

## 'World in grip of food crisis'

Amid a continued global shortage of food supply because of severe droughts in several countries and with grain being diverted to biofuel production, the world is in the grip of a food crisis, WAM news agency reported Monday citing a UAE daily editorial.

'The pressure is visible on the streets already with protests against food prices increasing and governments around the world responding with often counterproductive controls on prices and exports,' the Gulf Today wrote on its editorial Sunday.

To highlight the gravity of the situation, the paper referred to the World Bank warning that some 33 countries could face social unrest because of higher food and energy prices.

Citing examples of violent protests over food prices, the paper said at least four people have been killed in southern Haiti when demonstrations against rising food prices turned into riots recently.

Last week, the paper said, a riot broke out in Cote d' Ivoire over rising food prices leading to one death and injury to about 10 others, forcing President Gbagbo to cancel custom duties and cut taxes on household products.

There have also been reports about riots in other West African countries including Cameroon, Burkina Faso and Senegal.

'The worst drought on record has slashed Australia's exports of wheat. Global wheat stocks are at their lowest levels since 1979. Prices are increasing sharply for some of the most basic foodstuffs traded on international commodity markets. Harvests have been reduced by drought in countries including Canada and Australia, and by a US freeze followed by excessive rain last year,' the paper noted.

It said that China, India and Vietnam have also cut rice exports and Indonesia has reduced import tariffs to protect food supplies and cool inflation.

Harsh weather in producing countries and a boom in demand from fast-developing countries have pushed up prices of staple foods by 80 percent since 2005. Last month, rice prices hit a 19-year high; wheat prices rose to a 28-year high and almost twice the average price of the past 25 years.

'With higher energy prices and demand for biofuels draining maize stocks, no one country can deal with the problem alone, as World Bank president Robert Zoellick has pointed out. A major factor adding to the crisis is unbridled population growth.

'The world's population is expected to top nine billion by the middle of the century. The inconceivable number of mouths to feed will put pressure on a range of resources, including land, water and oil, as well as food supply,' the paper said.

The US Department of Agriculture has predicted that global corn stocks will fall to a 33-year low of just 7.5 weeks of consumption, while global wheat stocks will plunge to their lowest level in at least 47 years at 9.3 weeks.

To tackle the challenge, the paper said, the international community should act collectively. 'Macro problems cannot be handled with micro solutions. One should not forget that spiralling prices are exacerbating hunger and malnutrition. Time is running out,' the paper cautioned.

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