

## NZ seabird returns 150 years on

BBC ONLINE

Two British men say they have seen a seabird thought to have become extinct more than a century and a half ago.

The bird, the New Zealand storm petrel, was spotted a short distance off the country's North Island in November.

There had been a possible sighting of the petrel in January 2003, when it was photographed for the first time, though the image is said to be "questionable".

But this time the two Britons say they are in no doubt the bird they sighted really is the one last seen in 1850.

They are Bryan Thomas, a professional bird photographer, and his friend Bob Flood, a writer. They were in New Zealand to write an article for an ornithologists' website, Swarovski Birding.

Thomas told BBC News Online: "We were in a small boat off Little Barrier Island, not far from Auckland, on 17 November when we saw between 20 and 30 petrels.

"Off New Zealand you expect to see two other species, the black-bellied and the white-faced storm petrel.

"But the bird we saw is really distinctive and different. The underparts are white with a black streak, and the feet project further back than the tail.

"There are differences in the detail of the plumage as well. And we were as close as 20 feet (six metres) to them.

"There are two skins dating

from the time the bird vanished in the 19th century, and we now want those subjected to DNA testing.

"We're confident that will prove the New Zealand storm petrel is a genuinely distinct species, and our visual evidence to back that up is absolutely spot on."

The "lost" bird has distinctive features.

Thomas thinks the petrels breed on Little and Great Barrier Islands, where there is a sizeable rat population.

He believes the rats are now in decline and that this has given the petrels a chance to re-establish themselves.

The realisation that they had almost certainly rediscovered a lost species did not dawn on the pair till some hours afterwards, said Thomas.

He said: "There were just the two of us in this little boat with our boatman, hanging on for dear life in a very rough, choppy sea.

"It was hard to photograph anything, and I didn't download the images till we were back onshore that evening.

"Then I said to Bob: 'Come and look at this - there's something not right here.' I didn't realise we were looking at something that had come back from the dead.

"But I remembered the possible sighting from January, and then everything fell into place.

"Since then my e-mails haven't stopped. It's a big deal for New Zealand - now they've got something back."



Prime Minister Khaleda Zia slices a Christmas cake at her residence yesterday, marking the greatest religious festival of the Christian community.

## Abducted farmer murdered in Chittagong

UNB, Ctg

Miscreants kidnapped a farmer from his house at Zamirzuri village in Chandanaish upazila yesterday before killing him.

Police said Hossain Ahmed, 54, was kidnapped in the early hours of yesterday and found dead in the evening.

Family sources said a gang of five raided the house at about 4:00am and abducted Hossain at gunpoint. After a hectic search, his body was found about three kilometres off the house at about 5:00pm.

A case was filed with Chandanaish Police Station.

## Musharraf escapes

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Mercedes, but he was unhurt, they said.

"The President and all his companions are safe and sound," said Major-General Shaikat Sultan. An aide said Musharraf, who had been heading home, was "in good spirits."

"It was an assassination attempt," said Information Minister Sheikh Rasheed Ahmed. "Two suicide attackers in two cars tried to hit the president's vehicle. Allah has saved him. Three cars of the cavalcade, including the president's car, were damaged."

Interior Ministry spokesman Abdul Rauf Chaudhary said at least 14 people had been killed, including at least two bombers, and 18 people were wounded.

A soldier and three policemen were among the dead. Some police officers in the motorcade were hurt and a diversionary open-topped Mercedes at the tail end of the motorcade was blown across the road by the blasts.

Soldiers and police cordoned off the area on the road connecting Rawalpindi with the capital Islamabad. The route is used almost daily by Musharraf to drive to and from the capital.

Sultan said it was too early to determine who might be responsible for the attack.

Authorities suspect Islamic militants, who Musharraf has targeted as part of his contribution to the US-led war on terror, were behind the December 14 attack. Musharraf told the news agency a few days later it could have been the work of al-Qaeda and he believed "destiny" had shielded him.

The list of Musharraf's enemies has lengthened since he took a front-line role in the US-led war on terror after the September 11 attacks in 2001.

He has angered militants by dropping support for the former Taliban regime in Afghanistan, arresting hundreds of members of Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda network and cracking down on domestic groups, and by edging toward peace with rival India.

The attack came just over a week before a regional summit in Islamabad due to be attended by India's Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee.

In September, Arabic television broadcast an audio tape purporting to be Musharraf's voice.

However, French justice and law enforcement officials said yesterday they found little evidence that terrorists were planning to use US-bound aircraft to launch attacks against American targets.

No arrests were made, and French authorities released seven men -- one French, one American and several Algerians -- after briefly questioning them late Wednesday, said an Interior Ministry spokesman. He said the investigation was all but on hold.

Police said the clash erupted at about 9:00am when the claim of one Siddique Ali on the land adjacent to a mazar was dismissed by the village arbitrators.

Nineteen of the injured were admitted to Sadar Hospital. They are Abbas, Razzak Ali, Akbar, Shams Mia, Khalil, Asad, Abdul Haq, Sikandar, Nurul, Noor, Foyezul, Babul, Nurul Islam, Anwar, Mukit, Ashak Ali, Monnaf and Gayas Ali.

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edly from al-Qaeda deputy leader Ayman al-Zawahri urging Pakistanis to overthrow Musharraf for supporting the United States.

"It could be al-Qaeda, it could be an internal factor, or both internal and external," Sultan said. "We can say something only after investigations are complete."

Yesterday's attack happened within sight of the previous attempt on Musharraf's life, in which explosions ripped apart a bridge just after his motorcade passed over it. Musharraf survived an attempt on his life last year for which three Islamic extremists were convicted.

The latest bid came a day after Musharraf reached an agreement with hardline Islamic opponents to step down as Chief of Army Staff by the end of 2004 in order to resolve a long-running row that has virtually paralysed parliament.

The agreement is likely to see the general's term as president extended until 2007, although any weakening of his links to the military could undermine his position.

Analyst Shireen Mazari, head of the state-funded Institute of Strategic Studies, said the attacks could be the work of extremists wanting to derail moves toward peace with neighboring India and unhappy with the war on terror.

She said the attacks raised serious questions about Musharraf's security and much touted intelligence services.

"I am amazed the attack occurred in the same area targeted before," she said.

Defiance analyst Rifat Hussein said al-Qaeda would be prime suspects, but domestic militants angered by Pakistan's peace overtures with India could also be responsible.

"The attack comes very close to the summit, which creates an atmosphere of terror and could mean the government may not be able to achieve what it wants to," he said.

India condemned the attack.

## Rivals kill 3

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shots and exploded crackers during the clash that lasted for an hour.

At one stage, one group retreated with three bullet-injured operatives. But their rivals chased them and managed to catch the injured three. They slit their throats and left the scene.

On information, police rushed to the spot, recovered the bodies and sent them to Pabna General Hospital for autopsy.

Additional police have been deployed in the village. A tense situation was prevailing in the area. No case was filed till the filing of the report at 6:30pm.

## Jamming device

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Musharraf had passed over it. The jamming device may have blocked the signal to the remote-controlled bomb.

His security was stepped up in a big way following last year's failed attempt on his life in Karachi, for which three members of a banned Islamic militant group have been convicted.

Most of the time two or more identical black Mercedes are part of his motorcade, and it is nearly impossible to make out in which car he is travelling.

There has always been a ban on carrying mobile telephones at his functions.

But lately, security officials have been using a radio-jamming device to block all kinds of wireless communications within a radius of about a couple of hundred metres.

Reports say a vehicle with the jamming device is also part of President Musharraf's motorcade.

There is a strong possibility that it may have blocked the use of a remote-controlled device to detonate the explosives while his car was on the bridge on Sunday.

However, officials are reluctant to comment publicly on the matter.

## 5 ansars linked

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to court yesterday.

Police sealed the hotel Shibir activists used as their hideout with the ansars on guard as camouflage.

Leaders of the ICS disowned the injured young men as its activists.

But Rubel told interrogators that his father was an influential leader of Phultala unit of Jamaat-e-Islami, the backer of the ICS. Rubel also said during interrogation that they were all Shibir activists.

## PM plans

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a PMO source said.

The premier recently declined a proposal of Principal Secretary Kamal Uddin Siddiqui, whose contractual service expires on January 9, to nominate him as the vice-chairman of the Asian Development Bank (ADB), he claimed.

Under the previous BNP government of Khaleda from 1991 to 1996, Siddiqui served as her secretary. When the government's term neared completion, he successfully got nomination for the executive director of the ADB.

The Awami League government that took office in 1996 ballot recalled him.

The PMO official alleged the chance of Siddiqui retaining the principal secretary's position on further contract was remote this time as many secretaries complained to the premier about him.

## Opposition

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belonging to the 11-party leftist alliance, are also preparing for a January 8 countrywide rail and road barricade programme.

Party representatives recently attended meetings of the coordination committee, but were unable to fix a date for the convention due to "preoccupations with individual party matters", JSD's Abdullahil Quayyum and CPB's Ruhin Hossain Prince told The Daily Star.

Some insiders however hinted that the parties are uncomfortable with the lack of clarity of the convention's agenda.

While the main opposition AL wants to use the convention platform as a springboard for a greater anti-government movement, the CPB wants to see the convention focus on ways to strengthen the UP and abolish the controversial Gram Sarkar.

Organisational problems aside, the UP convention could actually bolster the anti-government movement if chiefs of the four parties joined the convention, sources said.

## JU students

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Wednesday at around 11:30pm. In face of the students' demand, the VC agreed to issue the written circulation.

The students went on the hunger strike in front of the administrative building from December 23 to break the prevailing deadlock since October 15 after Juta called an indefinite strike to press home its three-point demand.

Juta withdrew the strike after the JU authorities met its demands partially.

The VC panel election will be held on February 19 and cadres of the Jatiyatadabi Chharta Dal, who kept confined the Shaheed Salam Barkat hall authorities on August 12 will be punished within seven days, but removal of the VC is not possible, the authorities said.

Amin said they withdrew the strike at an executive committee meeting after the authorities promised to meet their demands. But Juta members shot down the decision, saying it was taken without their consent.

## AL leader killed

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He died on the spot in front of a large number of onlookers. While leaving the place the assailants exploded two more bombs.

The slain AL leader was a nephew of former state minister for information Syed Didar Bakht Hashemi. The motive for the murder is yet to be known.

## Christmas

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the day. Christmas Carol singers along with Santa Clauses performed in these hotels much to the amusement of the tiny tots. For children, receiving X-mass gifts from Santa Clause was the main attraction of the Christmas celebrations.

Besides, cakes were cut at hotels and Christian houses to share the happiness of the X-mass celebrations among relatives, neighbours and fellow members of the community.

Reports of X-mass celebrations in far-flung areas of the country including the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) poured in our newsroom last night. Deputy Minister for CHT Affairs Moni Swapan Dewan joined the X-mass celebrations of the Tripuras at Roangchhari in Bandarban yesterday and cut a cake on the occasion.

Security in Dhaka was tightened to ensure peaceful celebrations. Special law-enforcing squads at different strategic points were kept on alert to avert any untoward incidents.

## Parents wired to respond to child

BBC ONLINE

The brains of parents -- especially mothers -- appear to be wired up to respond to the cries of babies.

A team from the University of Basel used sophisticated scans to measure brain responses to recordings of babies' cries and laughter.

One measure showed the cries provoked a stronger reaction in parents than in childless people, and another showed a stronger response in women than men.

The research is published in the journal Biological Psychiatry.

The scientists found that a baby's sobs triggered increased activity in a particular area of the brains of parents of both sexes.

This area, called the amygdala, plays a central role in processing emotions.

However, measures of activity in the amygdalas of childless adults, both men and women, showed they were more likely to be stimulated when a baby laughed, rather than cried.

A parent needs to foster their offspring, so that they spread their genes into the world.

Lead researcher Professor Erich Seifritz, of the University's Department of Psychiatry, told BBC News Online that the findings made biological sense.

He said: "For a parent a baby's cries are much more important than for a non-parent.

"A parent needs to foster their offspring, so that they spread their genes into the world.

"So it is important that they have mechanisms in their brain to make sure they are sensitive to needs of their baby.

"In evolutionary terms, this means that a child is more likely to

survive and pass on his or her genes."

However, the research came up with different findings when it focused on a second area of the brain called the prefrontal cortex. This is a complex structure, which is not fully understood, but is also thought to play a role in processing emotion.

These readings showed that all women, regardless of whether they had children of their own, registered altered activity in this area in response to a baby's cries.

However, men, again regardless of their parental status, showed no sign of raised activity in this region.

The researchers believe that a baby's cries may trigger a noise filter in the prefrontal cortex which enables a woman to focus solely on a child's cries, to exclusion of other sounds.

## BSF abducts Bangladeshi

BSS, Rajshahi

A man was abducted by the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) personnel from a village near Gilabari frontier under Bholahat upazila of Chapainawabganj on Wednesday.

Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) sources quoted witnesses as saying a BSF team entered Jadunagar village at about 5:30pm and abducted Bablu, 50, son of Sajju Sheikh, while he (Bablu) was harvesting paddy in his land.

Local BDR authorities yesterday sent a protest letter to their Indian counterparts, requesting them to hold a flag meeting as early as possible on the matter.

## Rockets shower

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and an apartment block were struck, as well as the area where the headquarters of the US-led administration is situated.

Guerrillas fired rockets that hit the outside wall of the Iranian embassy, the Turkish embassy and a residential building next to the German embassy.

The rockets blew a hole in the front wall of the Turkish mission and shattered windows but caused little damage in the other blasts, witnesses said.

A rocket missed the Interior Ministry and landed in a nearby street, witnesses said.

Only one woman was wounded in the attacks that took place around sunrise.

The slain American soldier brought to 206 the number of US military deaths from hostile fire since Washington announced the end of major combat in Iraq on May 1.

Washington blames attacks on Saddam supporters and foreign Islamic militants. Officials had warned insurgents would launch fierce attacks during the Christmas holiday season.

The bombings added to the gloom surrounding Christmas celebrations. Baghdad churches did not hold the traditional midnight mass for lack of security, clerics said.

Hundreds from the Christian minority attended masses in the morning, alarmed by the violence gripping their city.

The lift area between the eighth and ninth floors of the Ishtar Sheraton Hotel was struck. Debris and shattered glass littered the hotel's lobby.

A manager at the hotel said there were no casualties.

The hotel, where US contractors and Western journalists stay, was hit in another attack late on Wednesday, but once again there were no casualties.

"This is a regular day for us," said US First Lieutenant Kurt Muniz, as he led several soldiers on

a foot patrol in the area.

He said the attackers left behind leaflets urging staff at the Ishtar Sheraton to stop working at the hotel and demanding US forces leave Iraq.

Another rocket hit the Bourj al-Hayat Hotel, also used by Americans. The hotel was used by U.N. weapons inspectors before the war. No one was hurt.

At the apartment block, Samar Zeid, 20, said: "We were sleeping when we heard a large explosion. My mother was taken to hospital." The attack damaged his parents' bedroom.

A neighbour said he saw a car speeding away from a nearby street immediately after the attack.

A US military spokesman said three or four rockets struck in the vicinity of the US-led Coalition Provisional Authority complex in the centre of Baghdad on the western bank of the river Tigris.

Warning sirens sounded several times at the complex, which was once one of Saddam's palaces. The all-clear was sounded some two hours after the attacks.

Three US soldiers died in a bomb blast north of Baghdad on Wednesday and a suicide car bomber killed himself and four other people in northern Iraq.

US aircraft and artillery pounded suspected guerrilla hideouts in southern Baghdad for a second night.

Blasts and heavy machinegun fire echoed across the city as the US military's Operation Iron Grip went on into early Thursday to flush out suspected guerrillas.

US soldiers have arrested hundreds of suspected guerrillas and their backers in raids across the Sunni Muslim heartland west and north of Baghdad since Saddam was captured on December 13 in his hometown of Tikrit.

The Sunni minority dominated Iraq under Saddam's rule. He repressed the majority Shia Muslims during his three decades in power.

## 191 die in China

FROM PAGE 1

related accidents in the first nine months of the year.

The cause of the latest disaster was still being investigated but one oil industry official in Chongqing said the well had burst while it was being drilled.

The Xinhua news agency said at least 191 people had been confirmed dead by last evening.

"Chinese leaders called for unreserved efforts in searching and rescuing victims," the official news agency said on its Web site.

Rescue workers carrying oxygen tanks on their backs and wearing masks were seen near the site, said one official.

The private www.sina.com website said about 30,000 people had been evacuated. The injured had swollen and sensitive eyes and some had difficulty standing, it said.

Xinhua said the gas well burst on Tuesday, spewing a high concentration of natural gas and sulfurated hydrogen 30 meters (100 feet) into the air at the Chuandongbei field, which is owned by China National Petroleum Corp (CNPC), parent of

oil major PetroChina.

It was also unclear why the reported death toll had shot up two days after the accident. Earlier yesterday Xinhua reported that 133 had died but soon raised that to 163 and then 191.

Another CNPC official in Beijing said the blast had not caused a fire.

In Kaixian, about 1,000 km (620 miles) west of Shanghai with a population of about 1.5 million, more than 200 people were being treated for poisoning, a hospital administrator said. It was not clear how many were admitted to other hospitals.

State radio said an earlier burst had been brought under control on Wednesday. It quoted a government official as saying the gas well that had burst would be sealed on Friday.

The central government sent a team to coordinate the rescue.

Chongqing and the neighboring province of Sichuan are among China's major natural gas producing areas.

In August, PetroChina began construction of a \$400 million pipeline to pump natural gas from Chongqing to central China.

## Israeli strike in Gaza kills 5

AGENCIES, Gaza

Israeli helicopter gunships killed a senior Islamic militant and at least four other people in a missile strike on a car in Gaza City last night, medics said.

The Israeli army said the target was a militant from the Islamic Jihad group thought to be planning an attack.

It said Meqled Hamid of Islamic Jihad, a Palestinian militant group spearheading a three-year-old uprising against Israel, was killed in the attack.

Meanwhile, an explosion tore through a bus outside Tel Aviv, injuring at least 10, Reuters reported quoting Israeli security sources.

They said the blast took place at a highway leading to Israel's coastal metropolis.

In a separate incident, the Israeli army said earlier it had foiled an attempted Palestinian militant