

Al Jazeera March 13, 2008

The UN secretary general has warned that millions of people are at risk of starvation as global food stocks have fallen to their lowest levels for decades.

In a letter to a US newspaper Ban Ki Moon warned that shortages are forcing prices to rise which may have devastating consequences for the world's most vulnerable communities

The most acute effects have been seen in Egypt, where thousands of people have resorted to violence due to shortages of basic food commodities and rising food prices.

At least 10 people have died over the past two weeks, in riots that erupted at government subsidised bakeries.

The unavailability of basic food products such as bread, rice, sugar and cooking oil, coupled with high food prices has led many to protest against the Egyptian government and resort to violent tactics.

National crisis

An Egyptian man said: "People are fighting. Killing for bread, some are even pulling out knives. What is happening? What is this? Famine? "

Another woman, waiting at a government bakery said: "I've been standing here from 7am. Its now 2pm and I can't get hold of even one loaf of bread."

"I have five children. What am I supposed to do? You now need to bribe someone to get bread, if you do not want to get trampled on."

Egypt is one of the world's largest importers of wheat and this year alone spent \$2.6 billion on its wheat-import.

However, soaring food prices has driven many Egyptians to the brink of starvation.

Al Jazeera's Jamal El Shayyal reported from Cairo, that people were demanding drastic measures to be taken and wanted the military to be called in, to solve the food crisis.

An Egyptian waiting in a queue for bread, said: "The army is the only power capable to plant the people's wheat. We want the government to distribute the wheat fairly amongst the poor."

Meanwhile, the Egyptian government has added an additional 15 million names to the register of people who are eligible to receive subsidies on basic products such as sugar, rice and oil, which has compounded the problem.

Egyptians are demanding for the regular availability of basic food products and a cut in the price of essential commodities.

Global phenomena

The shortage of food has now assumed a global dimension; some 73 million people in 78 countries depend on the United Nations World Food Programme (UNWFP).

According to their figures, 1 out of every 80 person relies on somebody else to provide for basic food requirements.

Most of these handouts are taking place in Africa, Asia and Central America, but developed countries are feeling the impact for the first time as well.

Rice, corn, dairy and poultry products are the worst affected commodities, around the globe.

Multiple factors

Marcus Prior, spokesman for the World Food Programme in East Africa said, that there were multiple factors contributing to this global crisis.

‘There are a number of elements that have all come together at the same time,’ he told Al Jazeera.

‘Perhaps, the most important is the rise in global fuel prices, which is having a chain-reaction effect through the food production system. Right from the cost of input such as fertiliser and seeds, through the harvesting and the storage and delivery process.’

Prior said that there has been an enormous increase in the demand from booming economies such as India and China.

‘People there are eating a lot more meat than they used to,’ he said.

The UNWFP said another key factor contributing in the global decrease of productivity was weather irregularities all across the world.

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