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: Maharashtra court employees suspend strike over pay parity

Around 34,000 employees in Maharashtra's district and subordinate courts began an indefinite statewide strike on November 17, demanding revised pay scales comparable with those received by Bombay High Court staff. The four participating associations said employees performing similar work had faced pay disparity since 2006, while a proposal submitted by the High Court administration to the state government in January 2025 remained unresolved. The stoppage disrupted filings, hearings, remand proceedings and other court work across the state.

The unions temporarily suspended the strike on November 18 after intervention by a committee of Bombay High Court judges and an assurance that employee representatives would meet Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on November 26. They warned that the action could resume if the meeting did not produce a satisfactory decision and a concrete government order implementing the pay revision.

Karnataka community health workers continue indefinite protest

Thousands of Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) workers began an indefinite day-and-night protest at Freedom Park in Bengaluru on November 17. Organised by the Karnataka Rajya Samyuktha ASHA Karyakarteyara Sangha, the workers are demanding a fixed monthly honorarium of 15,000 rupees ($US159). The government says workers currently receive around 8,000 rupees a month from central and state payments and incentives, while the union says a 2025 promise to raise the fixed honorarium to 10,000 rupees remains unfulfilled.

Other demands include an end to compulsory app-based work unless the government provides mobile phones and appropriate incentives, payment of outstanding honoraria and incentives, continuation of ASHA facilitator positions, special payments for training programs, financial assistance during serious illness and a retirement benefit of 500,000 rupees. Talks with the state government on November 19 failed to resolve the dispute, and the union said the protest would continue.

Bangladesh: Garment workers continue mass protests for higher wages

Garment workers in Savar, Ashulia, Gazipur and Mirpur continued protests on November 18 and 19, demanding that the minimum monthly wage be increased from 12,500 taka ($US100) to 30,000 taka and that the revised rate take effect on December 1. The unrest intensified after the wage board postponed its November 16 meeting and factory owners failed to submit a wage proposal. Workers blocked major roads, while police used tear gas and sound grenades to disperse demonstrations.

Production was halted at around 300 factories on November 18, including 129 that were closed indefinitely under the Bangladesh Labour Act's 'no work, no pay' provision. Disruption continued at 61 factories in Savar and Ashulia the following day. Police said around 300 people had been arrested in 24 cases connected with the protests, while Border Guard Bangladesh personnel were deployed in major industrial areas.

Teacher registration candidates demand special recruitment circular

Candidates who passed Bangladesh's 18th non-government teachers' registration examination but did not receive recruitment recommendations staged a sit-in at Shahbagh in Dhaka on November 15. They demanded a special recruitment circular containing sufficient subject-by-subject vacancies and a new collection of vacancy information where necessary. The protesters called for all 9,842 remaining successful candidates to be included before their registration certificates or age eligibility expire.

According to the candidates, 60,634 people passed the preliminary, written and oral stages of the examination, but previous recruitment rounds failed to include all available subject vacancies and allowed candidates who had already received recommendations to apply again. They said repeated memorandums and earlier protests, including a three-day sit-in in April, had not produced a comprehensive recruitment process.

Sri Lanka: Irrigation technical assistants stage two-day sick-leave protest

More than 450 technical assistants employed by Sri Lanka's Irrigation Department withdrew from duty in a two-day sick-leave protest beginning at midnight on November 15. The Irrigation Technical Assistants' Association said its members undertake continuous field duties across the island and are required to pay fuel expenses from their own incomes. Workers had expected relief in the 2027 budget but said none was provided.

The association demanded financial assistance or an allowance sufficient to cover field travel and fuel costs. It said members were

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prepared to enter negotiations if the government provided a concrete response during the two-day action.

Disaster relief officers begin nationwide strike over workload and allowances

Around 400 disaster relief officers began a nationwide strike on November 16 after the government failed to implement commitments that the Defence Ministry secretary had reportedly made on November 5. The dispute centres on the heavy workload involved in repeatedly inspecting homes damaged by Cyclone Ditwah, inadequate transport and inspection payments, and wider problems within the National Disaster Relief Service Centre.

Union representatives said officials received only 100 rupees ($US0.30) for each damaged house inspected and a monthly transport allowance of 3,000 rupees, even though some homes required more than 20 visits. They demanded an inspection allowance of 1,250 rupees for each committee member, reduced workloads and measures to address severe occupational stress. The union said members would remain withdrawn from disaster relief duties until the government provided solutions.

Public sector engineers continue action over field allowance

Public sector engineers held a nationwide one-day sick-leave strike on November 13 and marched near Parliament on November 16 over the government's failure to restore the Field Attendance and Transport allowance in the 2027 budget. The Government Services Engineers' Association is demanding that the allowance, suspended in July 2024, be restored at 75,000 rupees ($US226) a month to cover transport, equipment, clothing and other expenses incurred during official field work.

The association said its continuing action included withdrawal from field inspections, duties outside normal working hours and participation in some coordinating, procurement and bid-evaluation committees. It warned that development and infrastructure projects could be disrupted if the allowance dispute remained unresolved.

Preschool teachers protest for higher allowance and pension rights

Hundreds of preschool teachers demonstrated in towns across Sri Lanka on November 16, demanding higher pay and pension rights. The teachers said the current government allowance of 6,000 rupees ($US18) a month was grossly inadequate amid rising living costs. They called on the government to implement an earlier promise to increase the allowance to 25,000 rupees and establish a pension scheme.

Sri Lanka has an estimated 35,000 preschool teachers working in about 19,500 early childhood centres. Protesters said many teachers with decades of service still lacked secure salaries, retirement benefits and formal recognition, even as the government prepared to revise the preschool curriculum in 2027.

Gold Coast council workers strike and march on council offices

City of Gold Coast council workers struck on Wednesday, November 18, and marched to the council's administration building in Bundall. The Services Union said more than 1,000 workers took part, and the Nerang, Burleigh Heads and Ormeau libraries and four waste transfer centres were closed.

The action had been postponed from November 10 after the council threatened to lock out workers who took part until the following day.

The council has offered a 12 percent pay rise over two years and eight months, and plans to shift workers to a nine-day fortnight. The unions are seeking 13 percent and say the council's offer would amount to a wage freeze until July 2029. The Services Union said some council staff are so squeezed by the cost of living that they are living in council depots. The unions have called a further strike for Monday, November 30.

Virgin Australia airport workers hold first-ever stoppages

Australian Services Union (ASU) members in Virgin Australia's Guest Services division, who handle check-in, boarding and gate operations, stopped work for two one-hour periods at Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Adelaide airports on Monday, November 16. It was the first time the workers had held stoppages. They also held back boarding until 15 minutes before scheduled departure. Virgin claims there was no disruption to flights.

The workers are opposing nine-hour shifts, cuts to days in lieu and Virgin's pay offer of 5 percent in the first year of a three-year agreement and 4 percent in each of the following two. The ASU said further action would follow if talks next week fail.

National Pharmacies staff strike across two states

Pharmacists employed by National Pharmacies in South Australia and Victoria held a 24-hour strike on Saturday, November 14, closing 24 stores. The workers are members of Professionals Australia, which said it was the first multi-state 24-hour strike by community pharmacists in Australia. It followed a one-hour stoppage on November 12.

The pharmacists are opposing unpaid clinical work and chronic understaffing, and are demanding backpay and improved parental leave.

Healthe Care nurses strike for fifth time in a month

About 65 nurses and midwives at Healthe Care's Hurstville Private and Waratah Private hospitals in southern Sydney walked out for two hours on Wednesday, November 18, and marched to Timothy Reserve. The workers are members of the NSW Nurses and Midwives' Association. It was the fifth strike at Healthe Care hospitals in a month.

Healthe Care, owned by private equity firm Pacific Equity Partners, initially offered 2.4, 3 and 3 percent, before lifting the first-year rise to 3.5 percent for 2026. Nurses are demanding pay parity with the public hospital system and enforceable nurse-to-patient ratios. Members said they had worked shifts running from 8 a.m. to 2 a.m. because of

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understaffing. More action is planned next week.

Royal Hobart Hospital nurses walk out again

Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation members at the Royal Hobart Hospital held a 15-minute walkout on Tuesday, November 17. The Liberal state government has offered 8.25 percent over three years, a real wage cut. The union noted that state politicians had received a 22 percent pay rise. The action follows a walkout and rally at state parliament by Hobart nurses on November 7.

Launceston prison officers stop work

Correctional officers at the Launceston Reception Prison in Tasmania, members of the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU), held a one-hour stop-work meeting on Thursday, November 19. The state government has offered rises of 3, 2.75 and 2.5 percent over three years, against inflation in Hobart of 5.3 percent.

BOC gas workers in Brisbane take third round of action

Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union members at gas supplier BOC's Rocklea site in Brisbane took a third round of protected industrial action on Friday, November 13. The 16 workers are fighting a 45-hour working week and have been in negotiations for a new agreement since February.

New Zealand Warehouse Group workers strike

Over 300 distribution workers at the New Zealand Warehouse retail group struck for 24 hours and held protests in Auckland and Christchurch on November 12. The workers were opposing increasing automation of their jobs and intrusive workplace monitoring practices.

The Workers First Union said the introduction of drones and a stock-picking robot is putting staff out of work, while workers' bathroom breaks are being tracked by artificial intelligence. Drones used for stocktaking had been introduced to the distribution centres, cutting the size of inventory teams. A large robot was being introduced to the Auckland warehouse to pack small items for new orders.

Workers who spoke to Radio NZ said they fear what the future holds. One woman said she was worried and angry at the rate and pace of change. She had already lost colleagues in an earlier round of cuts, including some who'd worked there for 30 years.

A Workers First spokesperson said the union is in discussions with the company. The union is "not trying to kill the robot or AI," she said, but wanted protection and some mechanisms for the "inevitable" loss of jobs. The Warehouse Group posted $11.2 million in profits in September, attributed to lower costs and improved margins.

NZ medical laboratory workers strike

About 660 medical laboratory workers began four days of strike action this week. Workers employed at Awanui Labs—the country's biggest private laboratory service—notified strike action for November 19 and 20 and again on November 23 and 24.

The APEX Union said collective bargaining for a new contract between it and Awanui Labs has "ground to a halt." Awanui has offered a 9.5 percent pay rise over 28 months but has refused to guarantee a moratorium or protections against future lab service cuts and staff redundancies. A survey of workers found almost 70 percent rate the staffing situation as "poor" or at "crisis" level.

Strike action is impacting medical laboratories and phlebotomy collection centres in Northland, Auckland, Taranaki, Wellington, Nelson, Blenheim, Canterbury, Otago and Southland. Surgery delays and other disruptions have affected hospital services in Southland, Dunedin, Wellington, Hutt Valley, Oamaru, Nelson and Wairau.

APEX remains in facilitated bargaining with Awanui through the Employment Relations Authority.

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