

Indian health workers protest over COVID-19 treatment discrimination and wages; Western Australian caterers and cleaners strike on offshore gas platforms

Workers Struggles: Asia and Australia

25 July 2020

India: Karnataka contract health workers protest

Nearly 600 contract health workers from the National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro-Sciences (NIMHANS) in Bangalore demonstrated on Monday against workplace bias and poor facilities. The health workers allege that they are denied treatment at the hospital if any of them contract COVID-19 whilst working the facility. Permanent workers, however, are treated at the hospital if infected with the virus.

The contract health workers also complained that some of those unable to get transport to the campus hospital during the coronavirus lockdown are banned from joining the 500,000-rupee Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan health insurance scheme. Around 40 health workers at the Victoria Hospital also protested on Monday demanding to be included in the health insurance scheme.

Doctors at Karnataka government hospitals resign

About 2,000 AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy) contract doctors at Karnataka state-run hospitals resigned on July 16 over long-standing demands for permanent jobs, salary increases, social security and the provision of personal protection equipment which had not been fulfilled.

Their resignations followed a threat a week earlier to take stronger action if the government continued to ignore their demands. The doctors returned to work after the government committed to increase their salaries.

Municipal sanitation workers in Odisha strike over outstanding pay

Seventy contracted sanitation workers from the Jagatsinghpur Municipality in Odisha struck on July 18 over non-payment of their salaries. The workers claim they have not been paid their daily 280-rupee (\$US3.7) wage for the last two months.

They also said they had carried out all their duties during the coronavirus pandemic, without any days off, but were not provided with gloves, masks or sanitisers by the municipal body.

In response to the strike, a municipal official assured the workers that their salaries would be paid on the fifth of every month and that this month's wages provided on July 20. Following this assurance the strikers returned to work.

Tamil Nadu munitions factory workers protest over discrimination

Cordite Factory workers in Aruvankadu, Tamil Nadu demonstrated outside the factory on July 17 to defend their right to speak Tamil at the facility. The protest erupted after a manager allegedly asked employees not speak in Tamil when he was approached with concerns over COVID-19 issues.

The protest was organised by the Cordite Factory Labour Union, the National Employees Union and the Defence Factory Labour Union. There are 1,700 workers at the state-owned ordinance factory.

Bihar health workers strike over COVID-19 discrimination and unpaid wages

Nurses and sanitation workers from the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) in Patna walked out on July 18 over two months of outstanding pay and against health treatment discrimination. AIIMS Patna is one of four specialised COVID-19 treating hospitals in Bihar state.

Striking workers and other staff allege that they and their family members have been banned from receiving treatment at AIIMS Patna, despite having worked day and night since the outbreak of COVID-19.

According to the media, the hospital has become a hub for economically better off COVID-19 patients in the past week, with "common" people have been refused admission if infected. The press claims that the majority of the isolation and ICU beds with ventilator facilities have been occupied by governing National Democratic Alliance (NDA) leaders, ministers and legislators, as well as judges and businessmen.

Telangana contract nurses demand pay rise

Contract nurses from the government-run Nizams Institute of

Medical Sciences (NIMS) in Hyderabad protested outside the director's office on July 17 to demand a wage increase.

In 2012, around 450 contract nurses were hired as interns at the hospital on a 9,000-rupee monthly salary. Sometime last year management assured the nurses' salaries would be increased to 25,000 rupees for those with less than five years of experience and 30,000 rupees for those with over five years.

The nurses, however, are currently paid only 17,000 rupees (\$US227), far below what hospital authorities promised, with no decision made at several board meetings on the issue.

Hyderabad doctors strike to demand new hospital infrastructure

Doctors and interns at the government owned Osmania General Hospital in Hyderabad began limited strike action on Monday to demand a new hospital building. Government Doctors' Association members decided to stop work for an hour each morning—from 9.30 to 10.30—until their demand is granted.

The doctors said the more than century-old main building is in a run-down state and that rains last week had left the building flooded with knee-deep water and patients left sitting helplessly on their beds.

Bangladeshi workers protest over unpaid wages and loss of jobs

Workers organised by Bangladesh Garment Workers' Solidarity, the United Front of Workers and Employees, the Trade Union Centre, and the Dhaka Taxi Car Drivers Union demonstrated in Dhaka on Tuesday to demand the Eid festival allowance and unpaid wages and in protests against lay-offs and job cuts. They demanded that owners of mills and factories pay outstanding amounts before July 25.

The demonstration followed a similar protest outside the National Press Club on July 17 over the same issues.

Bangladeshi sugar mill workers and farmers demand overdue payments

Workers from the state-run Rangpur Sugar Mills struck on Monday and demonstrated on the rail tracks at Mohimaganj, Rangpur district, demanding four months' outstanding wages. They were joined by sugarcane farmers from the mill zone in Gaibandha district who were demanding overdue payments from the mills.

Sri Lanka: Public health inspectors strike over COVID-19 infection procedures

Around 2,000 Public Health Inspectors (PHI) began a national strike on July 17 in protest against the government's failure to implement adequate legal procedures to contain the coronavirus pandemic. Their walkout erupted after the Sri Lankan minister for health described the health inspector's work as "harassment of people."

The inspectors also denounced the government for not gazetting health care guidelines or giving the PHIs sufficient legal authority to conduct COVID-19 pandemic procedures.

The Association of Public Health Inspectors has claimed that the work of its members is severely limited by a lack of proper legal authority. The union said PHIs are carrying out all basic activities related to the control of the pandemic but that the government was openly breaking health rules in public campaigns leading up to the general election scheduled on August 5.

Western Australia: Caterers and cleaners strike at offshore LNG platforms

Caterers, cleaners and cooks working on Shell's giant Prelude offshore liquefied natural gas (LNG) platform in north Western Australia began industrial action this week in their dispute for a new enterprise agreement. Workers stopped work between 4 a.m. and 7 a.m. and between 4 p.m. and 7 p.m. on Thursday and placed indefinite bans on baking, preparing hot meals, laundry and other services.

The workers are employed by Sodexo, a food services and facility management company headquartered in Paris. The company employs over 60 workers on five LNG platforms off northern Australia. The Prelude floating platform is owned by Royal Dutch Shell, KOGAS and Inpex, and managed by Shell.

The Offshore Alliance, a coalition between the Maritime Union of Australia and the Australian Workers Union (AWU), claims that Sodexo had agreed to a new work agreement but that Shell Australia management had pressured the contractor to abandon the deal.

The current agreement, which expired in October 2017, pays annualised salaries of \$85,000 to \$95,000. The AWU want pay increases of up to \$25,000 to bring their members into line with most other offshore employees. The union has now scaled the claim back to between 6 and 10 percent.

According to the AWU, Sodexo in early negotiations wanted to be able to force cooks and caterers on the offshore facilities to work an extra five weeks a year at no extra pay, an effective pay cut of 20 percent.

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