

British doctors launch new strike ahead of general elections in the UK



People hold British Medical Association (BMA)-branded placards calling for better pay as they stand on a picket line outside St. Thomas' Hospital in central London during a strike by junior

doctors on June 27, 2024, a week before the July 4 general election. (Photo by AFP)

London, June 28 (RHC)--Hospital doctors in England have launched a new strike ahead of general elections expected to oust the failed Tory government. The five-day strike over pay and conditions started on Thursday and would end two days before the July 4th general elections.

Hospital staff "have been in dispute with the government for 20 months... and we're yet to be provided a credible offer," one striking junior doctor working at a hospital in London told media.

The United Kingdom has seen the biggest rise in "absolute poverty" in 30 years.

"Doctors are tired. We're frustrated but we're ultimately scared... We've seen the quality of care in this country decline," Shivram Sharma said. "We need to keep doctors here and stop them from leaving because of the poor conditions and poor pay," he said on a picket line out Saint Thomas' Hospital in central London.

"Until we deal with that, the waiting list will continue to go up (and) wards will continue to remain understaffed," he added. The striking doctors said they would call off the strike if Conservative Prime Minister Rishi Sunak came to the table with a credible commitment to increase their pay.

The ruling Conservative government, which has been in power running the UK since 2010, claims the doctors' pay raise is unaffordable because of stretched public finances.

British workers from all sectors across the economy, from teachers to train drivers -- junior doctors, specialists, and consultants included -- staged multiple walkouts in the post-COVID era due to rising inflation unprecedented in four decades resulting in a dire cost-of-living crisis impoverishing the general population.

However, the Conservative government insists the workers' strikes are politically motivated. Deputy chair of the British Medical Association's Junior Doctor Committee Sumi Manirajan said wages had not kept up with inflation over the last 15 years and doctors have to pay thousands out of pocket for indemnity fees, courses and exams.

"Rishi Sunak has made a commitment to spend £2.5 billion on a national (military or civic) service. It would cost £1 billion to pay the doctors," she said. "So the money is there. It's a political choice on where they spend it."

Instead of raising doctors' salaries, Sunak's government chose to spend "three billion pounds fighting us," she pointed out.

The new strike runs until Tuesday, July 2nd, two days before a general election which the main opposition Labour Party is expected to win.

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