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109 HELPLINE

A complaint centre or an info hub?

NILIMA JAHAN

The toll-free 24/7 National Helpline Centre for Violence Against Women & Children 109, was introduced in 2012 to receive complaints against various forms of women and children abuse and provide services accordingly.

Initially, the helpline number was 10921 and was changed to 109 in 2017.

Established under the Multi-Sectoral Programme on Violence Against Women of the women and children affair's ministry, it was to give appropriate services to victims of domestic violence, child marriage, sexual harassment, physical abuse, dowry, detention, child custody and more.

However, according to a data analysis, the helpline seems to be restricted to providing information more than giving services.

From January to April 16 this year, 2,68,430 calls were logged. Over 95 percent of them were related to seeking information. In 2023, the figure was 97 percent and the year before, it was 95.

The information they seek range from how to handle violent situations, process of obtaining dowry or alimony, divorce proceedings, reconciling conjugal relationships, etc.

According to 2024 data, among the total calls received, only five percent sought specific services.

Among the five percent, only two percent requested legal assistance and one percent sought police intervention in instances of torture.

Additionally, 0.22 percent calls were made for emergency medical support due to violence, 0.09 percent specifically sought mental health support, and 0.31 percent calls fell under the miscellaneous categories.

Since its inception, the helpline has experienced a significant rise in popularity, now receiving between 5,000 and 6,000 calls daily.

This uptick represents a notable increase from the previous year, when the average volume of daily calls was approximately 4,500 to 5,000.

An analysis of the calls made in the first quarter of this year shows the helpline handled 230,628 calls, with domestic violence being the reason behind 11.48 percent of them.

Data from the helpline authority showed a surge in domestic violence calls – 296 per day, up from 254 calls a day in 2023.

Following domestic violence, physical assault made up for 5.96 percent of calls, while sexual assault accounted for 0.13 percent. Calls made for burn and acid injuries each were less than 0.01 percent, while those regarding child marriage and mental torture were 0.13 percent and 8.47 percent.

The largest category, "others", constituted 73.74 percent of calls, reflecting the helpline's diverse concerns.

In 2023, similar patterns were observed – domestic violence made up 9.71 percent of all calls, physical assault 5.82 percent, and sexual assault 0.16. Mental torture accounted for 7.47 percent, while burn and acid-related cases were each less than 0.01 percent. Calls regarding child marriage was 0.14 percent.

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This small tunnel, built in the British era under a rail line, is key for various businesses in Ashuganj of Brahmanbaria to ship in and ship out goods. The old tunnel is getting damaged every day as heavy and tall trucks use the tunnel and scrape its ceiling. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Relationship with the US now stronger than ever

Says foreign minister

STAFF CORRESPONDENT,
Cox's Bazar

Bangladesh's relationship with the US is now stronger than it ever was in the past, Foreign Minister Hasan Mahmud said yesterday.

He also said the US president wrote a letter to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina immediately after the election. Now, Donald Lu is coming to Bangladesh to take this relationship to greater heights.

The foreign minister said this while replying to a journalist's query before a meeting of the parliamentary standing committee on the foreign ministry at the Office of the Refugee

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Gaza bleeds on as death toll tops 35,000

Israel launches new assault on northern Gaza, ups military pressure on Rafah; donors pledge over \$2b for Gaza

AGENCIES

Israel sent tanks into eastern Jabalia in the northern Gaza Strip early yesterday, after a night of heavy aerial and ground bombardments, as the death toll in the Palestinian enclave exceeded 35,000 people.

More than seven months into the Israel's war on Gaza, UN chief Antonio Guterres urged "an immediate humanitarian ceasefire, the unconditional release of all hostages and an immediate surge in humanitarian aid" into the besieged Gaza Strip.

"But a ceasefire will only be the start," Guterres told a donor conference in Kuwait. "It will be a long road back from the devastation

and trauma of this war." Later the donors pledged over \$2 billion for Gaza at the conference.

As Egyptian, Qatari and US mediation efforts towards a truce appeared to stall, US President Joe Biden said on Saturday a ceasefire could be achieved "tomorrow" if Hamas released the hostages held in Gaza.

AFP correspondents, witnesses and medics said Israeli air strikes pounded parts of northern, central and southern Gaza during the night and into yesterday morning.

The Israeli military said its jets had hit "over 150 terror targets throughout the Gaza Strip" over the past day.

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GOVERNMENT JOBS 7 held over exam fraud

They leaked questions, supplied answers via 'spy devices'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The police have busted a racket that helped candidates with ill intentions to cheat on recruitment tests for various government services.

The gang made deals with job seekers, charging hefty sums in exchange for answers fed directly into their ears from outside the exam halls via "electronic spy devices."

The Detective Branch (DB) on Saturday arrested seven members of the ring who had so far leaked questions for at least nine recruitment tests.

"Depending on the

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Brian Bennett smashes one of his five sixes in his 49-ball 70 in Zimbabwe's eight-wicket win in the fifth and final T20I against Bangladesh at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. The right-handed batter also put away five fours and put together a 75-run stand with skipper Sikandar Raza to guide his side to victory.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

96 constituencies go to polls in 4th phase today

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

A string of high-profile ruling BJP and opposition politicians will be in the fray as millions of Indians cast their votes 96 constituencies across ten states and union territories in the fourth phase of India's marathon Lok Sabha elections today.

The voting begins at 7:00am and ends at 6:00pm with a favourable environment for voting as the met office said the heatwave that was partly blamed for lower voter

turnout in the first three phases of polling will not affect the fourth phase.

In this phase, 17.7 crore eligible voters will seal the electoral fates of 1,717 candidates in EVMs in 1.92 lakh polling stations.

Polling has concluded in the three phases so far in 283 Lok Sabha constituencies across 20 states and union territories out

of the total 543 constituencies. After the seventh and last phase of polling on June 1, the counting of votes is scheduled for June 4.

The parliamentary election is being fought between Prime Minister Narendra Modi seeking a record-equaling third term in office riding on a blend of development, social welfare and an aggressive Hindu nationalism. A multi-party

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Will renew passports of 69,000 Rohingyas

Says home boss after meeting with Saudi delegation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh will renew passports of 69,000 Rohingyas who went to Saudi Arabia after the country's independence with Bangladeshi passports.

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan made the disclosure yesterday after a meeting with a visiting Saudi delegation, led by Saudi Deputy Interior Minister Nasser bin Abdulaziz Al-Daoud. The Saudi government urged Bangladesh to renew the passports.

Talking to reporters after the meeting held at city a hotel, the home minister said some Rohingyas from Bangladesh went to Saudi Arabia after the country's independence.

"We don't know their number. They [Saudi] told us that it is around 69,000. The Saudi Arabian rules state that if they [Rohingyas] don't have passports, they will be sent back. In that case, we had an agreement with the Saudi Arabia authorities that the Rohingyas would not be sent back and their passports would be renewed," the minister said.

Asked why Bangladesh is taking responsibility of 69,000 Rohingyas in Saudi Arabia, the minister said

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