# Concerns rise over rising violence against UK prison staff after boiling water attack



Concerns have escalated surrounding the safety of prison staff following troubling incidents of violence within the UK's correctional facilities, most recently highlighted by an attack at HMP Belmarsh involving Southport triple killer Axel Rudakubana. The 18-year-old allegedly threw boiling water at a guard, an incident that has reignited debate over the measures necessary to protect frontline staff. Former prison governor, Professor Ian Acheson, cautioned that unless immediate changes are made to enhance protections, a prison officer could be murdered.

Rudakubana, who is serving a remarkable 52-year sentence for the brutal murders of three young girls during a dance class last year, reportedly managed to boil water in his cell and hurl it through a hatch. The guard, who suffered minor injuries, was treated at Queen Elizabeth Hospital and is expected to return to work next week. This incident is not an isolated occurrence; just weeks prior, Hashem Abedi, jailed for his involvement in the 2017 Manchester Arena bombing, assaulted three guards at HMP Frankland, using cooking oil and homemade weapons, leaving some officers with life-threatening injuries.

The climate of violence appears to be intensifying in UK prisons. Home Office figures indicate that serious assaults on prison officers rose by 19% in just one year, a statistic that underscores the growing concern regarding staff safety. Acheson expressed alarm over the "appeasement" of dangerous inmates. He argued that the balance of rights in prisons has become overwhelmingly tilted in favour of inmates, compromising the safety of those tasked with their supervision. He emphasised, “A prisoner having a kettle is not a human right, especially when it could be used as a weapon by somebody who is dangerous.”

The nature of Rudakubana's crime necessitated a placement within a healthcare unit, a decision likely taken due to the high risk of self-harm associated with his life sentence. However, Acheson argued that such considerations should not override the potential dangers posed by these individuals to staff members. He argued for a reassessment of what constitutes acceptable living conditions for inmates, particularly those known to exhibit extreme violent behaviour.

A representative from the Ministry of Justice has stated that violence in prisons will not be tolerated and that the harshest forms of punishment will be pursued for such acts. Nonetheless, critics like Acheson have dismissed this assurance as “delusional, hopeless boiler plate rubbish,” contending that violence is not just tolerated but effectively normalised within the prison system. He noted that while overcrowding is often cited as a cause for increased violence, many high-security facilities currently do not face overcrowding issues.

These recent violent incidents also draw attention to the management of extremist prisoners in facilities like Belmarsh, known for housing high-level security threats. Abedi’s attack in April 2022, which involved using hot cooking oil as a weapon against prison officers, occurred in a specialised segregation unit where inmates are provided with cooking facilities deemed necessary for their health. Critics argue that allowing such access to dangerous prisoners represents a significant flaw in prison policy, one that could potentially jeopardise the safety of both staff and other inmates.

As the justice system grapples with these escalating concerns, the call for stronger measures to protect prison staff remains urgent. Acheson's warning is clear: failure to act decisively could lead to a tragic loss of life amongst those who serve on the frontlines of prison management. The need for a reassessment of prison policies that prioritise the safety of staff cannot be overstated in light of the increasing frequency and severity of such assaults.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14699353/prison-guard-killed-Southport-murderer-Axel-Rudakubana-boiling-water-jail-officer.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://apnews.com/article/0ff04f610c85a174938b5978110ab3a4> - In April 2025, Hashem Abedi, convicted for aiding the 2017 Manchester Arena bombing, attacked three prison officers at HMP Frankland in northeast England. He threw hot cooking oil over them and stabbed them with homemade weapons. Two male officers sustained life-threatening injuries, while a female officer was treated and released from the hospital. The incident occurred in a specialized separation center within the prison, where extremist inmates have access to cooking facilities. Authorities, including counterterrorism officials, are investigating the unprovoked assault, and the Prison Officers Association criticized the policy allowing dangerous inmates access to potential weapons. Justice Secretary Shabana Mahmood has promised the harshest punishment for such attacks. ([apnews.com](https://apnews.com/article/0ff04f610c85a174938b5978110ab3a4?utm_source=openai))
3. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-tyne-66521308> - In April 2022, Alan Lawrence, a prisoner at HMP Northumberland, was sentenced to an additional two years in prison for throwing boiling water in the face of a fellow inmate. The victim suffered burns to 7% of his body. Lawrence, who was serving a sentence for robbery, claimed the attack was 'karma' for the victim allegedly mugging an elderly woman 15 years prior. The court heard that Lawrence had planned to barricade himself in a cell with the victim and bite his fingers off. He also faced a concurrent one-month sentence for racially abusing a black prison guard while in the segregation unit. ([bbc.com](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-tyne-66521308?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/jan/13/manchester-arena-terrorist-parsons-green-bomber-charged-prison-attack-hashem-abedi-ahmed-hassan> - In January 2021, three convicted terrorists—Hashem Abedi, Ahmed Hassan, and Muhammed Saeed—were charged with assaulting a prison officer at HMP Belmarsh. The incident occurred on 11 May 2020, when the three men allegedly assaulted a prison officer, leading to charges of actual bodily harm. Abedi, convicted for his role in the Manchester Arena bombing, and Hassan, convicted for the Parsons Green tube bombing, were among those charged. The Metropolitan Police confirmed the charges and stated that the men would appear in court in April 2021. ([theguardian.com](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/jan/13/manchester-arena-terrorist-parsons-green-bomber-charged-prison-attack-hashem-abedi-ahmed-hassan?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-60437894> - In February 2022, three convicted terrorists—Hashem Abedi, Ahmed Hassan, and Muhammed Saeed—were found guilty of assaulting a prison officer at HMP Belmarsh. The attack occurred in May 2020, when the three men assaulted a prison officer in the high-security unit. Abedi was sentenced to an additional three years and 10 months, while Hassan and Saeed received three-year sentences, all to run consecutively to their existing terms. The court highlighted the severity of the attack and the disrespect shown for society and its rules. ([bbc.com](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-60437894?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2022/02/22/brother-manchester-arena-bomber-hashem-abedi-found-guilty-attacking/> - In February 2022, Hashem Abedi, the brother of the Manchester Arena bomber, was found guilty of leading a gang that attacked a prison officer at HMP Belmarsh. The attack, which took place in May 2020, involved Abedi, Ahmed Hassan, and Muhammed Saeed assaulting the officer, leaving him with significant injuries. The court described the assault as 'animalistic' and highlighted the severity of the attack. Abedi received an additional sentence of three years and 10 months, while Hassan and Saeed were each sentenced to three years, all to run consecutively to their existing terms. ([telegraph.co.uk](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2022/02/22/brother-manchester-arena-bomber-hashem-abedi-found-guilty-attacking/?utm_source=openai))
7. <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/manchester-bombing-uk-government-was-complicit-libyan-torture-court-heard> - In a court hearing, it was alleged that the UK government was complicit in the torture of Hashem Abedi in Libya. Evidence presented included reports of physical and psychological injuries sustained by Abedi, with a British consular official reportedly photographing his injuries during a visit to Tripoli. Abedi's lawyer stated that the British government was aware of the torture early on and did nothing to try and stop it. The allegations raised serious questions about the UK's involvement and response to the treatment of Abedi while in Libyan custody. ([middleeasteye.net](https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/manchester-bombing-uk-government-was-complicit-libyan-torture-court-heard?utm_source=openai))