'World food production must double to feed Asia'

AFP, *Manila*

World food production must double in 50 years to feed Asia's growing population, the father of the "Green Revolution" told an Asian Development Bank (ADB) conference yesterday.

However the potential for expanding arable land in Asia was limited and "future expansion in food production must come largely from land already in use," said Norman Borlaug, who won the 1970 Nobel peace prize for his role in expanding agricultural production.

"Africa is the biggest food security challenge although hunger is still extensive in Asia and among indigenous people in Latin America," he told the conference at ADB headquarters in Manila.

This is compounded by the limited water resources and the emergence of new crop diseases, Borlaug said, citing a new form of "stem rust" affecting wheat, reported in East Africa in 1999.

"It is only a matter of time before it spreads to Asia," he said, calling for a revival of the international research system to deal with such diseases.

The demand for food, animal feed and fibres in China was likely to double by the middle of the century as the population became larger and wealthier, he said.

Arable land, however, was likely to shrink by 20 percent, he said.

Agriculture in India must also undergo "a major transformation" with changes in cropping patterns and crop management systems, he said, calling for "precision farming practices ... in high potential areas," and efforts towards drought tolerance.

Borlaug called for a twin-track strategy emphasizing both productivity-led agricultural growth and "safety net programmes to assist the chronically hungry".

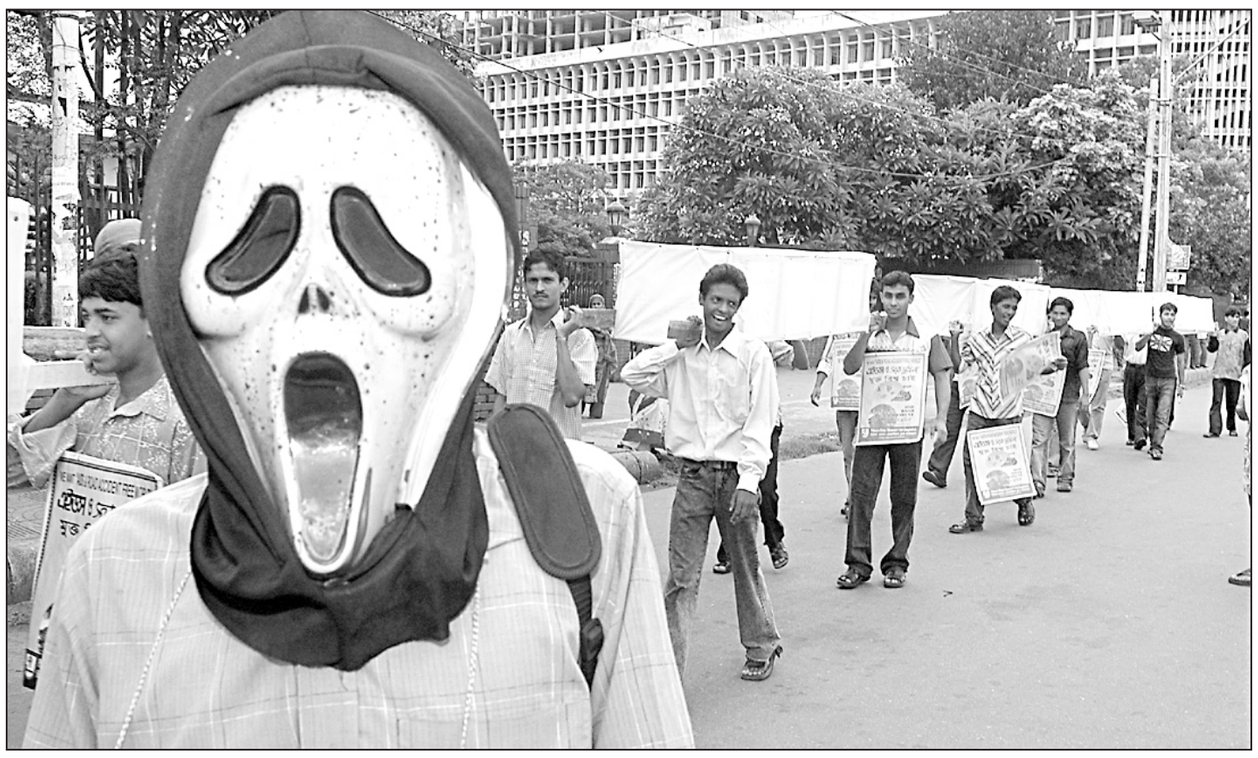

PHOTO: STAR

Carrying symbolic coffins, members of Princess Diana Memorial Club of Bangladesh took out a procession in the city yesterday demanding a world free from AIDS and road accidents.

Subtropic warming could mean bigger deserts

REUTERS, *Washington*

Earth's atmosphere is warming faster over the subtropics than anywhere else, which could mean bigger deserts and more drought from Africa to Australia to the Middle East, researchers said on Thursday.

The fast-heating area girdles the globe at about 30 degrees north and south latitude, crossing the southern United States, southern China and north Africa in the Northern Hemisphere, and southern Australia, South Africa and southern South America in the Southern Hemisphere.

Based on 25 years of satellite data, researchers at the University of Washington also determined that the jet streams -- a pattern of westerly winds that help drive weather in both hemispheres -- have shifted about 70 miles toward their respective poles.

This is important because the jet streams mark the northern and southern boundaries of the tropic climate zones, said John Wallace, an atmospheric scientist and co-author of a research paper in this week's Science journal. The jet streams' shift toward the poles means the zones are expanding.

The research is not predictive, but does show a long-term trend, Wallace said by telephone.

"If (this jet-stream shift) is going to stop and it just ends up being 70 miles, that's not a big deal," he said. "But if it were to continue at the same rate over the next century, then that would amount to a couple of hundred miles and that would start to have significant effects."

ENCROACHING ON THE TEMPERATE ZONE

The dry subtropical climate regions, which contain some of the world's major deserts, could encroach into temperate regions, Wallace said. Areas such as the Mediterranean, southern Europe and the northern part of the Middle East could have a tendency toward more drought, Wallace said.

The same might happen in southern Australia and South Africa, he said.

The study does not address whether this warming is due to the greenhouse effect or some other factor. It is different from previous models, which saw the fastest warming in the tropics, rather than the subtropics.

The greenhouse effect is seen as a major cause for global warming, in which so-called greenhouse gases, especially carbon dioxide, swaddle the Earth like a blanket, keeping the sun's warmth.

Some greenhouse warming is natural, but many scientists believe that accelerated warming over the last century was caused by human activities including coal-burning power plants and the use of other fossil fuels.

Faster subtropical warming in the lower atmosphere, which moves the jet streams, could push storm tracks toward the poles, possibly reducing winter precipitation in places like southern Europe, including the Alps, and southern Australia, the scientists said in a statement.

Pak-Afghan bus service opens after 27 years

AFP, *Peshawar*

Pakistan and Afghanistan resumed bus service yesterday between their two border cities after 27 years, officials said.

A bus carrying 22 passengers left Peshawar, capital of Pakistan's North West Frontier Province, for the Afghan eastern city of Jalalabad.

The trial run of the bus was conducted in March. Authorities said they plan to run three buses from Peshawar and three buses from Jalalabad daily.

The service came at a time when relations between the two neighbouring countries are tense following allegations by Afghan officials that Taliban insurgents are using Pakistani soil to launch attacks across the frontier.