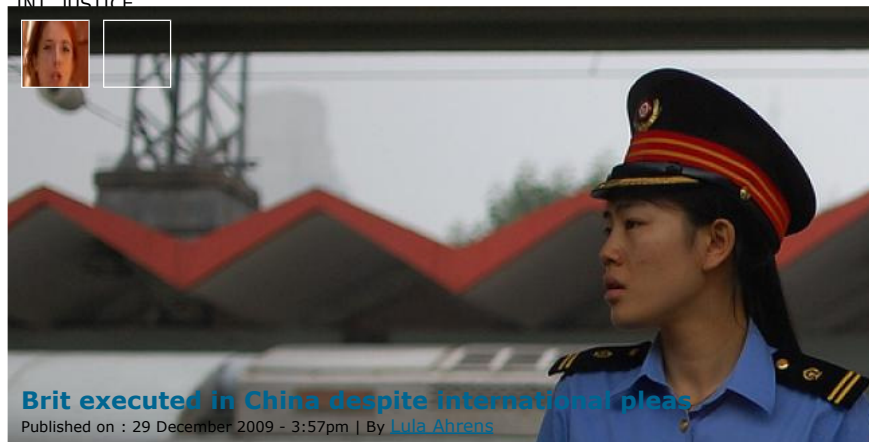


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## Brit executed in China despite international pleas

Published on : 29 December 2009 - 3:57pm | By [Lula Ahrens](#)

Filed under: [Akmal Shaikh](#) [China](#) [death sentence](#) [execution](#) [Gordon Brown](#)

**Worldwide pleas for Akmal Shaikh were not able to prevent yesterday's execution by Chinese authorities of a 53-year-old Brit, Akmal Shaikh, for drug trafficking. He is widely reported to be the first national from a European Union country to be executed in China in 58 years.**

Updated on: 30 December 2009

Shaikh was arrested in 2007 in the West-Chinese province of Xinjiang, carrying 4 kilos of heroin in his suitcase. In China, being caught in possession of fifty grams of the drug can result in a death sentence.

But according to Shaikh's supporters this was not a case of ordinary drug trafficking for profit. Psychologists in England say he suffered from bipolar disorder or schizophrenia and could therefore not be held accountable for his actions.

### Come little rabbit

How did Shaikh, owner of a cab firm in London and father of three, end up in a Chinese prison? According to The Guardian newspaper, he went off the rails after his divorce. In 2005, Shaikh suddenly left England for Poland, where he planned to set up an airline. He ended up on the streets of the Warsaw instead, telling everyone he wanted to become a pop star. He said his song, 'Come little rabbit', would bring about world peace.

Pakistan-born Shaikh bombarded British Prime Minister Gordon Brown, singer Paul McCartney and more than seventy other prominent figures with e-mails, announcing his plan to save the world.

British prisoners' rights organisation Reprievesays these e-mails show how Shaikh's mental instability made him an easy target. Shaikh wrote that he would travel to a studio in Central Asia to record his song. 'Friends' had taken care of that. The same 'friends' introduced him to the owner of a night club, who offered to organise Shaikh's first performance in China.

Shaikh said that right before the flight from Tajikistan to China, his friends were suddenly unable to go. They told him to go first - and take along a suitcase. He was arrested on arrival at the Urumqi airport on September 12th 2007.

At his first trial, it took the judge half-an-hour to sentence him to death.

### Death sentence

Under China's criminal code, punishments can be reduced or nullified if criminals are unable to recognise or control their misconduct. But the issue never came up during Shaikh's initial half-hour trial. During his second trial, although judges reportedly laughed at his erratic 50-minute speech, they refused requests by UK consulate-appointed lawyers for a psychological evaluation. By the time this became an issue, Shaikh's case may have become too high-profile for the authorities to adjust their stance without looking like they were backing down.

The question why the Chinese judges did not accept requests by the defence that Shaikh be mentally examined will most likely be the most damaging to relations between China and the UK.

### Facts

China carries out three times as many death sentences as the rest of the world put together, according to Amnesty International's most conservative estimate. Last year, 72 percent of the world's executions took place in China. In 2008, the organisation confirmed 1,718 executions. The Dui Hua Foundation said as many as 5,000 executions were carried out in 2009. As many executions are not reported, some analysts say the figure may be above 6,000. There are no official figures on executions. The exact number is a state secret.

In China the death sentence applies to 68 offences, including non-violent crimes such as tax fraud and embezzlement. Those sentenced to death are usually shot. Over the last years, some provinces have introduced lethal injections

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**Image and secrecy**

In yesterday's issue of the national newspaper China Daily, Chinese criminologists state that Shaikh himself told the court that neither he, nor anyone else in his family had any record of mental problems. The Chinese Supreme Court agreed to an assessment of his mental health during an appeal earlier this month, the China Daily reports, but the results apparently failed to persuade the court towards leniency. Chinese authorities rejected Shaikh family's request for a second examination.

Two important concerns remain. First of all, in the Chinese judicial system deliberations are carried out behind closed doors so it's therefore not known whether Shaikh's condition was adequately considered. Secondly, although Chinese courts describe themselves as independent, they are in fact controlled by the Communist Party.

**China's reaction**

China has not given an inch. A spokesperson for the Chinese foreign ministry told a press briefing in Beijing: "No one has the right to comment on China's judicial sovereignty. It is the common wish of people around the world to strike against the crime of drug trafficking. We express our strong dissatisfaction and opposition to the British government's unreasonable criticism of the case. We urge the British to correct their mistake in order to avoid harming China-UK relations."

The country insists it was fair and humane to execute a British man despite concerns about his psychiatric condition.

Officials in Beijing said the UK had no right to meddle in the case of the convicted drug smuggler Akmal Shaikh and warned that "unreasonable criticism" could harm relations between the two countries. The Chinese government has cancelled an annual meeting between the two countries, scheduled for January in Beijing to discuss human rights.

Gordon Brown had declared in a written statement on the British Foreign Office website that Shaikh's mental condition was not evaluated and that he is "appalled and disappointed" by the execution.

Drug trafficking is a sore subject in China and the country is waging a permanent war on drugs. The country suffered great losses during the Opium War (1839 -1842), when the British colonialists tried to forcefully open China to foreign trade. When the Qing Emperor refused, the Brits flooded China with cheap opium. The defeat of the Qing Dynasty, the opium addiction of millions of people and the way in which Western colonial powers appropriated China's best ports is still seen as a national defeat. And these days, the country is vulnerable to smuggling because it borders two of the world's largest heroin producers - Afghanistan and Burma.

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**DISCUSSION**

Anonymous [reply](#)  
 3 January 2010 - 3:23pm / scotland  
 pathetic comments saying how dare they execute our man he did the crime in their country his family if indeed he was mentally ill should have taken better care of him. typical that we think its our right to break other countries laws and get away because we are british.  
 justice was done as he got the needle

Anonymous [reply](#)  
 5 January 2010 - 9:03pm / America  
 Since you're now accusing his family of not sufficiently taking care of him, it seems as though you are implying that it is now his family's fault he got put into this situation. The next time a mentally ill member of YOUR family commits a crime, I'd like to see how you feel and react to those who then put the blame on you since you "should have taken better care" of said family member. Your thinking is off. And your hostility towards the British is sad and very little-minded of you. Ask yourself: If this happened to a Scottish citizen, would you react differently?

Anonymous [reply](#)  
 2 January 2010 - 7:23pm / America  
 This article is sad and disheartening to read. It's easy to live in a bubble where you don't think about fair and just treatment by your country only because you always were given it. It's articles like this that slap you back to reality. There are select countries that honor, protect, and fairly treat their citizens (as well as citizens of other countries.) Shouldn't the Chinese feel shameful of their actions? To treat a mental ill man in such a fashion.. a man who isn't even a citizen of the country? And then to go so far as to make statements that, "We express our strong dissatisfaction and opposition to the British government's unreasonable criticism of the case. We urge the British to correct their mistake in order to avoid harming China-UK relations." China is using it's relations with the UK as leverage to force the British to bend over to them in this case. China is a proud country, but if I was a citizen there I would be utterly ASHAMED of my country.



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Anonymous [reply](#)  
 2 January 2010 - 4:03am / England  
 You do realise he was supposedly mentally ill, therefore not in control of his actions.  
 The fact that this was totally disregarded is inexcusable.

Anonymous [reply](#)  
 3 January 2010 - 3:27pm / uk  
 where was his family then?letting him go around the world on his own stupid if  
 indeed he suffers from bipolar????  
 what if he had blown up a plane would that be ok because he was not in control of  
 his actions  
 do the crime knowing the results gets you what you deserve when caught

Anonymous [reply](#)  
 30 December 2009 - 3:54pm / CHINA  
 his own fault, why committed crime?  
 he deserved it...

Anonymous [reply](#)  
 29 December 2009 - 11:33pm / England  
 Sorry for the families loss, but you do the crime you should face the punishment. So  
 he was British, so what he broke the law in China and was executed for it! Good on  
 the Chinese maybe more idiots will not go abroad and break the law now!

Anonymous [reply](#)  
 29 December 2009 - 8:12pm / britain  
 I am very angry how dare the chinese gov dismiss our values and execute one of our  
 people but of course our weak government will kiss arse as they always do , our people  
 stand against racism of all kinds and acting against a person with mental problems is  
 a form of this , stand up for our people gorden brown instead of doing the weak talk ,  
 walk the walk show the british people we will not stand for this insult against us if this  
 was america all hell would break loose but no its the brits once strong a name to be  
 respected but now look at us a bunch of doormats DO SOMETHING KICK SOME ASS  
 they are putting the finger up to us and we are just saying oh ok ye ye thats fine  
 STAND UP MAN

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