16.

Transport workers protest at ALDI supermarkets over supply-chain safety

Hundreds of truck drivers protested outside ALDI supermarkets and warehouses across Australia on Wednesday, opposing dangerous practices in the company's supply chain.

Transport Workers Union (TWU) National Secretary Michael Kaine said, "Throughout ALDI's transport supply chain there are shocking tales of injuries, dangerous vehicle standards, underpayments and pressure to rush."

The union claims that poor vehicle maintenance at trucking companies contracted by ALDI has led to workers being permanently injured, and serious accidents including truck rollovers. The TWU also alleges finding trucks held together with tape, workers hit by forklifts and vehicle

collisions in ALDI distribution centres.

At the ALDI store in Balgowlah, New South Wales, workers have on three separate occasions been crushed and trapped in a scissor lift, the union says.

Vehicle incidents are by far the most common cause of death in Australian workplaces, accounting for at least 38 fatalities already this year. On average, 79 of the 191 workplace deaths each year are vehicle-related, and 58 occur in the transport, postal and warehousing sector.

DXC Technology workers continue strike action

Hundreds of DXC Technology workers have carried out further strike action across the country, with a three-day stoppage beginning on July 1, following the latest rejection (387 votes against to 137 in favour) of a proposed enterprise agreement.

The workers are members of Professionals Australia (PA) and the Australian Services Union, who said the deal had no cost-of-living increase, no backpay, and cancelled standby rates which could cost some workers tens of thousands in lost annual income. The company has publicly admitted to underpaying workers since 2017.

The meagre wage demand advanced by the unions, for a nominal increase of 4 percent per annum, would itself mean a wage cut in comparison with inflation.

According to PA CEO Sam Roberts, DXC used strikebreakers during the industrial action, but were unable to address critical failures as the “fill-in crew had no idea what they were looking at.”

The union said significant system failures affected the Victorian WorkCover Authority, the Victorian Premium Collection System, Victoria Police and the City of Gold Coast IT systems during the strike. DXC staff supporting the operations of the Australian Taxation Office also stopped work as millions of Australians begin lodging tax returns.

Though all deny any major effect, the action likely extended wait times for repairs, even if major outages were prevented.

The latest action follows a 24-hour strike on April 2, a five-day strike from May 8 and a 72-hour strike from May 23. The unions say industrial action will continue until at least July 14.

Victorian public hospital doctors prepare for industrial action over wages and conditions

More than 2,000 Victorian public hospital doctors voted overwhelmingly on June 29 to begin the process for protected industrial action, the first by the state’s public hospital doctors in more than two decades.

The Australian Medical Association (Victoria) and the Australian Salaried Medical Officers’ Federation voted to apply to the Fair Work Commission (FWC) for a protected action order after negotiations with the Victorian Labor government over a new enterprise agreement stalled. Only 12 members voted against the motion.

The application was approved by the FWC on July 3, meaning doctors will vote in a formal ballot on industrial action between now and July 27.

According to the unions, the first phase would involve public campaigning and administrative measures, including disruptions to billing and other non-clinical processes. This would be followed by bans on unpaid and unscheduled overtime, before possible strikes and work stoppages. The unions say any action would not compromise patient

safety.

After 10 months of negotiations, the unions want a 30 percent wage increase over four years, improved parental leave and guaranteed payment for overtime. They have accused the state Labor government of abandoning an earlier commitment to improve overtime arrangements, claiming it later rejected the proposal on cost grounds.

The dispute comes amid industrial action by tens of thousands of other Victorian public sector workers, including teachers and allied health professionals, over wages, workloads, staffing shortages and the government’s sub-inflation 3 percent wage cap.

Victorian allied health workers continue industrial campaign

Victorian allied health workers are continuing their campaign for better wages and conditions with lunchtime rallies in Geelong, Bendigo and Shepparton, with further regional work stoppages scheduled for July 15, 23 and 31.

The dispute covers more than 13,000 public sector allied health workers represented by the Medical Scientists Association of Victoria (MSAV), the Victorian Allied Health Professionals Association (VAHPA), the Victorian Psychologists Association and the Association of Hospital Pharmacists.

On June 16, allied health professional members took 24-hour strike action, with about 3,000 union members marching to the Victorian parliament during stalled enterprise bargaining negotiations with the Allan Labor government. In early July, workers imposed indefinite work bans on the authorisation and release of test results and duties associated with discharging patients.

VAHPA wants a 36.18 percent wage increase over three years, improved career structures and measures to address chronic staffing shortages and excessive workloads. MSAV has been negotiating with the government for 14 months and is seeking a 28 percent wage increase over four years.

While workers have demonstrated their determination to fight, the unions have tightly restricted industrial action, combined with appeals for more talks with the Victorian Labor government, which faces a state election in November.



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