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Rory suspect missed court on child sex charges

CAMERON SIMPSON, TOM GORDON and BRIAN DONNELLY

THE man who has now emerged as the prime suspect in the murder of Rory Blackhall was on bail awaiting trial for sex charges when the 11-year-old disappeared, it was revealed yesterday.

Police yesterday identified the body of Simon Harris, 37, who was found on Sunday at his rundown former council home in Livingston. Officers are believed to have raided his home after receiving calls from members of the public.

Harris, who is believed to have committed suicide, had been due to appear in court on August 22, the day after Rory's body was discovered, according to the Crown Office.

However, he failed to turn up and a warrant was issued for his arrest.

The Crown Office confirmed that he had appeared at Lin-

lithgow Sheriff Court on August 22, but failed to appear. A warrant was granted for his arrest. The trial had been scheduled to take place on September 5.

However, the spokeswoman said the procurator-fiscal at Linlithgow did not receive the paperwork for Harris's arrest warrant until yesterday, the day after he was found dead, meaning police had never been instructed to apprehend him over his court absence.

Although Harris was charged with sex offences against children, he is not thought to have been on the sex offenders' register as he had never been convicted of a sex offence.

If he had, it is likely police would have visited him far sooner after Rory's disappearance. Rory vanished after being dropped off near his school by his mother on the morning of Thursday, August 18.

Last night, a Lothian and Borders Police source said they went to Harris's home at Camps Rigg after being alerted by the public after an appeal was issued at the weekend offering a description apparently fitting that of the joiner.

The source said they had received no notification about a grant of any arrest warrant after Harris failed to appear at court on August 22.

Police also refused to say last night whether they were still seeking someone else over the death of the boy.

The apparent failures in the bail system led a Labour MSP to call for an interim register to alert the police to those accused as well as convicted of sex crimes.

Paul Martin, MSP for Glasgow Springburn, where eight-year-old Mark Cummings was murdered by Stuart Leggate, a known sex offender, said: "We have to minimise the risk. If you are not guilty, you should not be concerned by police questioning."

IN A HURRY-CANE



RUN FOR COVER: New Orleans resident Arnold James struggles against the hurricane as he heads for shelter after the roof of his home blew off. Picture: Dave Martin/AP

Oil prices at record high as US production suffers

RICK WILKING NEW ORLEANS and WILLIAM TINNING

OIL prices rose to record highs yesterday as Hurricane Katrina severely disrupted production in the Gulf of Mexico before sweeping ashore on the Louisiana coast where it caused extensive damage.

As 145mph gales ploughed through, the Gulf oil companies shut down production

from many of the offshore platforms that provide 25% of US oil and gas output.

Oil prices jumped to \$70.81 a barrel for the first time before settling at \$69.71.

Sheikh Ahmad al Fahd al Sabah, head of Opec, said he would call for a 500,000 barrels a day rise in output by members at the next meeting in an attempt to calm oil supply fears following the Gulf of Mexico shutdown.

Hurricane Katrina weakened to a speed of about 135mph as it hit land in Louisiana.

Blinding rain that accompanied the gales submerged entire neighbourhoods in New Orleans tearing off part of the roof of the Louisiana Superdome where thousands of people had taken shelter.

At least 80% of the low-lying city's 500,000 residents had earlier been evacuated after the mayor warned them: "This is

not a test." The storm unleashed more chaos as it moved into Mississippi, hurling boats into buildings and ripping billboards to shreds.

Katrina was the most powerful storm to affect Mississippi since Hurricane Camille came in as a Category 5 in 1969, killing 143 people along the Gulf Coast.

"This is a devastating hit. We've got boats that have gone into buildings," Pat Sullivan,

Gulfport, Mississippi, fire chief said as he manoeuvred around fallen trees in the city.

To the relief of many residents Katrina was downgraded to a category two storm as it headed towards Alabama.

Last night, three deaths were confirmed. Hundreds of thousands of people across the region were left without power after the storm.

By storm Page 9

University faces £2m bill after dental students snub offer to defer oversubscribed course

ANDREW DENHOLM EDUCATION CORRESPONDENT

AN administrative error which led to a university allowing too many students on its dental course could end up costing it more than £2m.

Dundee University, which mistakenly offered 99 students a place on a course with a limit of 67, will have to pay for the extra places because they are not covered by grants from the funding council.

It costs some £14,000 a year to educate a dental student - leaving Dundee to find more than £2m over the five years of the course.

Dundee had hoped some students would defer for a year by offering them £2000 to postpone their studies, but so far

only four people have taken up the offer.

"That is the current situation we find ourselves in, but we really aren't in any position to comment any further on the funding issue at the moment," said a university spokesman.

The problem at Dundee arose because every year universities give more offers to students than they have places, as some will not achieve their grades and others decide to go to university elsewhere. The school has had a 40% rise in applications this year, with the number of acceptances increasing by more than 30%.

Ray Watkins, Scotland's chief dental officer, yesterday, travelled to Dundee to discuss the problem with university officials.



RAY WATKINS: Discussions.

"We had a positive meeting with the chief dental officer this morning and we were happy to have the opportunity to discuss some of the issues raised by the enlarged enrolment this year."

The SNP used the mix-up to call for more training places to be made available to Scotland's two dental schools, at Dundee and Glasgow University.

Richard Lochhead, Nationalist MSP for the North East, said: "The hundreds of thousands of Scots who are not registered with a dentist will be wanting as many new dentists trained up as soon as possible."

"The chief dental officer should go back to his political masters in Edinburgh and demand the resources to plug

Continued on Page 2

Polish shipyard 'was cleared on steel cost'

Scottish civil servants investigated the price of steel used by the Polish yard at the centre of a controversial ship deal and found no reason to block the contract, environment minister Ross Finnie said yesterday. Mr Finnie said he had no choice but to back the Remontowa yard tender which defeated the Ferguson's yard in Port Glasgow.

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Fringe ticket record

Edinburgh Festival Fringe has rung up "staggering" ticket sales in another record-breaking year. The International Book Festival, which is sponsored by The Herald and Sunday Herald, also reported a 10% rise in attendance.

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THE LAST TICKET PART TWO: DEAD, DO YOU UNDERSTAND? I WANT HIM DEAD...

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Society THE REAL VICTIMS OF A PAY DISPUTE

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HARRY REID WHY CRICKET MUST NOT BECOME THE NEW FOOTBALL

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