

# 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.*

## South Korea: Industrial Bank of Korea workers strike over low pay

Workers at the state-owned Industrial Bank of Korea (IBK) walked out in their first ever general strike on December 27 to demand higher pay and performance bonuses. Most branches in Seoul remained open but with reduced staff.

Ninety-five percent of the IBK union's 8,300 members who voted approved the strike. The IBK claimed that only 4,200 employees participated in the strike. Workers from the state-owned Bank of Korea (BOK) supported the strike.

The IBK union, a branch of the National Financial Industry Workers' Union, argues that the government sets wages 30 percent lower than those at commercial banks and fails to offer fair compensation.

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.

## India: Power utility workers across India strike against privatisation

Power utility workers across India held a one-hour strike at 12 noon on December 30 against privatisation of the power sector. The strike was called by the Electricity Employees' Federation of India and endorsed by the National Coordination Committee of Electricity Employees & Engineers. Workers held strikes in most state capitals and presented memorandums of demands to government authorities.

## Accredited Social Health Activist workers in Karnataka demand wage rise

Several hundred Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) workers from several parts of Karnataka demonstrated in Mysuru on December 31 to demand monthly wages be increased to 15,000 rupees (\$US175). The All-India United Trade Union Centre (AIUTUC) organised the protest.

Other demands were for an additional 2,000 rupees raise in urban work areas, which is proportionate to their workload, and provision of basic

amenities, such as toilets at workplaces. Workers condemned both state and central governments and accused them of ignoring their demands.

The workers plan to hold a protest at Freedom Park in Bangalore on January 7. AIUTUC claimed the ruling Congress government in the state election had promised a raise of 3,000 rupees for ASHA workers which is yet to be fulfilled even after 15 rounds of talks.

## Porters at Gujarat textile warehouses strike over heavy loads

Around 250 porters from textile warehouses in Vankaneda, Antroli, Saroli and Kadodara Road in Surat, Gujarat state, struck work on December 28 over the excessive weight of the cargos which they are forced carry. The strike was called by the Congress-affiliated Indian National Trade Union Congress.

Porters demanded the cargo weight be limited to 65 kilograms. They complained that some parcels weighed up to 130 kilograms and accused warehouse operators and transporters of blatantly violating a signed agreement. Other demands are for a pay rise and weekly days off.

## Samagra Shiksha government school workers in Telangana strike for permanent jobs

About 19,000 Samagra Shiksha government school contract workers have been on strike since last week in Hyderabad demanding permanent jobs and a pay rise.

The workers are organised by the Telangana Samagra Shiksha Udyagolu Sangam, which said it had made representations to the state government, but it tried to dodge the issue. It claimed it could not address the non-financial issues, such as leave and entitlements, and that other questions were national and needed to be dealt with in court. Workers vowed to continue their strike until demands are met.

Samagra Shiksha is a central government scheme in which government school children—from nursery until grade 12—are helped to bridge gaps in their studies.

## Tamil Nadu power-loom workers strike for pay rise

Around 2,000 power-loom workers at Aandipatti in Theni district, Tamil Nadu, walked out on indefinite strike on January 1 after their wage contract expired on December 31. The workers want their wages lifted by

50 percent, and a 20 percent yearly bonus. Workers said they could no longer live on the “miserly” wage the owners signed in 2022.

### **Bangladeshi postgraduate trainee doctors protest again**

Hundreds of Bangladeshi postgraduate trainee doctors resumed industrial action on December 29 to demand an increase in their monthly stipend. They blocked the Shahbagh intersection in Dhaka as they did in their protest on December 24.

The doctors want their current 25,000-taka stipend increased to 50,000 taka (\$US411). The protests followed a seven-hour national work abstention campaign by about 3,000 trainee doctors on December 22.

After negotiations with authorities the stipend was fixed at 35,000 taka with the increase to take effect from July this year. The protesters, however, demanded it be implemented from January and insisted on meeting with the Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus on January 6 to discuss the issue.

### **Bangladeshi water transport workers end strike over murder of seven colleagues**

On December 29, the Water Transport Workers’ Federation (WTF) called off their strike commenced two days earlier, which was initiated to demand justice for the murder of seven sailors on a lighter ship, the MV Al-Bakhera, in Chandpur on December 23. Workers were also demanding compensation for the deceased workers families.

The strike paralysed cargo transportation across the country, leaving tonnes of goods stranded at ports and waterways. The loading and unloading of goods at the ports of Chattogram, Mongla, Payra and Barishal were suspended.

WTF were demanding “a proper” investigation into the murders, uncovering the cause, arrests of the culprits, overall security on the waterways and compensation of 2 million taka (\$US16,740) for each of the deceased workers’ families.

WTFW said the strike was suspended following productive discussions between labour leaders and government officials, along with assurances from the government and a request from the Directorate General of Shipping. Details of the deal were not made public.

### **Western Australia: Weatherford offshore LNG platform workers continue industrial action**

Australian Workers Union (AWU) members employed by drilling and completion services company Weatherford at several offshore oil and gas platforms in Western Australia are maintaining industrial action begun on December 19. Industrial action includes seven different work bans and rolling one-hour stoppages.

The 36 workers, represented by the Offshore Alliance (OA) (comprising the AWU and Maritime Union of Australia), are opposed to the company’s proposed enterprise agreement. OA claims Weatherford’s “baseline” agreement was below industry standards and if accepted would lock workers into base salaries of only \$60,000 a year with reduced conditions well below industry standards.

Weatherford is an American multinational oilfield drilling and completion services company operating in 75 countries across oil and natural gas producing regions.

### **Sodexo catering workers on offshore LNG processing platforms in Western Australia resume industrial action**

Over 50 workers employed on five offshore LNG processing platforms by catering services company Sodexo have resumed industrial action to demand an improved pay offer in Sodexo’s proposed enterprise agreement. Members of the Australian Workers Union voted unanimously on November 20 for industrial action after twice rejecting the company’s proposed agreement.

On November 29, AWU members imposed six work bans for two weeks that included not cooking meat meals, picking up or delivering laundry, limiting beverage services and several administrative bans. Platforms affected were Prelude, Stag, Montara, Equinox and Endurance.

The workers’ bargaining unit Offshore Alliance (OA) claimed Sodexo wanted to freeze wages at the Prelude facility for four years and proposed varying pay rates on other facilities that would leave some workers worse off compared to the consumer price index (CPI) rate.

### **New South Wales ambulance control centre managers impose bans over unpaid overtime**

New South Wales Ambulance (NSWA) control centre Operations Managers put in place work bans on December 20 after negotiations for a new work agreement with the state Labor government failed to resolve a main issue around excessive hours. Ambulance Division Health Services Union (ADHSU) members are demanding to be paid overtime for excessive hours worked in the hope that NSW Ambulance will resolve the issue by reducing their workload.

Work bans put in place by the managers include work-to-rule, i.e., work no more than 38 hours a week, no on-call and no weekend work without payment; only wearing “blues” [uniform] to work with ADHSU shield attached; and not circumventing other workers’ industrial action. In a separate dispute, ADHSU Control Centre Officers currently have in place work bans after negotiations with the government for improved conditions in their award reached deadlock.

### **New Zealand border staff begin limited strike action**

New Zealand Immigration Border Operations staff, who process travellers at the country’s four international airports, started strike action last Tuesday after receiving a zero percent pay offer. They join 3,000 workers from the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) also with the same offer.

The Public Service Association (PSA) began strike action at MBIE on December 17. As Immigration Border Operations staff are essential workers, the union had to give longer notice. The PSA said in a statement that members will not undertake unpaid essential or non-essential work and will take rest and meal breaks together at specific times. The industrial action is due to last until January 20.

These are the latest group of workers to be offered a zero percent pay increase, following New Zealand Defence Force civilian staff being offered the same and who are also taking the same action.

PSA acting National Secretary Fleur Fitzsimons said the border staff are “critical workers who have been totally disrespected by this Government, which is determined to run down the public service at every step regardless of the consequences.” The union, however, is seeking to prevent any serious unified fight to defend jobs and conditions.

The far-right National Party-led government before Christmas introduced into parliament new anti-strike laws which will potentially see workers lose pay for such “work to rule” industrial action.



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