

# NATIONAL/INTERNATIONAL

## Allies back Starmer as Mandelson, Epstein leave UK leader fighting for his job

**LONDON, APR 19:** Senior Cabinet ministers on Sunday rallied around UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer, whose leadership is teetering over his decision to give Britain's most important diplomatic job to Peter Mandelson, a scandal-tarnished politician and friend of Jeffrey Epstein.

Starmer will face restive lawmakers in Parliament on Monday to fight for his job after the explosive revelation that Mandelson was appointed ambassador to the United States despite failing security checks.

Starmer says he's "furious" that he wasn't told at the time, in January 2025, that an intensive vetting process had recommended Mandelson not be given security clearance. The Foreign Office, which oversees diplomatic appointments, cleared him anyway.

Deputy Prime Minister David Lammy said that if Starmer had known, "he would never, ever have appointed him ambassador."



Technology Secretary Liz Kendall told Sky News on Sunday that Starmer "is a man of integrity and there is no way he would have proceeded" with Mandelson's appointment had he known.

The top civil servant in the Foreign Office, Olly Robbins, was forced to resign on Thursday – though allies say he was just doing his job and is being made a scapegoat. Robbins is expected to give his own version of events to the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee on Tuesday.

Simon McDonald, who was the top civil servant in the Foreign Office until 2020, said

Robbins had been "thrown under the bus." He told the BBC that vetting information was highly sensitive and "would never be shared" with the prime minister or his staff.

All the main opposition parties have called on Starmer to resign. Right-of-centre Conservative Party leader Kemi Badenoch said the prime minister's position is "untenable." Ed Davey, leader of the opposition Liberal Democrats, said Sunday that the government is "in perpetual crisis, and I don't think they can get out of that unless Keir Starmer moves aside."

Starmer's Labour Party

holds a large parliamentary majority, so power to topple him lies with his own lawmakers, who are already glum about the party's dire poll ratings.

Starmer defused a potential crisis in February, when some Labour lawmakers called for him to resign over the Mandelson appointment. But he could face a leadership challenge after local and regional elections on May 7, in which Labour is expected to do badly.

Some Labour lawmakers think it would be damaging to change leaders at a time of global instability, with wars in Ukraine and the Middle East, and with three years until a national election must be called.

Others despair at the prime minister's repeated missteps since he led Labour to a landslide election victory in July 2024. Starmer has struggled to deliver promised economic growth, repair tattered public services and ease the cost of living, and has been forced into repeated policy U-turns.

## Chhattisgarh Coal Levy Scam: Rs 4 Crore Assets Of Suspended IAS Officer Attached

**RAIPUR, APR 19:** The Economic Offences Wing (EOW) has attached properties of Rs 4 crore belonging to suspended IAS officer Sameer Vishnoi, an accused in a coal levy scam, for allegedly amassing assets beyond his known sources of income, officials said.

The EOW had registered a disproportionate assets case against Vishnoi in July 2024, an official release said on Saturday.

During the investigation, the agency identified nine immovable properties, valued at around Rs 4 crore, allegedly acquired through illicit means in the names of Vishnoi's family members and associated firms, it said.

"An application seeking attachment of these properties was filed before the Special Court under the Prevention of Corruption Act in Raipur. Following a hearing on April 17, the court ordered attachment of all such properties," the statement said.

Accordingly, the Anti-Cor-



ruption Bureau/Economic Offences Wing attached the properties. The attached properties cannot be sold or transferred, it said.

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) had earlier provisionally attached five immovable properties linked to Vishnoi in connection with the coal levy scam, it added.

Proceedings are also underway in cases involving other public servants, in-

cluding action taken in September last year against properties linked to Saumya Chaurasia, who was deputy secretary in the chief minister's office during the Congress government, the statement said.

Vishnoi, a 2009-batch Indian Administrative Service officer, was first arrested in 2022 by the ED in connection with the alleged coal levy scam. He was among

several accused who were granted bail last year by the Supreme Court.

The case refers to an alleged Rs 540 crore racket between July 2020 and June 2022, when an illegal levy of Rs 25 per tonne was being extorted by a cartel involving senior bureaucrats, businessmen, politicians and middlemen for every tonne of coal transported in the state. (Agencies)

## Defeat of bill on women's quota shows BJP doesn't represent people's will: Akhilesh

**LUCKNOW, APR 19:** Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav on Sunday said the BJP-led NDA has no right to remain in power at the Centre because its failure to get a Constitution amendment bill passed in the Lok Sabha to tweak the women's quota law has shown that it didn't represent the will of the people.

"The opposition, in real terms, represents people's will," the former Uttar Pradesh chief minister said.

Speaking at the party headquarters here, Yadav also said that the women's reservation law can't be discussed until the 16th Census is complete.

"The failure of the government to pass the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill in the Lok Sabha means it does not represent the will of the people. Therefore, it has no right to remain in power. The opposition, in real terms, represents people's will," he said.

Criticising the proposed women's reservation framework, Yadav said, "If the base itself is flawed, how can the outcome be



correct? If the count is wrong, how can the reservation be right?" According to Yadav, relying on outdated population data will undermine the foundation of the reservation policy.

"If 2011 Census figures are used, the very ground for women's reservation will become incorrect. Our message to the government was that until a fresh census is conducted, women's reservation should not be discussed," said Yadav, whose Samajwadi Party, along with other opposition outfits,

voted against the bill in the Lok Sabha.

The Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill to implement 33 per cent reservation for women in legislatures in 2029 and increase the number of Lok Sabha seats to 816 was defeated in the Lower House on Friday.

The bill proposed to increase the number of Lok Sabha seats to 816 from the current 543 to "operationalise" the women's reservation law before the 2029 parliamentary polls, following a delimitation exercise based on the 2011

Census.

Alleging that the BJP's politics is based on division, Yadav said, "First, it creates mistrust among people, then it splits them into groups and pits them against each other, and finally, it uses fear to consolidate support." "This is the 'CMF' formula – create mistrust and fear – a strategy now exposed before the public, and its effectiveness is declining," Yadav said. He also accused the BJP of attempting to divide women voters.

"It is trying to create divisions among women, but women today are aware, and they will defeat such politics while fighting issues like inflation, health exploitation and social pressures," he said.

Yadav also raised concerns over representation, saying, "It must be ensured that Dalit, backward, tribal and women from the minority communities get representative justice. But without updated census data, such inclusion cannot be guaranteed." He also said that mere reservation without preparation would lead to tokenism.

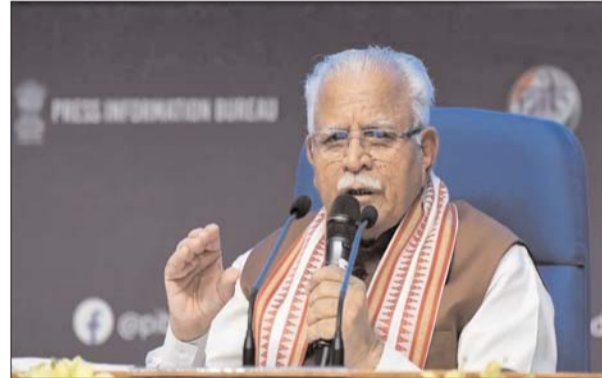
## Union Ministers Slam Oppn Over Defeat Of Women's Quota Bill, Accuse Them Of Prioritising Politics

**CHANDIGARH, APR 19:** Union Ministers Manohar Lal Khattar and Sanjay Seth slammed the opposition and its allies over the women's quota bill defeat, accusing them of betraying women and prioritising politics over a crucial issue.

A Constitution Amendment Bill seeking to increase the number of Lok Sabha seats and implement 33 per cent reservation for women in legislatures from 2029 under Nari Shakti Vandhan Adhiniyan was defeated in the Lower House on Friday. While 298 members voted in support of the bill in the Lok Sabha, 230 MPs voted against it. Out of 528 members who voted, the bill required 352 votes for a two-thirds majority.

Speaking to reporters in Punjab's Jalandhar, Khattar lashed out at the opposition parties, blaming them for causing "injustice" to women in the Lok Sabha after the Constitution amendment bill was defeated.

Khattar said there is a big contribution of women in every field, be it in farming, science, industry, medicine, engineering, teaching and sports.



He said that the BJP always wanted that in democracy, women should also have a right in the political space. He accused the Congress of stepping back for some reason or another and creating bottlenecks over this issue.

Referring to the defeat of the Constitution Amendment Bill, Khattar said the opposition played a 'ghimona khel' (disgusting game) and did not allow the bill to pass in the Lok Sabha.

He said a two-thirds majority is required for passing a Constitution Amendment Bill.

"We had thought that all should show confidence towards women. But they (opposition) did 'vishwas ghat' not only with our trust but also with women, which is

condemnable," said Khattar. He asserted that women will never forget it, and the opposition will face the consequences.

Uttar Pradesh Minister Baby Rani Maurya, who was accompanying Khattar, too hit out at the Congress and its allies, including the TMC, DMK and the Samajwadi Party, over the defeat of the Constitutional Amendment Bill in Lok Sabha, saying they "insulted" women.

"Women can tolerate anything but not their insult," Maurya said. The Opposition will face the anger of women in the upcoming elections, she added.

Union Minister Sanjay Seth said that INDI Alliance has committed a grave sin, and they should be prepared to face the consequences. (Agencies)

The country is angry, and people will teach them a lesson for this, Seth said. He said that the Nari Shakti Vandhan Adhiniyan is not merely a piece of legislation; it is a powerful instrument designed to secure the rightful entitlements of India's female population – comprising half the nation's populace.

"It is unfortunate that the Congress and other opposition parties chose to prioritise politics over this critical issue, whereas they should have unitedly extended their support for the empowerment of the nation's women," he said.

Accompanied by former Haryana Minister and senior BJP leader Kiran Choudhry, the Union Minister said the opposition's stance clearly demonstrates that they are not proponents of the genuine participation of women. "We wish to assure the women of this nation that our commitment to upholding their rights and dignity remains unwavering.

We will continue to strive relentlessly to ensure that they receive equal opportunities and respect in every sphere of life," Seth said. (Agencies)

## Frequent Mouthwash Use May Increase Hypertension Risk: Experts

**EXETER (UK), APR 19:** Social media videos are claiming that mouthwash can raise the risk of high blood pressure and potentially damage heart health.

According to some of these videos, this is caused by mouthwash wiping out "good" oral bacteria that are important for the cardiovascular system. While it's a striking message, don't throw your mouthwash away just yet. The reality is far more complex.

Our mouths contain a wide variety of bacteria. Together, these bacteria form a balanced and diverse microbiome which helps prevent the overgrowth of other bacteria linked to disease, supports normal metabolic functions and contributes to both good oral and overall health.

One of the important roles these oral bacteria have is converting the nitrate in our food (typically from sources such as leafy greens) into nitrite. When we swallow nitrite, the body turns it into nitric oxide.

This happens via the nitrate-nitrite-nitric oxide pathway, also called the enterosalivary pathway. It's one example of how bacteria contribute to keeping the body healthy.

Nitric oxide plays an essential part in regulating blood pressure and supporting brain and muscle function.

"healthy" bacteria the ones that produce nitric oxide.

### Mouthwash and heart health link

Several small studies have actually found that giving people mouthwash can change the balance of bacteria in the mouth. This may reduce the bacteria's ability to turn nitrate from vegetables into nitrite, which the body needs to make nitric oxide.

One study of 19 healthy volunteers found that the adults who used chlorhexidine mouthwash for seven days saw a small increase in blood pressure and reduced levels of nitrite.

An intervention study also reported that rinsing with 0.12% chlorhexidine gluconate mouthwash twice daily for one week significantly increased blood pressure in 27 healthy adults.

In another trial of 15 adults who already had high blood pressure, three days of chlorhexidine use further increased blood pressure.

The key detail that may be missed in some of these online social media videos is the type of mouthwash used in these studies.

Many of the studies which have found a link between mouthwash use and blood pressure gave participants chlorhexidine.

This is a strong, over-the-counter antiseptic mouthwash only recommended for short-term use in people with gum disease or after dental procedures



where its antimicrobial effects are beneficial.

Chlorhexidine disrupts oral bacteria to help with infection control and including the bacteria that convert nitrate into nitrite.

This makes it an ideal mouthwash to use for researchers wanting to study the nitrate-nitrite-nitric oxide pathway. However, it also means the findings may not reflect what happens with milder, everyday mouthwashes.

A trial with 12 healthy adults investigated the effect of three different mouthwashes (and gargling water, which acted as a control) on oral bacteria.

After drinking a nitrate-rich juice, researchers measured how much nitrate was converted to nitrite by oral bacte-

ria. Water and the mild mouthwash (which didn't contain harsh ingredients such as chlorhexidine) caused a typical response, where nitrate was converted into nitrite.

But the cetylpyridinium chloride mouthwash (which also has strong, anti-bacterial effects) partially blocked the conversion of nitrate to nitrite. The strongest chlorhexidine mouthwash almost completely stopped this process.

This is consistent with their stronger antibacterial effects. The stronger types of mouthwash were also linked to higher systolic blood pressure.

Alcohol (ethanol) is another common ingredient in many mouthwashes, although formulations usually also include other active ingredients such as essential oils. This makes it difficult to

isolate the specific effects of alcohol.

As an antimicrobial, alcohol may influence the oral microbiome. Some studies have even suggested a possible association between mouthwashes containing alcohol and increased oral cancer risk.

However, there are currently no studies that have specifically examined the effects of ethanol-only mouth rinses on the oral microbiome or cardiovascular health.

Overall, the body of evidence suggests that a mild, over-the-counter mouthwash, like the kind most people buy at stores, may be less likely to significantly interfere with nitrate-to-nitrite conversion or affect blood pressure.

In a long-term study of 354 adults, better routine oral hygiene, such as brushing and flossing, was linked to a lower risk of cardiovascular death over nearly 19 years. Regular mouthwash use did not appear to have any influence on heart health outcomes.

This was true for milder mouthwashes containing fluoride and alcohol, as well as stronger, anti-bacterial mouthwashes such as chlorhexidine and cetylpyridinium chloride.

**The type of mouthwash matters**

Together, these studies suggest that some types of mouthwash (such as chlorhexidine) disrupt beneficial oral bacteria and the nitrate-nitrite-nitric oxide pathway when used long-term.

But more research needs to be done

to truly understand the long-term effects of other types of mouthwash on cardiovascular health – including mild everyday mouthwash brands and those containing alcohol.

Mouthwash comes in different types for different purposes, so it's important to check the active ingredient on the back of the packaging. Alcohol-free and milder mouthwashes appear to have less effect on the heart-healthy bacteria than stronger types.

However, be aware to check the ingredients as even alcohol-free options can contain antibacterial agents such as cetylpyridinium chloride. As such, it's best to choose one that fits your needs and use it in moderation. Strong mouthwashes containing chlorhexidine are best reserved for helping gum disease or oral infections.

It's also worth noting that oral health and untreated infections can also contribute to heart disease more broadly. For example, a systematic review of 82 studies concluded that chronic oral disease and tooth loss were associated with the risk of heart problems.

This is why maintaining a healthy balance of mouth bacteria matters beyond your teeth.

Take care of your oral and overall health by keeping up with brushing, flossing, visiting your dentist and choosing a mouthwash that works for you. (agencies) (The Conversation)