

## Hunger and food waste

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ZULFIQUER AHMED AMIN

HERE are 6.6 billion people in the world, of which 4 billion live in poverty or on the borderline. Close to a billion people are starving today. But the amount of food we produce could feed 12 billion people. In a world of plenty, a huge number go hungry. One of the major causes of hunger is poverty itself, people cannot afford to buy food and hence go hungry.

The Challenge of Hunger Report (2008) finds 33 countries with "alarming" (Hunger Index Score 20.0-29.9) and "extremely alarming" levels (Hunger Index Score >30) of hunger. Another 32 countries come in the bracket of a "serious" hunger situation. When over 9 million people die worldwide each year because of hunger and malnutrition some 1.2 billion, mostly in developed countries, suffer from obesity. Many countries are faced with food shortages and food riots, while other countries throw away food.

In the UK, 6.7 million tonnes of wasted food amounts to £10.2 billion each year. Official surveys indicate that every year more than 350 billion pounds of edible food are available for human consumption in the United States. Of that total,

nearly 100 billion pounds are lost by retailers, restaurants and consumers. According to the US Census Bureau, 35.9 million people live below the poverty line in America.

An estimate from the ministry of food processing says that Rs. 580 billion worth of agriculture food items get wasted in India every year, resulting in artificial demand, price hike and food shortage. How does one explain that 200 million people in India, supplier of 80% of Switzerland's wheat, suffer from malnutrition? Food stocks are piling up in India, and yet the country is home to a fourth of the world's poor and hungry.

In Bangladesh, the same wasting practices are rampant. In any governmental or social ceremony, the continuing insanity of food waste at times masks our true economic position and violates all ethical norms.

In Sweden, families with small children throw out about a quarter of the food they buy, a recent study found. The mass waste of fruit and vegetables is only part of the story, though. The EU's common fisheries policy results in between 40 and 60 percent of fish caught by trawlers being thrown back into the sea dead, because there is no quota trading system in

Iceland.

Grocery stores discard products because of spoilage or minor blemishes. Restaurants throw away what they don't use. And consumers toss out everything from bananas that have turned brown to last week's Chinese leftovers. In 1997, one estimate showed that two years ago, 96.4 billion pounds of the 356 billion pounds of edible food in the United States were never eaten.

Using the food diaries, WRAP in UK estimated that the Britons toss away a third of the food they purchase, adding up to 4.4 million apples, 1.6 million bananas, 1.3 million yoghurt pots, 660,000 eggs, 440,000 ready meals, 1.2 million sausages and 2.8 million tomatoes.

In a globalised food system, where we are all buying food at the same international market place, that means we are taking food out of the mouths of the poor. Buying food that is often wasted reduces overall supply and pushes up the price, making grain less affordable for the poor in other parts of the world.

Rising food prices are having impacts across the world, but especially among poor people in low-income developing countries. Since 2000, a year of low food prices, wheat prices in international markets have more than tripled, corn prices have doubled, and rice prices rose to unprecedented levels in March 2008. According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), its index of food prices in March 2008 was 80 points higher than in March 2007, a rise of 57%.

In 2007, the index rose by 36% over its

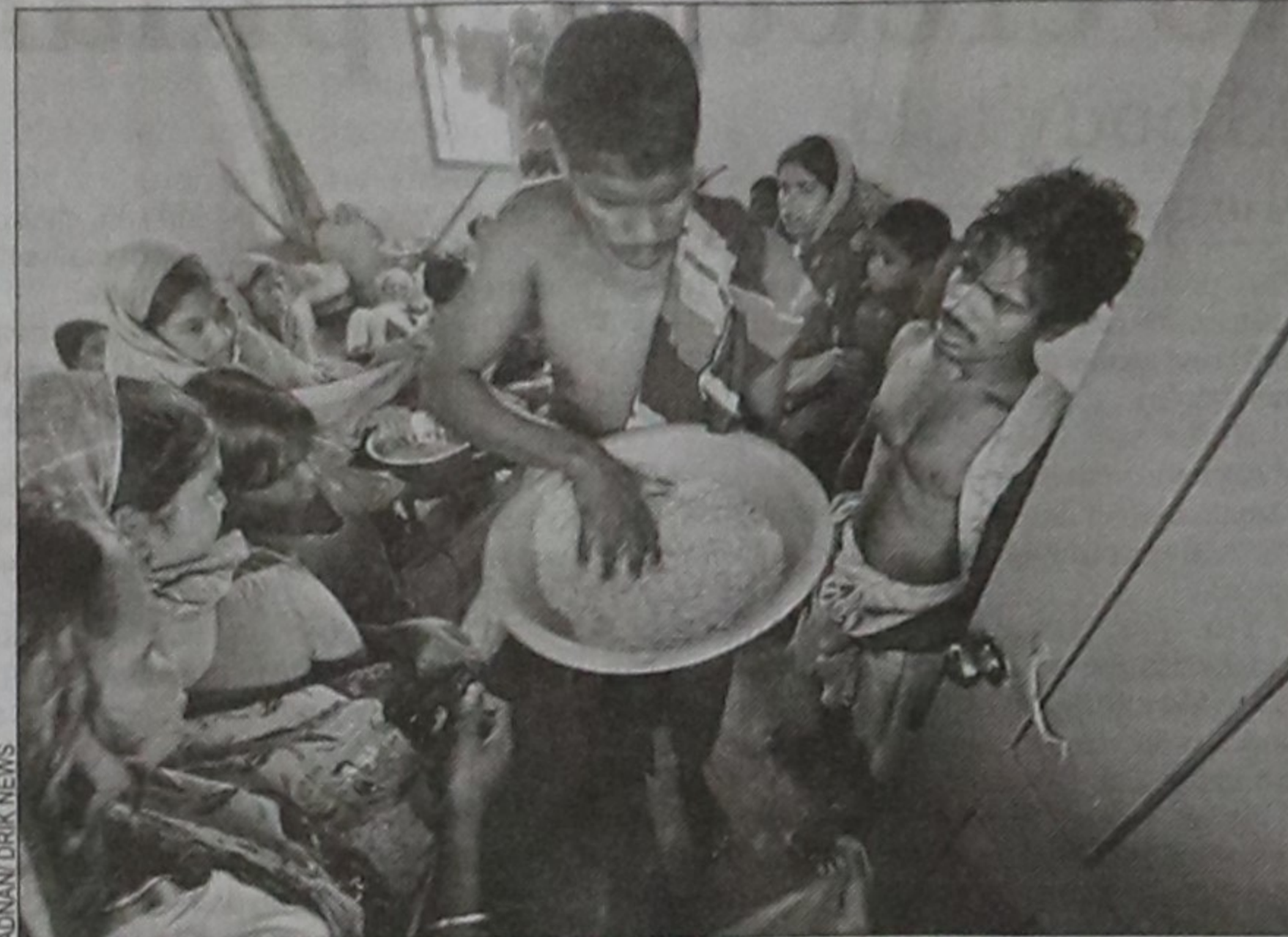
2006 level. Such increases in food prices have raised concerns about the ability of poor people to meet their food and nutrition needs and, in a number of countries, have led to civil unrest. The World Bank has estimated that more than 100 million people are being pushed into poverty as a result of food-price escalation.

One way of dealing with food waste is to reduce its creation. Consumers can reduce their food waste output at point-of-purchase and in their homes by adopting some simple measures; planning when shopping for food is important, spontaneous purchases are shown as being the most wasteful; proper knowledge of food storage prevents foods from becoming inedible.

Every effort should be undertaken to counter supermarket "bogof" (buy one, get one free) offers that encourages shoppers to buy food they do not need and which ends up unused in bins.

There are practical ways to end the glut. Watch your portion sizes and make sure that plates are completely cleared at mealtimes. Householders should start making shopping lists, freeze ingredients and make use of leftovers to ensure they eat up everything. During the Second World War, a government poster proclaimed: "A Clear Plate Means A Clear Conscience." Sixty years on, we should salute the sentiment.

More than enough food is produced to feed the global population. Distribution and access to food are the problems -- many are hungry, while at the same time many over-eat; many waste the food they buy, and all the resources used to grow,



One bowl for so many.

ship and produce the food along with it. We are providing food to take care of not only our necessary consumption but also our wasteful habits. Whereas, merely eliminating the wastage of the millions of tonnes of food that are thrown away annually in the US and UK alone could lift more than a billion people out of hunger.

There are solutions for this issue, but we only lack the zeal, urge, and motivation to adopt them. We have to stand against this kind of egregious loss of resources along the food chain and across the society.

The persistence of a scourge like hun-

ger even today among large sections of the world population, in spite of astronomical distances covered by science and technology, perhaps remains the greatest contradiction and challenge within the contemporary world system. The failure to be food secured is due to human, not natural, foibles. If the losses and wastage go unabated pressure on natural resources will intensify, with millions more to be added to the deaths from starvation.

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## Control the chaos and confusion

The present anarchic communication system in the city has been causing frustration in the citizens, apart from wasting valuable time. The government should pay serious attention to this problem to improve the image of the country.

MOHAMMAD AMJAD HOSSAIN

TIME is an important factor in life. Since I arrived in Dhaka I have been facing serious problems in travelling in the city because of the severe traffic jams. This was not the case in the recent past. I have been spending one to two hours, either in a car or a bus, before reaching the destination. These hours are wasted.

Being a Least Developed Country, Bangladesh depends on foreign investments for economic development. Under the existing archaic traffic system, a foreign investor and spends two hours on the road to reach the Export Promotion Bureau or Board of Investment at Motijheel. The impression he carries back will not be congenial for investment. The communication network plays a vital role in the business sector. If that system is disrupted, business will be hampered.

The present anarchic communication system in the city has been causing frustra-

tion in the citizens, apart from wasting valuable time. The government should pay serious attention to this problem to improve the image of the country. As of now, the government is apathetic to the existing situation.

There are traffic laws in the country. Traffic light posts are installed at different points. Traffic lights are working. At the same time, traffic police are also posted. It is understandable that traffic lights don't work properly because of severe road shedding in the city. When traffic lights are off, traffic police should take care of the movement of the vehicles manually, for which they need proper training.

In the first place, all vehicles should follow traffic lights assiduously. If the traffic is controlled manually, why take the trouble of installing traffic light posts that cause unnecessary expenses from the exchequer?

On the other hand, drivers of all vehicles who enter the cantonment area follow traffic lights. Why don't these



Wasting time, wasting money.

drivers follow the same rule in the other parts of the city? It seems that two traffic rules exist in the same city.

As there is no scope for expansion of roads, flyovers at important junctions, for example Gabtoli and Jatraabari, could be constructed to ease the load of vehicles.

According to one estimate, nearly one hundred thousand people pass through Jatraabari every day. Similarly, hundreds of

vehicles from the southern part of Bangladesh, and also some from India, are arriving at Gabtoli. Traffic jam at these two important junctions cause causing frustration and uneasiness among the travellers.

I recall the efforts made during the BNP rule to phase out unfit vehicles from the roads. To my utter surprise, many old and worn-out vehicles, which cause environ-

mental pollution, are still seen on the roads. They are contributing to the increase of emission, apart from increasing traffic volume. The government should strictly consider phasing out vehicles that are more than 15 years old.

In this context, I would like to point out that the government of West Bengal has begun phasing out 15 years old vehicles by the order of the High Court. A similar exercise needs to be carried out in Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna, and Rajshahi to improve the quality of the environment.

Subway is another option for controlling anarchic traffic. It could be constructed, if feasible, from the airport to Motijheel and from Motijheel to Gabtoli, connecting residential areas to the Secretariat. One week back I read an article in a Bengali daily where the writer gives negative opinions about metro stations, saying that it was a losing concern in Kolkata. I have the experience of travelling by metro rail in London and many parts of US, but I have never heard that metro rail was a losing concern.

Many people, including motorists, are availing of the facilities in metro rails. Motorists leave their cars at metro parking lot, which helps in reducing pressure on the roads. Metro-rails, on the other hand, earn money from rail and parking tickets. If the management could plan

and implement the project relating to metro-rail, there is no question of losing. It is a profitable venture indeed.

It is suggested that traffic laws should be applied to all drivers of all vehicles. There is no point in making laws unless they are implemented. A driver who violates traffic rules three times should have his driving license cancelled.

Drivers should pay a hefty penalty under traffic laws. If necessary, traffic laws should be revised to cope with the existing situation in the country. During office hours, no one should be permitted to drive a car with a single passenger -- like in Singapore -- to ease traffic jam.

At one or two locations "warning signs" for pedestrians to use foot over-bridges came to my notice. Foot over-bridges are not properly utilised by pedestrians. This is highly objectionable and should be subjected to penalty. Traffic weeks may be conducted for bringing traffic laws to the knowledge of pedestrians and drivers of all vehicles.

In view of the persistent traffic jams, the government should consider banning import of vehicles of any type for a period of ten years. These are the few suggestions to improve the anarchic traffic system.

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## Climate week: Don't celebrate too soon

But a signature doesn't cut carbon emissions. Only Senate ratification of a treaty can do that, and on that score we seem to be back in 1997, with a sceptical Congress unlikely to go for a treaty that requires the U.S. to commit to carbon cuts and to bankroll low-carbon technologies in the developing world.

SHARON BEGLEY

THIS is Climate Week here in New York City, so if you have been swept up in the excitement over Hugh Jackman's lending his celebrity to the cause of averting a catastrophic greenhouse effect ("people in developing countries have contributed the least to climate change and are suffering the most from it," he said at Monday's opening ceremony at the New York Public Library), or President Obama's speech at the United Nations Tuesday warning of "irreversible catastrophe" if the nations of the world do not cut carbon emissions, you might feel optimistic that the nations of the world will get their acts together enough to produce a climate treaty to succeed the Kyoto Protocol. Forgive me for being the skunk at this greenhouse-gas-enhanced garden party.

How tough are climate negotiations leading up to the meeting in Copenhagen, whose goal is to produce a binding treaty? Tony Blair, the former British prime minister who has recently worked with the non-profit Climate Group to produce a report on the economic benefits of going low carbon, was painfully blunt. Climate

negotiations, he said, are "at the most difficult end of the spectrum" of such international talks -- and this from someone who "just spent the morning... discussing the Middle East peace negotiations." And then Blair uttered the phrase that I heard from at least four other diplomats this week: "Don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good" when it comes to a climate treaty.

He is probably wise to lower expectations. Those of you with long memories will recall that President Clinton never sent the Kyoto accord to the U.S. Senate for ratification because its chances there were nil because Congress was on record opposing any binding treaty that did not require China, India and other up-and-coming large carbon sources to cut their greenhouse-gas emissions. Kyoto didn't, requiring such cuts only of what it called Annex 1 (wealthy) countries.

Will India and China agree to binding greenhouse cuts this time? Because of geography, topography, and poverty, those two countries (as I wrote in a recent column) stand to suffer more than many others from calamitous climate change. Yet at Monday's Climate Week kickoff, Su Wei, who as China's director-general of

climate change will lead its delegation in Copenhagen, said this: "We need to make sure progress on climate change is based on the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Treaty."

Translation: just as Kyoto did not require China to commit to binding emissions cuts, Copenhagen better not either.

And this: "For success in Copenhagen, developed countries need to provide financing to support developing countries, [and] agree to deeper emissions cuts." Translation: what we want out of Copenhagen is an agreement by which the developed world finances clean energy and climate adaptation in the developing world (which the UN estimates would be \$500 billion to \$600 billion every year for decades).

And this: "I am confident we will achieve an equitable agreement in Copenhagen on the principle of equity." Whenever you hear China talk about "equity" in climate talks, you can safely translate it as "you guys in the rich world caused this problem, so don't expect us to agree to cut our carbon emissions as part of any international treaty."

The only silver lining in this cloud is that China seems willing to make voluntary emissions cuts. But in his Tuesday speech to the U.N., President Hu Jintao vowed only to decrease China's "carbon intensity" -- that is, the amount of carbon dioxide produced per unit of economic output. As economic output rises, therefore, so will CO2.

Jairam Ramesh, India's minister for environment, was only slightly more conciliatory. "It is in our interest to have an agreement in Copenhagen, because we are very vulnerable to climate



Protocol or not, pollution continues.

change," he said. "India will not be found wanting in contributing to the international agreement to limit global temperature increases to 2 degrees C by 2020."

That sounds encouraging, but he, too, made the "we didn't cause this mess" point, saying that India's "per capita emissions will always be less than the

developed world's." (True, though when you have 1 billion capita, total emissions add up: India is now the fifth-largest emitter of carbon from the burning of fossil fuels.) And Ramesh also called for "the beginning of a financial [mechanism] to underwrite [low-carbon] energy technology," which means rich countries subsidising renewables and the like in poor countries.

Whether the U.S. will sign an accord in Copenhagen if it does not require binding emissions cuts from China and India isn't the point. Unless the treaty is truly awful, it's hard to imagine Obama balking on an issue he has made a priority. But a signature doesn't cut carbon emissions. Only Senate ratification of a treaty can do that, and on that score we seem to be back in 1997, with a sceptical Congress unlikely to go for a treaty that requires the U.S. to commit to carbon cuts and to bankroll low-carbon technologies in the developing world. (For a sense of the Senate's mood, check out Sen. Lisa Murkowski's proposal to prohibit the Environmental Protection Agency from regulating carbon-dioxide emissions from anything but "mobile sources" -- that is, no power plants, no factories. Or note that the Senate has no companion bill to the House's Waxman-Markey climate change legislation, though Senator John Kerry said yesterday that he was on the verge of introducing one.) No wonder chief U.S. negotiator Todd Stern said: "We must acknowledge that progress on [climate] negotiations has been slower than we'd like."

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