

Domestic workers on the rise worldwide

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

THE number of domestic workers has grown significantly in the past 15 years to more than 52 million, the International Labour Organisation said in a report yesterday.

"From caring for children, to caring for elderly and persons with disabilities, to performing a wide range of household tasks, domestic workers are an indispensable part of the social fabric," Sandra Polaski, ILO's deputy director-general, told AFP during the unveiling of the study yesterday.

Malte Luebker, a senior specialist at the ILO's regional office in the Asia and the Pacific region, said: "Domestic workers create value for the economy by allowing more workers, often with valuable skills, to leave the house and take up paid work."

The study, based on 117 countries and territories, estimated 52.6 million domestic workers worldwide, a group equivalent to the entire working population of Vietnam, and more than four out of five of them are women.

"And the demand for domestic care workers will only grow in the future as societies age," Polaski said.

South and Central America are the regions that have seen the steepest hike in the number of domestic workers over the 15-year period, jumping from 10.4 million in 1995 to 19.6 million in 2010.

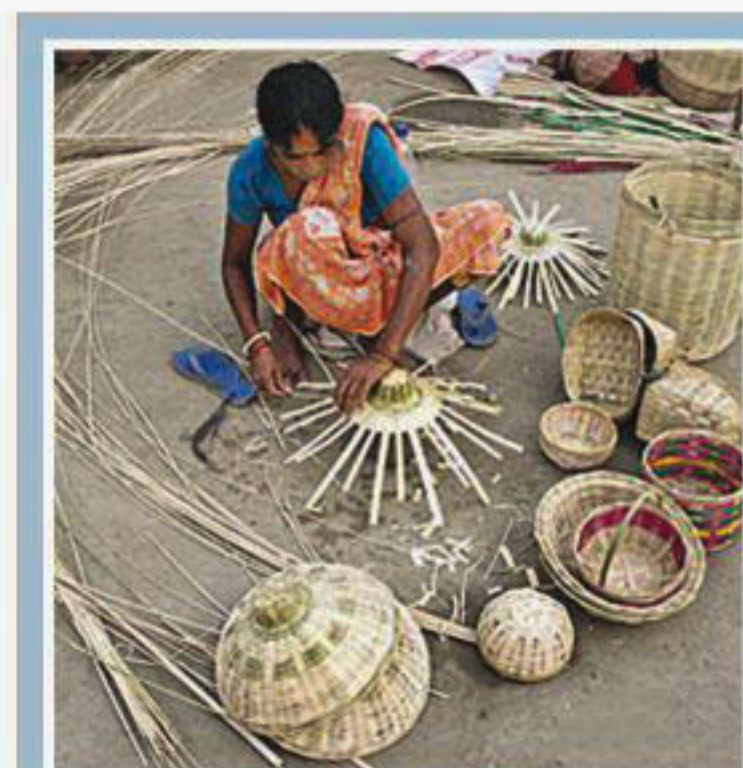
The report said the surge was in large part linked to the rising number of women entering the workforce in a region often lacking other options for child and elderly care.

However, the highest concentration of domestic workers was found in the Asia-Pacific region, despite lagging behind the rest of the world in terms of rights and conditions such as working time, minimum wages and maternity protection.

Only domestic workers in the Middle East (many of whom are migrants from Asia) have weaker legal entitlements.

The study found about 41 per cent -- 21.5 million -- of the world's domestic workers in the region that included Bangladesh.

Within Asia, the greatest numbers of domestic workers are found in India (4.2



The Asia-Pacific region has the highest concentration of domestic workers, who get fewer facilities in terms of rights and conditions than those in the rest of the world.

million), Indonesia (2.4 million) and the Philippines (1.9 million).

Furthermore, one in 13, around 7.8 per cent, of all women with a waged job in the region in 2010 was domestic workers.

Only 3 per cent of Asia's domestic workers are entitled to a weekly day of rest, whereas globally more than half of the domestic workers have this right.

Additionally, only one per cent of domestic workers in Asia-Pacific have statutory limits to their normal maximum weekly working hours; by contrast, more than three-quarters of their counterparts in Latin America enjoy such protection.

Just 12 per cent of domestic workers in Asia-Pacific are covered by statutory

minimum wage legislation; worst only by the Middle East.

In all other regions of the world more than six out of seven domestic workers can expect to be paid at least the minimum wage.

For maternity leave and maternity cash benefits, 76 per cent of Asia Pacific's domestic workers have no entitlement.

By contrast, in Latin America all such workers qualify for maternity leave and a large majority for related benefits.

"Excluding domestic workers from basic labour protection reflects an out-dated view that domestic work is somehow not real work. Domestic workers clearly deserve a better deal," said Luebker.

"Combined with the lack of rights, the extreme dependency on an employer and the isolated and unprotected nature of domestic work can render them vulnerable to exploitation and abuse," Polaski pointed out.

The UN agency, however, stressed that its tally probably underestimated the real numbers, while pointing out the exclusion of some 7.4 million child domestic workers under the age of 15.

It acknowledged that the real number of domestic workers in the world could be closer to 100 million, since such work often goes unreported.

The report's publication follows the adoption of a new ILO Convention and Recommendation on domestic work in June 2011.

These new international standards aim to ensure decent working conditions and pay for domestic workers worldwide.

Three countries -- Mauritius, the Philippines and Uruguay -- have already ratified the Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189), which is due to enter into force in September 2013, while others have begun the process.

"The Convention sets a new global benchmark which countries can use to assess their own legislation," said Yoshiteru Uramoto, ILO's regional director for Asia-Pacific.

"It's very encouraging that some Asian countries, such as Thailand, the Philippines and Singapore, are moving in the right direction with labour reforms. But this report makes it clear that more action is needed, by more countries."

Novoair starts flying



STAR BUSINESS REPORT

PIVATE airline Novoair yesterday launched its flights on three domestic routes with promises of providing better services and highest level of aviation safety.

The carrier initially began its operation with Brazil made two 49-seater Embraer EMB-145 jets on Dhaka to Chittagong, Cox's Bazar and Jessore routes.

Civil Aviation Minister Faruk Khan inaugurated Novoair's debut flight from Dhaka to Chittagong at the domestic terminal of Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport.

Starting from Dhaka, the airline will operate four flights to Chittagong, one flight each to Cox's Bazar and Jessore.

The airliner also plans to start Dhaka-Sylhet flight next month.

Corporate and business travelers now prefer air travel to save time due to poor condition of roads, said Mofizur Rahman, managing director of the airline.

So Novoair wants to ensure on-time departure and passengers' safety and comfort, he said. The fares for a one-way trip to Chittagong will be Tk 4,949 for early bookings and Tk 6,949 for regular bookings.

One-way fare on Dhaka-Cox's Bazar route is Tk 5,728 to Tk 7,728, while a one-way ticket to Jessore will cost Tk 3,000 to Tk 4,500.

Government always encourages and provides support to the private sector to ensure more commercial involvement of them in the aviation sector and give a boost to the country's economy, said the minister.

"We have already reduced all charges at domestic airports to help the local aviation industry flourish," he said, adding: "We are also considering reducing the charges further."

Air traffic has been gradually increasing on local routes in the recent years, as business and industrial activities expanded depending on the booming domestic tourism.

Local airlines carried 6.27 lakh passengers on domestic routes in 2011, up 20 per cent from the previous year, according to data from the Civil Aviation Authority, Bangladesh.

At present, three local carriers -- Biman Bangladesh Airlines, United Airways and Regent Airways -- operate flights to different domestic destinations.

Novoair, which has 12 Bangladeshi and six foreign pilots, may launch international flights by the next three years, Rahman said.

Since the beginning of its journey in 2007, Novoair was engaged in multiple facets of aviation services, like representing China Southern Airline and Tiger Airways, Singapore as general sales agent for Bangladesh.

Indian rail fares to be hiked for first time since 2004

REUTERS, New Delhi

INDIA will raise railway passenger fares for the first time in nine years, snapping a populist trend in order to help mend the finances of a network whose creaky service has become a drag on the economy.

Railways Minister Pawan Kumar Bansal said on Wednesday the fare increase, which comes into effect on January 21, will help generate 66 billion rupees for the cash-strapped system.

The government tried to raise the fares, unchanged since 2004, in March 2011 but protests from a key ally forced Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to abandon the plan and drop his railways minister.

The fare increase ahead of the railway budget release in February signals Singh's intent to push ahead with politically unpalatable but vital reforms to revive an economy that is on track to post its worst growth rate in a decade.

Many Indians still see the railways as a service for the "aam aadmi", or common man, ferrying often-poor migrants left largely on the outside of two decades of surging growth that has seen millions buy cars or travel by air for the first time.

The refusal by successive ministers to raise passenger fares has strained the finances of the railways, sapping its capacity to lay new track, modernise services and improve safety.

Bansal said the fare hike was necessary. "Facilities and safety measures will improve with an increase in fares," he told reporters.

He also said the rail budget in February would not propose a further hike in fares.

A sleeper ticket from New Delhi to Mumbai, about 1,390 km away, can cost as little as about 400 rupees.

Clogged freight lines, slow delivery times and overcrowded ports have dented many companies' competitiveness and slowed the pace at which crucial commodities such as coal are transported, aggravating India's power shortages.

India's economic growth has been stuck below 6 per cent for the past three quarters, hurt by a combination of weak investment and consumer demand.

Time to create a holistic mobile ecosystem

SUNIL DUTT

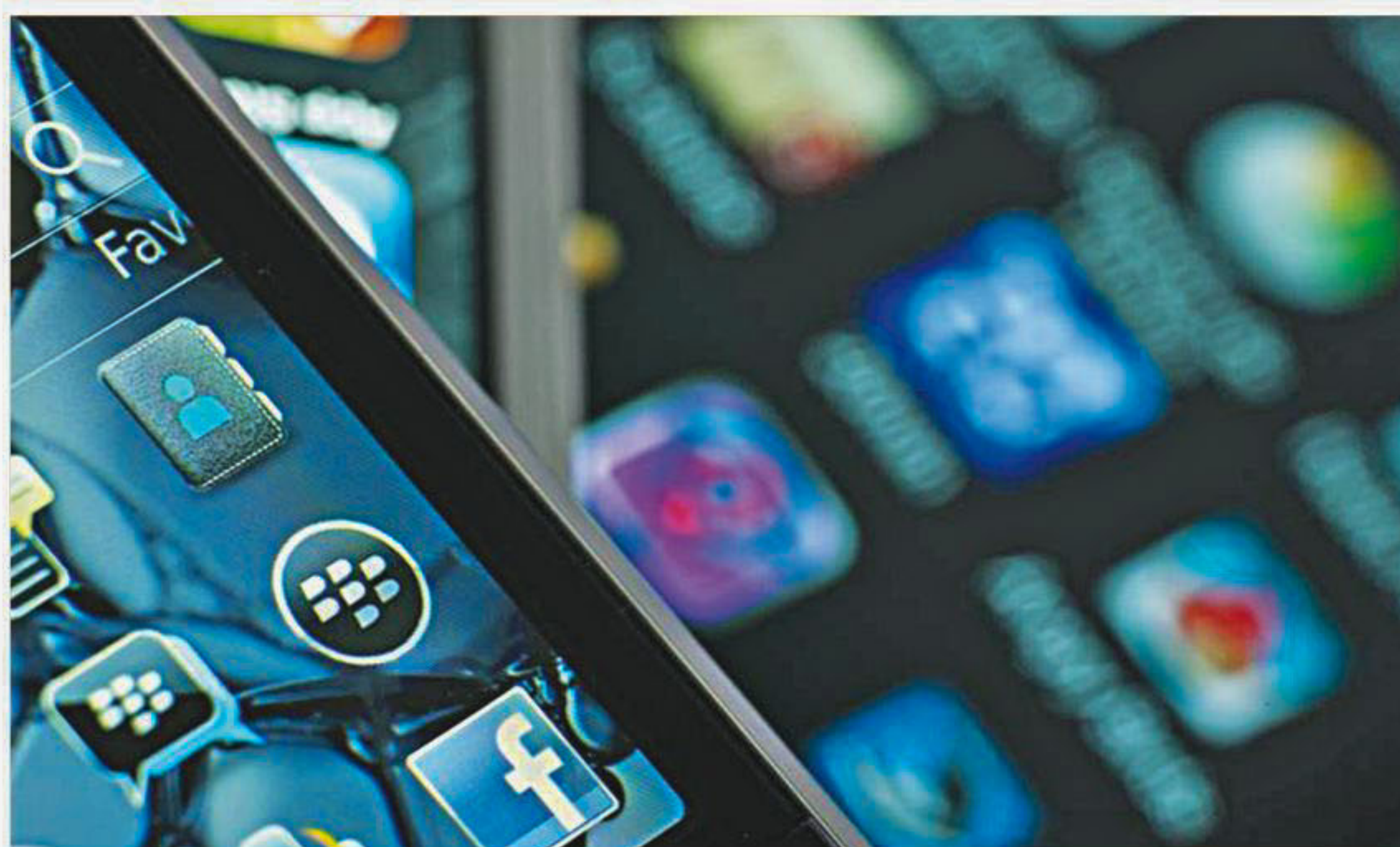
MOBILE phones have transcended various phases of evolution since the time they began their journey. They have come a long way from being simple feature phones, which were meant for making calls and sending text messages.

Mobile phones have evolved to become smartphones -- more intelligent, interactive and capable of doing just about anything and everything that was earlier possible only on a computer.

However, this process of evolution doesn't stop here. As the juggernaut of innovation marches on, it's time for yet another quantum leap in the field of mobile phones. Much has been said and done about powerful processors and hardware specifications, versatile operating systems and killer apps.

Now it's time to emphasise on consolidation of all these and build the most powerful, holistic, all-in-all mobile ecosystem. The idea is to seamlessly integrate all the features to provide an end-to-end environment for the ultimate user experience.

Today, the driving force behind the innovation is the need for an expanded and holistic ecosystem. Technology providers are putting in a chunk of their investment on R&D to amalgamate their products, solutions and services and ensure relevancy in their target market. Further, the cloud, undeniably, is one of the largest paradigms of this decade and



there has been a growing demand for platform-independent cloud services from users.

This is why we have witnessed large-scale technology consolidation over cloud, leading to the empowerment of users who have started operating on the cloud from computers, tablets and smartphones. From being just a storage medium, the cloud has evolved into a much more sophisticated and complex unit which supports large scale applications and solutions. This is a huge opportunity for mobile phone manufacturers and mobility solution providers and they need to capitalize on the full potential of the cloud to build their mobile ecosystem.

One of the most crucial aspects of a mobile ecosystem

should be highly efficient and versatile applications. The present phase of mobility depends a lot on the functionality of platform-agnostic applications. Users are expecting nothing less than cutting edge innovation when it comes to usability of applications and have developed a natural proclivity of opting for those mobile phone brands which can satisfy them on this front.

The key to developing a huge and relevant application bank is winning the trust of app developers and a mobile phone manufacturing company needs to build and nurture a community of such developers or in other words, evangelists. Developer evangelism is all about personal contact, listening, responding, and educating. It is imperative to work very closely with the developer community, expand

on support and programs that make it easy and rewarding for developers to create apps, be in the midst of developers to understand their needs and secure a great developer experience, and identify and remove the barriers that they face in supporting the mobile operating systems.

One of the most exciting stories in the industry today is the rise of HTML5 for mobile applications. Developers everywhere are looking for a solution to the cross-platform problem, and they seem to be landing on HTML5.

Beyond cloud and applications, the trump card for successfully building a mobile ecosystem in industry is the ability of devices to integrate and synchronise with enterprise-class email system that works with corporate email

solutions; a factor which greatly influences the choice made by a tech-savvy prosumer while purchasing the device. Managing mails, calendars, appointments, editing documents and presentations with the ability to share the files with ease is a primary requirement of any professional user and it is expected from a good ecosystem that it will cater to these requirements.

But while doing so, tech-savvy prosumers and their respective employers need to ensure that access to this corporate data is not compromised in any way, even on a user's personal device. Similarly, access to personal data is the prerogative of the individual user only, and needs to be logically and securely partitioned from corporate data.

In addition, a strong tie-up with service providers ensures that users get the maximum output from their smartphones in terms of performance and efficiency. Lucrative data plans, ability to access personal and professional data on a 'when-ever and where-ever' basis, seamless and end-to-end connectivity along with a healthy dosage of fun and entertainment in the form of games, music and videos; all of these consolidated under one unified smartphone 'umbrella' is what will be termed a complete mobile ecosystem.

Sunil Dutt is the managing director for India at Research In Motion (RIM) and is responsible for overseeing and driving overall business strategy and growth for BlackBerry in the region.