

IN THE EASTERN CARIBBEAN SUPREME COURT

SAINT CHRISTOPHER & NEVIS

SAINT CHRISTOPHER CIRCUIT

IN THE HIGH COURT OF JUSTICE

CASE SKBHCR 2024/0018

REX

V

SHAKEIM CRANSTON

APPEARANCES

Ms Greatess Gordon Hazel, Ast.DPP, and Mr Leslie Roberts, Senior Crown Counsel, for the Crown.

Mr Hesketh Benjamin for the defendant, assisted by Mr Craig Tuckett.

2025: DECEMBER 15

SENTENCE

For murder, as execution by shooting through head at hospital

- 1 **Morley J:** Following trial during 18.09-10.10.25, Shakeim Cranston aka 'Shaq' and 'Little Nuzzle', aged 31 (dob 21.01.94) was convicted unanimously by jury of the murder on 20.06.17 when 23, of Darnell Govia aka 'Bushey', aged 31, by shooting him in the style of an execution through the head dead at the JNF hospital. The sentence was discussed on 26 and 27.11.25, the death penalty has not been sought by the Crown, with adjournment to today for remarks to be in writing.
- 2 On 20.06.17, Govia had gone at 08.00hrs to the JNF hospital to help a friend who had a medical appointment. He sat in a corridor alcove near the bloods laboratory. Cctv shows Cranston with open face and head at the hospital at 08.07 passing the x-ray room and then at 08.13, wearing sunglasses and a hat, in minor disguise, with an evident bulge under his white tshirt at his right

waist, which as inference was a pistol, at which point he was hunting for Govia. Further cctv showed him at 08.22 climb stairs onto the corridor and then seeing Govia, he began shooting at him down the corridor, people fleeing, where at least two bullets went through the far door and window. Govia ran across the corridor out a side door, pursued by Cranston who can be seen plainly to be holding a pistol, and he chased him across some grass in the hospital grounds and caught him. Cranston then executed Govia by shooting him defenceless through the head, 7cm below the top of the head and 3 cm to the left of the posterior midline. The direction of the wound goes from back to front with downward deviation, showing Cranston shot down into Govia whose back of head was below the pistol, suggesting Cranston was over him delivering a calculated deliberate shot designed to kill. There was also a defensive bullet wound to the right palm.

- 3 Cranston denied having anything to do with the killing, the defence being the identification was unreliable, though there was no positive case as he did to give evidence, nor called any, and said naught to police.
- 4 However, the quality of the cctv was very good, including clear stills, such that it was possible for the jury to conclude they could see for themselves the killer was Cranston, while he was also identified on the cctv by police officers, his dna was recovered from Jordan draggers by the body, Cranston was within minutes discovered nearby sweating, the killer having run off, shoeless, in the same clothes as the killer on cctv, minus the hat, gun, and sunglasses, wearing a ring visible on the cctv, and on his white tshirt there was gunshot residue to match a shell casing also found by the body. The case was overwhelming.
- 5 It was a distinct feature of the case the murder was wholly premeditated, with Cranston scouting the hospital having somehow learned Govia was there, and then between 08.07 and 08.13 being given a pistol and hat to be a minor disguise, hunting for Govia, and on seeing him, killing him, running off, while a man in blue shorts, apparently never identified by police (which this judge finds to be astonishing), seen also earlier in the x-ray area, can be seen on cctv to follow behind, picking up spent shells in the hospital corridor, openly to remove evidence.
- 6 Cranston is not of good character, having relevant convictions, being for wounding and assault on 22.08.14 when 20 at the magistrates for which he was fined, and on 16.10.18 aged 24 at the

High Court for possession of an unlicensed firearm and ammunition, where when 19 on 21.11.13 he threw away a loaded firearm on arrest by police, receiving 8 years, then reduced on appeal on 22.03.22 to 4y49w1d, which was served while on remand for the murder after arrest on 20.06.17, and which murder was while on bail for the loaded firearm.

- 7 The case begged why did Cranston do it, and there was conjecture this was revenge for Cranston being shot multiple times on 20.10.15, through his hip, buttocks, flank, abdomen, and including through the penis, requiring multiple surgeries during two years, and for a time having a colostomy bag, which police had tried to investigate, but he would not cooperate. At one point, the Crown were openly contemplating they might accept provocation manslaughter if Cranston admitted to the killing and gave as his reason that it was Govia who had shot him, which the police had initially suspected. This may well have been correct as Govia was known to police to be a member of the 'Phillps gang', where he held the status of 'General', eulogized after death by the noted rapper Imark¹ (also murdered, on 18.08.24), while Cranston had at one point been said by police associated with the 'KMS gang' (killer mafia soldiers) through his brother Istan Mitcham aka 'Big Nuzzle', who had been murdered on 22.10.14, which had then led to Cranston leaving Basseterre supposedly to get away from this background, and so he ended up in Phillips, where it has been suggested by police he fell out with Govia over use of a firearm.
- 8 It is overwhelmingly clear the murder of Govia by Cranston is in a gangland context, though exactly what had been motivating hostilities is indistinct, and the court must weigh whether to sentence him as a out-right gangster, or as one who had tried to get away from it, and was then shot as one going straight in 2015 in his new neighbourhood, later seeking coordinated revenge in 2017.
- 9 On 26.11.25, in discussing the case with counsel, it was conceded by the defence there is no formal mitigation as matters stand: Cranston continues to deny being the killer, there is no remorse, there is no credit for plea, and there is no good character, when to the contrary there is a distinctly aggravating previous conviction, being possession of a loaded firearm, set in the context of here a deliberate gangland execution while on bail for it. The case was adjourned to

¹ See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4WAvokPQEXQ>, where Govia is referred to in the lyrics as 'Bushey', and appears at the video end, being the person with the hat and goatee with hanging beard strings.

- 27.11.25 to see whether he would admit to the killing, as being revenge for 2015, which the court made clear would be a significant mitigation, but likely mean he could not later argue on appeal he was not the killer, and perhaps understandably he declined to do so. Counsel Benjamin for the defence has delicately with some skill sought to encourage the court to assume the killing was revenge, though he cannot make it his instructions, and the court has responded that matters adverse to Govia cannot just be assumed, there has to be a positive presentation by the defence, on instruction from Cranston, and in its absence events in 2015 cannot be taken into account as mitigating the murder; indeed, 2015 may make Cranston's position worse as without context offered by him, these injuries taken together with his previous convictions add to appearance he has been much involved in violent gangland activity.
- 10 There was an intelligent social enquiry report dated 04.11.25 by probation officer Lauston Percival, where Cranston makes no admissions, left school without qualification, worked on cars and in Rams, and is supported as a reliable, hardworking, honest young man by his mother, aunt, and 4 thoughtful family friends. It has been observed by the court he has always been polite and respectful during the proceedings, and so he presents as a contradiction, being capable of modest behavior and yet has hunted down and executed a man.
- 11 By way of victim impact, there have been statements dated 20.11.25 from the mother and sisters of Darnell Govia, being Arlene, Sherrienne and Shakila. Whatever Govia's other activities, there is no doubting the enormous impact his murder has had on his family, who report with much emotion how much they miss him, and how Cranston's actions have scarred them each deeply and forever.
- 12 Within the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court, there are sentencing guidelines and a **Practice Direction, no. 3 of 2021**, for murder, republished on 06.01.25. The death penalty not being sought, the choice is between a determinate term and a whole life term with no prospect of release, where for any murder with a firearm the starting point is 40 years imprisonment.
- 13 The sentence might fit within a whole life term under para 5c and 5j, as being premediated and in the context of a gang, also bearing in mind there are previous convictions for violence under para 5q. There is aggravation of the sentence under para 12f and 12m, as the shooting was in

a public place, where there were bystanders, and from how the man in blue shorts picked up shells and how Cranston disguised himself and acquired a gun between 08.07 and 08.13 shows the event was organized criminal activity unfolding in real time as captured by the cctv.

- 14 If not a whole life term, these features greatly increase a determinate term upwards from 40 years, in my judgment by 20 years to 60 years, as they mark the case out as being at the highest end of determinate sentence murder: this is no killing in anger, arising of the moment, where a man is armed, and overreacts; instead this is a hunt, and execution, in a public place, in 2017 while on bail for possession of a firearm in 2013, firing off a pistol along a hospital corridor where there are members of the public, and then shooting a defenceless man downwards into the head on the grass outside.
- 15 Considering his personal circumstances, the previous convictions for violence, particularly for possession of the loaded firearm, with the murder while on bail for it, must add to the sentence, increasing it in my view by 3 years, to 63 years.
- 16 Time on remand for the murder since 20.06.17 shall count, being 4y3m22d as calculated after deduction for serving the sentence passed on 16.10.18 for the loaded firearm, and its effect on the earliest date of release is to be factored by the prison².
- 17 With remission of one-third for good behaviour, this would mean serving at least 42 years in jail, which would be in the UK in my judgment for this gangland offence likely the least minimum term in a sentence of automatic life imprisonment there before eligibility for possible parole. For this reason, I consider the sentence of 63 years has within it adequate sentencing power, and so I will not pass a whole life term.
- a. Online research shows in the UK there have been large minimum terms as follows:
- Several individuals in the UK are serving life sentences with minimum terms of more than 40 years, and others have received whole-life orders, meaning they are unlikely ever to be released.
- The longest determinate minimum term ever handed out in a UK court is 55 years, given to Hashem Abedi.

² See para 12 of **R v Anthony Adams 2025** at <https://eccourts.org/judgment/rex-v-anthony-adams-2>

While notable cases with minimum terms over 40 years (excluding whole-life orders) include:

- Axel Rudakubana: Sentenced to a minimum of 52 years in January 2025 for the "sadistic" murders of three young girls and the attempted murder of several others in Southport.
- Hashem Abedi: Received a record-setting minimum term of 55 years in August 2020 for his role in the Manchester Arena terror attack that killed 22 people.
- Michael Adebawale: One of the killers of Fusilier Lee Rigby, he received a minimum term of 45 years in 2014; his accomplice Michael Adebolajo received a whole-life order.
- Jamie Barrow: Jailed for life with a minimum term of 44 years.
- Darren Osborne: Sentenced to a minimum of 43 years for the 2017 Finsbury Park terror attack that killed one man and injured 12 others.
- Brian Sengendo: Given a minimum term of 42 years for a murder involving "extreme violence" and the sexual assault of his victim's dead or dying body.
- Paul Sinclair: Sentenced to a minimum term of 41 years for a fatal stabbing and an attempted murder during an unprovoked two-day rampage.
- Urfan Sharif: The father of 10-year-old Sara Sharif, he was sentenced to a minimum of 40 years for her murder in December 2024.
- Reynhard Sinaga: Britain's most prolific serial rapist, his minimum term was increased to 40 years by the Court of Appeal for 159 sexual offences against 48 men.
- Joseph McCann: His minimum term was also increased to 40 years for a string of sex attacks and kidnappings.
- Ian Huntley: The Soham murderer is serving a minimum term of 40 years for the murders of schoolgirls Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman.
- Roy Whiting: The child killer of Sarah Payne was locked up with a minimum term of 40 years.

For the most serious cases of murder, a judge may impose a whole-life order, which means the offender will never be eligible for parole and will die in prison unless released on exceptional compassionate grounds.

- b. In the ECSC, there have been whole life terms passed by this judge for double murder, on Antigua in **R v Calvin James 2020**³ and on St Kitts in **R v Orvis Pogson 2022**⁴, though this case concerns a single murder, while a significant determinate sentence was passed in **R v Shaquiel Liburd 2024**⁵, being 60 years for the stabbing murder of an elderly lady in her home.

³ See: <https://eccourts.org/judgment/regina-v-calvin-james>

⁴ See: <https://eccourts.org/judgment/regina-v-orvis-pogson>

⁵ See: <https://eccourts.org/judgment/rex-v-shaquiel-liburd>

- c. To my mind, these cases show 63 years for a premeditated gangster killing at a hospital is within reason, and will meet the public expectation there must be for deterrence and retribution, irrespective of rehabilitation, a very lengthy term indeed.
- 18 *Obiter*, I do opine there is much merit in the UK approach, where for murder there is automatic life imprisonment, with a minimum term expressed before being considered for parole, which means on release a person can be recalled to prison if in breach of their parole license, which is not a power on St Kitts & Nevis, as there is no parole board. To this end, the government may wish to reflect, leaving aside arguments about the death penalty being apparently still available in legislation, on creating a parole board, with new legislation requiring for any murder at least automatic life imprisonment with a minimum term, in a regimen successfully much established in the UK.
- 19 Further, and *obiter*, it may be Cranston may wish to reflect on admitting to the killing and explaining why he did it, which I would encourage, the case being overwhelming, if he wishes to argue before the Court of Appeal there can be good reason to reduce this sentence.
- 20 *Shakeim Cranston, please stand up*. For the murder of Darnell Govia on 20.06.17, for which you were convicted by the jury, there being no formal mitigation available to you, the sentence shall be 63 years imprisonment. Unless you admit the killing and why, you cannot use being shot in 2015 as mitigation. Time on remand shall count, and you shall be eligible for one-third remission if of good behavior. You may go with the gaoler.

The Hon. Mr. Justice Iain Morley KC

High Court Judge

15 December 2025