



It is alarming that, during the period 2006-2008, there was a dramatic rise in food prices, which continues to rise unabated, resulting in political and socioeconomic calamities in developed and developing countries.

Food prices could double by 2030, crushing the world's poorest people who already spend 80% of their income on food, according to a recent survey, involving 16,000 people in 17 developed and undeveloped countries carried out by Oxfam, Australia's leading agency working with communities around the world in finding a solution to poverty and social injustice.

The average world price for rice rose by 217%, wheat by 136%, maize by 125% and soybeans by 107%. The price of rice surprisingly rose 24 cents

industrialized countries to divert the limited supply of grain such as wheat, maize, soy and rice for the production of biofuels, reducing export of grains for human consumption with the inevitable all-round rise in food prices.

World population increase is the other irrepressible factor. The population now stands at 6.93 billion and it is expected to rise to 7.8 billion by 2050, according to the US Census Bureau.

The Malthus theory of 1798 that the population tended to grow in geometric progression (1, 2, 4, 8 ...), while food production tended to increase in arithmetic proportion (1, 2, 3, 4 ...) cannot be far from reality. It follows that food supplies per head must fall as population increases. Malthus theory seems to be still valid, considering the situation the

Ki-moon announced the setting-up of a task force to handle the global food crisis in order to close the funding gap of the UN's World Food Program (WFP), as it had reached \$755 million. Provision in a sum of \$200 million to boost food production in the worst affected areas, and \$1.7 billion to help countries in need to buy seeds was also made.

According to the Inter-American Development Bank, 26 million Latin Americans are in danger of being thrown into extreme poverty, and the Bank has provided a \$500 million credit line to boost agricultural productivity and anti-poverty programs.

It is really heart-breaking to see that people in developing countries, and even in developed countries, have tightened their belts and changed their eating habits,



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# Soaring food prices irk world leaders as consumers tighten their belts

a pound in April 2008, double the price which prevailed seven months earlier. The World Bank's food price index rose by 15% between October 2010 and January 2011, and it is 29% above the level a year earlier and only 3 % below its 2008 peak.

This steep rise in food prices is mainly due to poor harvests due to unfavourable weather conditions ; droughts to floods in Russia, Pakistan, Europe, North America, Australia and Japan; increased use of biofuel cutting into human consumption of grain; reduction of interest rate by the US Federal Reserve causing an increase in the demand for food and, therefore, the price of food; a similar increase in the demand for food by the fast growing economies of China and India; increased oil prices causing an all-round increase in the cost of food; agricultural subsidies in developed and some developing countries; and the growth of world population outstripping the food supply. To put it in simpler terms, the skyrocketing of food prices is solely due to the fact that the supply of food cannot meet the consumer demand.

Despite the advanced technology in producing high-yielding varieties of seed paddy and other grains, which are highly responsive to fertilizers; increase in cultivable land with irrigation facilities; greater use of nutrients; use of modern farm machinery; disease control and improved transport, it has not been possible to arrest or halt the astronomical rise of food prices.

The most significant contributory factor is the preferences given by highly



world faces today.

It is true that vast advances have been made both in controlling births and increasing the food supply, yet the population outruns the food supply, resulting in an unprecedented rise in food prices we are now confronted with.

The World Bank Group President Robert B Zoellick recently declared that global food prices were rising to dangerous levels, threatening tens and millions of people around the world, adding that the price hike had already pushed millions of people into poverty and put stress on the most vulnerable who spend more than half of their income on food.

The United Nations is urging the richer countries to increase the amounts of financial aid they give to poorer countries. In fact, in 2008, the President of US George Bush Jr ordered \$200 million for emergency food aid to meet to meet the urgent needs of Africa and other affected countries.

Recently, the UN Secretary-General Ban

The Oxfam survey, which was conducted in 17 countries including Australia, Brazil, Germany, Guatemala, India, Kenya, Mexico, Netherlands, Pakistan, the Philippines, Russia, South Africa, Spain, Tanzania, UK and USA, involving 16,000 people, has found that, even in wealthy nations such as US and Germany, and fast developing Brazil, people have changed their eating patterns because of high food prices, and some to keep themselves healthier.

Kenya has had the highest percentage of people changing diets amounting to 75%, and 79% citing high cost of food as the main reason. In India, 59% had cited health reasons for the change - the highest among all countries surveyed. Australia has 62% people who are no longer eating the same foods they did two years ago with 39% who have changed their diet because of rising food prices, and 36% for health considerations.

skipping meals and even excluding fruits and vegetables from their diets. They manage with whatever they have or can afford to buy.

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