



A ship of Migrant Offshore Aid Station (MOAS) for the mission in the Andaman Sea and adjacent areas.

## New mission to save migrants

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Global search and rescue charity Migrant Offshore Aid Station (MOAS) begins a new mission in the Andaman Sea and adjacent areas on March 3 to track, monitor and, if needed, rescue refugees or migrants.

The MY Phoenix and its crew will work to that end with coastguards, navy, local NGOs, experts and the media in coordination with the responsible authorities.

It will use long-distance drones to measure movement of ships that may be transporting refugees or migrants, said a MOAS statement from Bangkok yesterday.

The move comes following the shocking discoveries of some 200 remains of human bodies -- believed to be of Rohingyas of Myanmar and

migrants of Bangladesh -- from the hilly jungles of Thai-Malaysian borders in May and June last year.

Several thousand refugees and migrants had drifted on board in the sea for several days. The neighbouring countries -- Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia -- first denied accepting their boats. However, they later accepted the survivors amid global pressures.

Rohingyas, a persecuted minority in Myanmar, and poor jobseekers of Bangladesh had been taking risky boat journeys mainly to Malaysia through the sea. But, they faced shortage of food and torture on board and in the Thai jungles for ransom.

According to the UN Refugee Agency, some 370 people -- Rohingyas and Bangladeshis -- are believed to have died in the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea last year.

In 2015, an estimated 33,600 refugees and migrants of various nationalities across the region took to smugglers' boats, including 32,600 in the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea, where the bulk of the passengers had been Rohingyas and Bangladeshis, the UNHCR says in its latest report issued on February 23.

The 2015 fatality rate has still been three times higher in those waters than in the Mediterranean Sea. Survivors described harrowing experiences: death by starvation, people thrown overboard alive, and suffering from various debilitating diseases.

Nearly 170,000 Rohingyas and Bangladeshis are estimated to have made the dangerous journey from the Bay of Bengal since 2012.

It was agreed that preventing loss of life in the sea was a high priority, said

the MOAS in meetings with the local and national government authorities.

"The task of the MY Phoenix will be to observe and analyse irregular movement at sea with the goal of supporting local stakeholders in providing an enhanced life-saving response.

"Our aim is to generate a better understanding of the movement by the refugees and migrants and be ready to assist in cases where there is an imminent threat to loss of life," said MOAS founder Christopher Catrambone.

The MOAS, at the end of the four-week mission, will review its findings and funding provisions with the stakeholders, the statement said.

Malta-based NGO MigrantReport.org, a news organisation, and Fortify Rights, a rights organisation based in South East Asia, will support the MOAS in its mission.

## 5,500 ATMs

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Later, police arrested Piotr Szczepan Mazurek, a German born in Ukraine, along with three of his accomplices who were the employees of City Bank.

Though 53 banks have ATM services, Dutch-Bangla Bank alone has 3,700 such machines, exactly half of the total ATMs in the country. Q-Cash that runs a payments switch has around 3,000 machines across the country.

Most of the Q-Cash's ATMs are of Germany's Wincor Nixdorf. Each of the machines costs Tk 4.5 lakh to Tk 40 lakh, depending on the quality, said Kazi Saifuddin Munir, managing director of IT Consultants Limited (ITCL), which is the mother company of Q-Cash.

Munir said ITCL is the sole distributor of Wincor Nixdorf in Bangladesh. Other banks, including the market leader Dutch-Bangla, uses NCR brand of ATM that costs Tk 6 lakh to Tk 10 lakh each.

## Leading

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Rafikul Islam Ghotu, one of the initiators, told this correspondent that they decided to build the bridge in a meeting in February last year.

Ataur Rahman Ata, chairman of Manikganj Sadar upazila, gave them Tk 6 lakh from his upazila parishad funds. Mofiz Uddin Bablu, engineer of Manikganj Sadar upazila LGED, is providing them technical assistance without any fees, he said.

On completion of the bridge, farmers will benefit greatly as they can take their produce to markets easily, the chairman said.

## Ashutosh president

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Other members are MA Noman and Amit Talukder. LRF outgoing president M Badi-Uz-Zaman chaired the meeting while outgoing general secretary Wakil Ahmed Hiron conducted it, says a press release.

Other office bearers include Shamima Akter of Rtv (vice president), Muhammad Yeasin of The Independent (joint secretary), Ahammed Sarwar Hossain Bhuiyan of Bangla Vision TV (treasurer), Fazlul Haque Mridha of Jagone24.com (organising secretary), Arafat Munna of Janakantha (office secretary) and Ahmed Al Amin of Bangladesh Protidin (publicity and publication secretary).

Executive committee members are Azit Kumar Mohalder of Daily Shokaler Khobor, Jannatul Panna of Daily Manobkantha, Afzal Hossain of Somoy TV, Zaker Hossain of NTV online and Tanvir Ahmed of Bhorer Kagoj.

## California methane leak was biggest ever in US, say scientists

REUTERS, Los Angeles

The months-long natural gas leak that forced thousands of Los Angeles residents from their homes ranks as the largest known accidental methane release in US history, equal to the annual greenhouse gas emissions of nearly 600,000 cars, scientists reported on Thursday.

At its peak, 60 tons per hour of natural gas was spewing from a ruptured underground pipeline at the Aliso Canyon storage field, effectively doubling the methane emissions of the entire Los Angeles metropolitan area, the researchers said.

Their study, published in the journal Science, represents the first comprehensive effort to quantify a gas leak that made scores of people ill and prompted the temporary relocation of more than 6,600 households from the northern Los Angeles community of Porter Ranch at the edge of the gas field.

The damaged injection well discharged a total of 97,100 tons - or 5 billion cubic feet - of methane into the environment from the time it was first detected on Oct. 23 until it was plugged earlier this month, the study said.

Methane, the chief component of natural gas and a far more potent greenhouse agent than carbon dioxide, persists in the atmosphere for 10 years. The total release from Aliso Canyon is equivalent to the annual energy-sector methane emissions of a medium-sized European Union country, it said.

"Our finding means that the Aliso Canyon leak was the largest accidental release of methane in the history of the US," Tom Ryerson, a scientist for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and co-lead of the study, said in a NOAA statement about the research.

A 2004 accident in Texas actually expelled more natural gas but it was mostly consumed in an explosion and fire, so that methane never reached the atmosphere, the study said.

"Aliso Canyon will have by far the largest climate impact" and will "substantially impact the state of California greenhouse gas emission targets for the year," the study said.

In terms of heat-trapping greenhouse potential, the volume of leaked methane was equivalent to putting 572,000 passenger cars on the road for

a year, according to the scientists.

Aliso Canyon, owned by Southern California Gas Co., a division of San Diego-based Sempra Energy, is the fourth largest gas storage field of its kind in the United States.

The utility issued a statement late Thursday minimizing the extent of the greenhouse gas impact, citing earlier state Air Resources Board data showing that methane released at Aliso Canyon was equivalent to 2.4 million tons of carbon dioxide.

That amount, the utility said, represents less than 1 percent of California's entire year-round greenhouse gas emissions, and about one-eighth of the all methane produced annually by dairy cows in the state.

Still, environmental groups have seized on the Aliso Canyon disaster in calling attention to hazards posed by the state's aging fossil fuel infrastructure. The crippled well there was converted from oil production to gas storage in 1973.

## Taiwan president-elect must respect constitution: China

REUTERS, Beijing

Taiwan's president-elect Tsai Ing-wen must respect the island's own constitution that states Taiwan and the mainland are both part of one China, China's foreign minister has said during a visit to Washington.

China considers Taiwan a wayward province, to be brought under its control by force if necessary. Defeated Nationalist forces fled to Taiwan in 1949 after the Chinese civil war.

Beijing has warned against any moves towards independence since January's landslide win by Tsai and her independence-leaning Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) in Taiwan's presidential and parliamentary elections and said it would defend its sovereignty.

Tsai has said she would maintain peace with China, and Chinese state-run media have also noted her pledges to maintain the "status quo" with China.

## PM

FROM PAGE 1

of the four ill-fated boys and a classroom and a library at Sundrateki Government Primary School.

The Bahubal UNO confirmed the BSS of receiving the PMO directives.

Four children -- Monir Miah, 7, Zakaria Shuvo, 8, Mohammad Tajel Miah, 10, and Ismail Miah, 10 -- disappeared on February 12 after they went to watch a football match at a nearby Uttar Bhadeshwar village.

Their bodies were found buried at a sand extraction area around a kilometre off their village on February 17.

A power struggle between two groups of the local panchayat (village arbitration body) led to the brutal murders, according to police.

Police arrested six people, including Abdul Ali, his sons Jewel Miah and Rubel Miah, Azizur Rahman Arzu and Bashir Miah, in connection with the killings.

Bachchu, another key accused in the case, was killed in a "gunfight" with members of the Rapid Action Battalion early Thursday morning.

## Mysterious

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Jaintapur Health Complex where doctors declared the schoolgirls dead.

The bodies were sent to Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital for autopsies.

Police seized fruit drink packs from inside the vehicle.

## 'Space-saving' attempts at reform have fallen foul of deep-rooted Chinese burial customs, despite measures such as a cremation competition.

Cremation rates actually fell slightly between 2005 and 2012, from 53% to 49.5%, according to the Ministry for Civil Affairs, which wants it to reach 100% by the end of 2020.

The government has urged members of the ruling Communist Party to "take the lead" or face punishment.

The move has been met with outrage on social media, with thousands of comments posted on the Sina Weibo microblogging site.

"Has the government lost the plot?" one user exclaims, while another complains: "Even after life, death must be regulated." One person draws parallels with the country's chronic housing shortage: "No place to live during this lifetime, after death it's the same."

But some are more philosophical. "Everyone dies - I don't mind what happens to me after death," one user says.

## US test-fires ICBMs to stress its power to Russia, North Korea

REUTERS, Vandenberg Air Force Base

The US military test-fired its second intercontinental ballistic missile in a week on Thursday night, seeking to demonstrate its nuclear arms capacity at a time of rising strategic tensions with Russia and North Korea.

The unarmed Minuteman III missile roared out of a silo at Vandenberg Air Force Base in California late at night, raced across the sky at speeds of up to 15,000 mph and landed a half hour later in a target area 4,200 miles away near Kwajalein Atoll in the Marshall Islands of the South Pacific.

Deputy Defense Secretary Robert Work, who witnessed the launch, said the US tests, conducted at least 15 times since January 2011, send a message to strategic rivals like Russia, China and North Korea that Washington has an effective nuclear arsenal.

"That's exactly why we do this," Work told reporters before the launch.

"We and the Russians and the Chinese routinely do test shots to prove that the operational missiles that we have are reliable. And that is a signal ... that we are prepared to use nuclear weapons in defense of our country if necessary."

Demonstrating the reliability of the nuclear force has taken on additional importance recently because the US arsenal is near the end of its useful life and a spate of scandals in the nuclear force two years ago raised readiness questions.

The Defense Department has poured millions of dollars into improving conditions for troops responsible for staffing and maintaining the nuclear systems. The administration also is putting more focus on upgrading the weapons.

President Barack Obama's final defense budget unveiled this month calls for a \$1.8 billion hike in nuclear arms spending to overhaul the country's aging nuclear bombers, missiles, submarines and other systems.

The president's \$19 billion request

would allow the Pentagon and Energy Department to move toward a multiyear overhaul of the atomic arms infrastructure that is expected to cost \$320 billion over a decade and up to 1 trillion dollars over 30 years.

The nuclear spending boost is an ironic turn for a president who made reducing US dependence on atomic weapons a centerpiece of his agenda during his first years in office.

Obama called for a world eventually free of nuclear arms in a speech in Prague and later reached a new strategic weapons treaty with Russia. He received the Nobel Peace Prize in part based on his stance on reducing atomic arms.

"He was going to de-emphasize the role of nuclear weapons in US national security policy ... but in fact in the last few years he has emphasized new spending," said John Isaacs of the Council for a Livable World, an arms control advocacy group.

Critics say the Pentagon's plans are unaffordable and unnecessary because it intends to build a force capable of deploying the 1,550 warheads permitted under the New START treaty. But Obama has said the country could further reduce its deployed warheads by a third and still remain secure.

Hans Kristensen, an analyst at the Federation of American Scientists, said the Pentagon's costly "all-of-the-above" effort to rebuild all its nuclear systems was a "train wreck that everybody can see is coming." Kingston Reif of the Arms Control Association, said the plans were "divorced from reality."

The Pentagon could save billions by building a more modest force that would delay the new long-range bomber, cancel the new air launched cruise missile and construct fewer ballistic submarines, arms control advocates said.

Work said the Pentagon understood the financial problem. The department would need \$18 billion a year between 2021 and 2035 for its portion of the nuclear modernization, which is coming at the same time as a huge "bow wave" of spending on conventional ships and aircraft, he said.

## Gunman kills 3

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Walton said the first officer to arrive at the scene shot the gunman, saving "many, many lives."

"This is a horrible situation, just terrible," Walton said, adding that his department received a congratulatory call from the White House after the incident.

Walton said authorities had information on "some things that triggered this individual", but he would not elaborate.

The carnage was the latest in a string of mass shootings in the United States, where such attacks have become commonplace.

Walton said the gunman, who he declined to identify, first fired at two motorists from his car, and then stole a pickup truck from one of his victims before heading to the factory.

He shot a woman in the parking lot with an assault rifle and then entered the facility unleashing a volley of bullets as people ran for their lives screaming "run, fire, fire," according to one witness.

Local media identified the gunman as Cedric Ford, 38, who worked as a painter at the factory and had posted a picture of himself on Facebook with an assault rifle.

Matt Jarrell, a painter at Excel, told CNN affiliate KSNW that "never in a million years" would he have expected Ford to do something like this before he saw him open fire.

"He was a mellow guy," Jarrell said. "He was somebody I could talk to about anything."

Ford recently moved to the area from Miami, and had an extensive criminal record, including a history of prowling, loitering and illegal weapons possession, media reports said.

Walton said police surrounded the gunman's home after the shooting but his male roommate refused to allow them in, resulting in a standoff.

But officers later obtained a warrant and entered the home only to find it empty, KSNW reported.

'WAKE UP' The victims were taken to local hospitals, -- where five were deemed to be in critical condition -- as family members rushed to the factory for news of their loved ones.

One man said his 21-year-old nephew had been shot four times. "I hear about these shootings at theatres and things, and it's just a mess... it's horrible," an eyewitness said, referring to other mass shootings across the country. "This guy had this planned."

Several employees at the plant told local media they believed that the shooter had emotional and mental

problems. "Someone said this guy got fired, got upset and just came back and shot people," Marty Pierce, an eyewitness who works at the plant, told KAKE television.

Recent mass shootings in the United States include Saturday's rampage by an Uber driver that left six people dead in Michigan, the December terror attack in San Bernardino, California, that left 14 people dead, and the December 2012 Sandy Hook school massacre that killed 26, including 20 children.

Gun violence claims the lives of about 30,000 Americans every year. In a grim irony, Walton said his department had held a meeting last week on how to deal with an active shooting situation.

"Any place that thinks it can't happen here, wake up," he said. "Because it can happen."

"This is a fairly peaceful community," he added. "And to have something like this happen is tragic."

## Robbers loot

FROM PAGE 16

shops were closed.

He said they were trying to arrest the criminals.

In Chittagong, criminals looted 200 tolas of gold ornaments from Shamim Jewellers at Joraganj in Sitakunda upazila around 9:00pm last night.

Police said eight to nine criminals came in a microbus and looted the ornaments from the shop.

They blasted some homemade bombs, said Mostafizur Rahman, additional superintendent of police (Chittagong South Zone).

Two to three people were injured in the blasts, he said, adding that the injured were given primary treatment.

## 4 'robbers' hurt

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The DB team later recovered some looted goods from a covered van near the factory and sent the four injured to Shaheed Tajuddin Ahmad Medical College Hospital, said Ikbal.

Abdus Salam, resident medical officer at the hospital, said the four injured were brought to the hospital around 5:30am. They were given primary treatment before being referred to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH).

Sources at the DMCH said all the four, receiving treatment under police custody, were hit by bullets in their knee.

SI Atiqur Rahman of Joydebpur Police Station said the factory authorities were preparing a case in this connection.