

Indian and Pakistani health workers strike over coronavirus safety;  
Australia Paper maintenance workers locked out

## Workers Struggles: Asia and Australia

27 June 2020

### **India: Electronics workers in Tamil Nadu oppose sackings**

Around 150 TSMT Technology employees stopped work on Tuesday and held a sit-down protest at the factory's main gate in Maraimalai Nagar, Chennai against the sudden termination of 100 work colleagues. The electronics assembly plant, which is a wholly owned subsidiary of a Taiwan based multi-national, employs over 400 people. The sacked workers were only given one day's notice.

The protesters defied police demands that they disperse. The workers ended their action after six hours when management announced that the retrenched workers could return to work on July 1, at the end of the coronavirus lockdown.

### **Hospital doctors in Hyderabad strike over excessive workloads**

Around 27 post-graduate doctors from the Osmania General Hospital in Hyderabad, Telangana state, walked out on June 20 to demand additional doctors to ease increased workloads created by the COVID-19 pandemic. The doctors said they were treating around 50 patients in the coronavirus isolation ward on top of their normal work with critical patients in the acute medical care unit.

The doctors resumed normal duties on Wednesday, after hospital administration agreed to transfer doctors from other departments to care for the COVID-19 patients.

### **Private college hospital workers in Kerala demand wages and jobs**

Sacked workers from the Kannur Medical College in Anjarakandy demonstrated on June 21 to demand reinstatement and four months unpaid wages. The privately-owned hospital shut in mid-March after failing to reach an agreement with 60 permanent staff, including nurses, sanitation workers and other medical workers, who had been on indefinite strike since February. The strikers had been demanding minimum salaries for all employees.

The hospital was immediately taken over by the Kannur district administration and transformed into a COVID-19 care centre. The workers, who are members of the Private Hospital and Medical Shop Employees Union, which is part of the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU), also protested outside the Kannur Collectorate on June 15 to their demand jobs.

### **Uttar Pradesh construction workers demand COVID-19 lockdown pay**

About 50 workers at the Samsung India construction site in Uttar Pradesh's industrial city of Noida protested over their unpaid salaries on June 21. The electrical division workers allege that two contractors who hired them have refused to pay April and May wages during the coronavirus lockdown. The building workers said that they had been told they would receive this money when the lockdown ended.

### **Hyderabad food delivery workers protest pay cut**

Around 300 delivery workers from an online food delivery company in Hyderabad protested on Monday over drastic cuts to their wages and incentive payment during the coronavirus lockdown. The workers said that the company used the pandemic to introduce a new pay structure and are demanding restoration of their old pay rates.

Prior to the lockdown they received 35 rupees (\$US0.47) for every order within a three-kilometre radius but this has been reduced to around 25 rupees. On the previous rates they could make up to 1,500 rupees (\$20) per day but now barely make between 300 and 400 rupees. The company is also collecting delivery charges up to 50 rupees from each customer.

As part of their protest the workers are refusing to deliver orders to specific areas. The two largest food delivery companies in Hyderabad are Swiggy and Zomato.

### **Pakistan: Sindh health workers demand PPE, allowances**

Doctors, nurses and paramedics from Sindh government hospitals in Karachi and other cities throughout the province continued their two-week protests this week to demand personal protective equipment (PPE) and the provision of allowances, including a health risk payment.

Workers boycotted duties in some outpatient departments and marched in Karachi to the home of the province chief minister denouncing the government reneging on previous promises. The demonstrations were led by the Grand Health Alliance, an umbrella organisation of several unions.

The protesters also want dedicated isolation wards for healthcare workers infected with the virus. Many Pakistani health workers have been infected with the virus because of the lack of PPE and other basic safety equipment and practises.

### **Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government workers demand pay rise**

Government workers in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province held a sit-in demonstration on June 19 as part of their ongoing “pen-down” strike against a government pay freeze. The freeze is in response to the federal government’s budget cost-cutting measures for this financial year beginning July 1.

The protesting workers, from a range of government departments, want an immediate pay increase and allowances to compensate for the skyrocketing cost of living.

The All Government Employees Coordination Council, which includes various government unions, organised the protest and has threatened that the pen-down strike would continue until the end of the month and a protest march to Islamabad held unless their demands are met.

### **Bangladesh: Dhaka police attack protesting bidi workers**

For the second time in two weeks baton-wielding police viciously attacked bidi (hand-rolled cigarette) workers on Tuesday during a demonstration outside the Tangil Press Club in Dhaka. They were protesting against a 28.2 percent tax increase on the bidi industry in the 2020–2021 national budget. The workers demonstrated the following day at the National Board of Revenue.

The industry employs over 400,000 people with up to 70 percent of them children under the age of 15 years. They are paid just 50 taka (\$US0.59) a day.

Thousands of workers and factory owners protested across the country on June 14 against the tax rise. Bangladesh Bidi Sramik Federation representatives have accused the government of attempting to “kill” the bidi industry, pointing out that the proposed tax increase on other cigarettes will be only 5.14 percent.

### **Dhaka hotel workers demand support during COVID-19 pandemic**

Hotel workers demonstrated on Monday outside the National Press Club in Dhaka to demand a government assistance package, a ration system, job security and medical service to compensate the impact of Covid-19 pandemic. They complained that hotel owners had not given infected workers medical treatment, a risk allowance and compensation.

The protesters, who were organised by the Bangladesh Hotel Restaurant Sweetmeat Workers Federation, also alleged that hotel owners had refused to pay wages and Eid Ramadan festival bonus. The vast majority of these workers did not receive the government relief to unemployed workers in the informal sector.

### **Australia Paper maintenance workers in Victoria locked out**

On Tuesday, paper manufacturer Australian Paper (AP) used the Fair Work Act (FWA) to lock out 101 maintenance workers at the company’s Maryvale plant. The lockout was in response to nine months of “legally protected” industrial action by members of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU). The workers have formed a picket at the plant.

The dispute centres on the refusal of the maintenance workers to accept cuts to wages and conditions in the company’s proposed Enterprise Agreement (EA). Australian Paper, which is a subsidiary of Nippon Paper, a global company with a net income of \$10.3 billion, wants a two-tier agreement with 15 percent lower wage rates for all new employees. It also wants a freeze on existing employees’ wages until the pay of new starters catches up.

According to workers, the proposed changes could lead to full-time staff being replaced by contractors along with cuts in sick and personal leave and alterations in the way overtime is calculated and rosters devised. The company has hired contract labour to replace the locked out workers.

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