# Sir Lindsay Hoyle lashes out at government for sidelining Parliament amid prison crisis



Sir Lindsay Hoyle, Speaker of the House of Commons, recently unleashed a series of vociferous rebukes aimed at the government, which he perceives as continually neglecting the parliamentary process. His frustration boiled over thrice in a single session, drawing humorous yet serious comparisons to Iceland's dormant Mt Thrihnukagigur—an apt metaphor for a government that has seemingly chosen to bypass parliamentary decorum for direct media engagement.

The catalyst for Hoyle’s fiery oration was Justice Secretary Shabana Mahmood’s failure to address the Commons regarding a pressing issue: the acute shortage of prison spaces. Instead of presenting this information herself, Mahmood opted for a press conference. This decision, compounded by recent similar occurrences involving other ministers, has left Hoyle exasperated. He has observed a trend where significant policy announcements are made to the press rather than within the Commons, undermining the role of Parliament.

The Home Secretary's recent briefings on immigration policy, as well as the Trade Secretary's announcements about international trade agreements, illustrate a growing pattern of ministers opting for media channels over parliamentary accountability. Mahmood’s absence came at a time when the prison system is confronting an unprecedented crisis. The Government’s approach, according to many critics, reflects not just negligence but a disregard for parliamentary processes that ought to uphold transparency and foster informed debate.

Mahmood’s recent announcement indicated that due to severe overcrowding—prompting her to declare a new policy where many offenders breaching the terms of their release will face reduced prison recall times—has raised significant concerns. By cutting the recall period for certain offenders to just 28 days, the initiative is intended to free up approximately 1,400 prison spaces. While it aims to alleviate immediate capacity issues, it has also drawn sharp criticism, especially as victims of serious crimes may find their attackers released faster than before. This is particularly concerning in cases of domestic violence and sexual offences—areas in which the government has long championed tougher measures.

The precarious state of the prison system in England and Wales is stark. Reports indicate that the number of prisoners recalled to custody has surged from around 100 in the early 1990s to approximately 13,600 in 2024, driven largely by non-compliance with probation conditions. The Ministry of Justice recently warned that without sweeping reforms, prisons could reach full capacity within just six months, a situation compounded by a general historical trend of rising incarceration rates, which have nearly doubled in the past three decades.

In response to the crisis, Mahmood announced an investment of £4.7 billion to construct new prisons and consider alternative sentencing reforms, such as early release for good behaviour. However, merely building more prisons is unlikely to resolve the fundamental issues. Mahmood highlighted that the strategy also seeks to broaden the definition of acceptable punishments to include house arrest and electronic monitoring, with the aim of targeting offenders less suited for prison time.

Furthermore, Mahmood has called on major tech firms to assist in developing advanced surveillance systems as part of a broader initiative to monitor offenders outside of prison, marking a significant shift in penal policy. This concept, resembling a "prison outside prison," involves implementing technology that supports rehabilitation while maintaining public safety. While some experts have welcomed this move, citing its potential to address overcrowding, the policy raises concerns about privacy and the efficacy of technology in enforcing compliance, given the government’s history with IT procurement mishaps.

As discussions of these reforms proceed, Sir Lindsay Hoyle's eruptions not only underscore the rising tensions within Parliament but also reflect the urgency of addressing not just the immediate logistical issues in the penal system but the ethical implications of policies that may inadvertently jeopardise women's safety by fostering swifter releases for violent offenders. His passionate outcries reveal the larger stakes at play—beyond mere procedural correctness, they speak to the integrity of a justice system that must balance accountability with compassion.

In the backdrop of this tumult lies a Parliament grappling with its role in a rapidly changing societal landscape, facing mounting pressures to adapt while ensuring that the foundational principles of justice and due process remain intact.

### Reference Map

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

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-14717721/QUENTIN-LETTS-Volcanic-Sir-Lindsays-eruptions-left-hapless-minister-buried-ash.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/c45c1ffc-a5e9-4607-a572-2ba72a265c9e> - In response to severe prison overcrowding in England and Wales, Justice Secretary Shabana Mahmood announced a policy change reducing the length of prison 'recall' for offenders who breach release conditions. Under the new measure, many individuals serving sentences of one to four years will be returned to prison for only 28 days if recalled, rather than serving out the remainder of their sentence. Exceptions will be made for those committing serious offences. The Ministry of Justice warns that without such reforms, prisons could reach full capacity within six months. The total number of recalled prisoners has dramatically increased from around 100 in 1993 to 13,600 in 2024, with more than half due to non-compliance, such as not contacting probation services. The new policy is expected to free up approximately 1,400 prison places. Additionally, the government will invest £4.7bn to build three new prisons and is considering broader sentencing reforms, including allowing early release for good behavior. These changes are intended to address what Mahmood calls a 'shameful' capacity crisis without compromising public safety. An independent review led by former Justice Secretary David Gauke is also underway to propose long-term sentencing reforms.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/438f421c-ca4e-4201-b450-33bbd2e0c5aa> - UK Justice Secretary Shabana Mahmood has called on major technology firms like Microsoft, Amazon Web Services, and Google to help implement advanced surveillance systems to monitor criminals outside of prison, under a plan described as creating a 'prison outside prison.' This initiative aims to address overcrowding in prisons and reduce incarceration costs. The plan aligns with an anticipated policy shift in the new Labour government under Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer, supported by a forthcoming review from former Conservative justice secretary David Gauke advocating for reduced sentences and fewer incarcerations. Mahmood emphasized the use of artificial intelligence, sophisticated tagging technologies, drug and alcohol monitoring tags, and biometric 'gait recognition' systems to track and rehabilitate offenders in the community. While acknowledging past failures in public sector technology rollouts, Mahmood expressed determination to avoid repeating past mistakes. Experts like former Bar Council chair Sam Townend KC see potential in tech-based solutions but caution that these efforts require rigorous management due to the Ministry of Justice’s poor track record in IT procurement. The move reflects a broader transformation in penal policy, aiming to balance public confidence, rehabilitation, and efficient resource use.
4. <https://www.ft.com/content/1b0828e2-5280-484a-ae58-4b591dbefcc1> - The UK Justice Secretary, Shabana Mahmood, has warned that building new prisons alone will not solve the overcrowding crisis. Despite plans to invest billions in constructing four new prisons, the prison population is projected to increase faster than new facilities can be built. Mahmood emphasized the need for alternative punishments outside of prison, such as house arrest, to manage the growing number of offenders. A review led by former Tory Justice Secretary David Gauke will propose changes to sentencing, focusing on alternatives for less serious crimes while ensuring prison spaces for dangerous offenders. The Ministry of Justice released a 10-year prison strategy, committing £2.3 billion over the next two years to create 6,400 extra jail spaces. The government aims to add 14,000 new spaces by 2031 by refurbishing and expanding existing facilities. Despite these efforts, prisons are near capacity, and the government is releasing 5,000 prisoners early to manage the current crisis. Projections indicate that over 100,000 prisoners could be held by 2029. Mahmood criticized the previous administration for failing to meet its promise of creating 20,000 additional prison spaces. The Prison Reform Trust highlighted the importance of the sentencing review for achieving a more sustainable and humane penal system.
5. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-use-police-stations-prisons-under-emergency-measure-2025-03-18/> - The British government has announced the reactivation of 'Operation Safeguard,' an emergency measure that allows prisoners to be held in police cells due to overcrowding in jails. This measure was previously employed from February 2023 to October of the previous year. According to official data, the prison population in England and Wales has doubled over the past 30 years, leading to severe overcrowding. Justice minister Shabana Mahmood informed parliament that the prison system is operating at over 99% capacity, with January witnessing the highest average monthly growth in prison population in nearly two years. The World Prison Brief database indicates that England and Wales have imprisonment rates of 141 detainees per 100,000 population, higher than major European countries. The justice systems in Scotland and Northern Ireland are managed separately.
6. <https://apnews.com/article/406d7a3e1cb53aa110297f10466dbfa2> - A debate on a Gaza cease-fire in the UK Parliament led to fear for lawmakers' safety and calls for House of Commons Speaker Lindsay Hoyle's resignation. The debate resulted in Labour, the largest opposition party, passing a nonbinding motion for an 'immediate humanitarian' cease-fire without opposition from the Conservative and SNP parties, who refrained from voting. The chaos has been attributed to the handling of the debate, with over 50 lawmakers submitting letters of no confidence in Hoyle. The issue is fueled by rising tensions over the Israel-Hamas conflict, with demonstrations in support of Palestine and increased antisemitic incidents reported. The debate fell apart when Hoyle attempted to allow separate votes on three motions but faced resistance when the government and SNP withdrew their proposals. Hoyle apologized, stressing his intention to protect lawmakers amidst threats. Commons Leader Penny Mordaunt criticized Labour for the disarray, while the Institute for Government condemned all parties for reducing an important debate to chaos.
7. <https://time.com/6748899/uk-house-of-commons-speaker-lindsay-hoyle-gaza-ceasefire/> - British lawmakers are calling for Speaker Sir Lindsay Hoyle to resign following a controversial Gaza ceasefire debate in the U.K. House of Commons. Hoyle, accused of breaching parliamentary procedure, allowed a vote on Labour's amendment to a ceasefire proposal presented by the Scottish National Party (SNP). This move broke the convention that government can only amend opposition motions. In response, the SNP and Conservative MPs staged a walkout. Though Hoyle justified his decision citing concerns for MPs' safety amid the Israel-Hamas conflict, his decision led to Labour's amendment passing without a vote, sidelining the original SNP motion. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and Home Secretary James Cleverly commented on the situation, with Sunak expressing concern and Cleverly defending Hoyle's record. Hoyle apologized for his decision's unintended consequences and took responsibility for the actions taken.