

World Food Day

More investment will be needed in farm sector

PARIS, Oct 14: As global governments pour trillions into shoring up ailing banks, World Food Day will be marked on Thursday by calls to invest massively in farming to combat burgeoning hunger and a price spiral.

Thursday's World Food Day comes amid a particularly bleak prognosis on the levels of hunger around the world.

Last month, the head of the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) said the number of malnourished people rose by about 75 million to 925 million year-on-year this spring, when food riots erupted worldwide after a rise in prices.

Jacques Diouf also said the number of people affected is likely to top one billion by the end of the year, underlining that the goal of cutting hunger by half by 2015 appeared "even more remote." Diouf also accused world leaders of repeatedly ignoring the FAO's warnings on the food crisis.

According to the FAO, investment in agriculture shrank from 17 per cent of all aid in 1980 to just three per cent in 2006, al-

though the world's population grew by almost 80 million every year during that period.

Meanwhile, in July Diouf also said the production of biofuels was depriving the world of around 100 million tons of cereals that could go to feed the hungry.

Experts have blamed the increase in famine on a number of factors such as oil prices, the growing use of biofuels and increased consumption of high-calorie food, particularly meat, in emerging economies.

Many say it is time the international community refocused on the ongoing food crisis.

"As famine affects almost one billion people, world leaders must reassess the way aid is delivered and channel funds to the neglected food-producing agricultural sector," said Stephane Delpierre from the EU's humanitarian aid office (ECHO).

On Tuesday the former UN Special Rapporteur for the Right to Food, Jean Ziegler, called hunger a "crime against humanity" and protested against the expanded use and production of

biofuels.

He said 358 kilogrammes of maize would have to be burnt to produce bio-fuel to run a car, something "that can keep a Mexican child fed for one year." He also accused the international community of reneging on its promise to cut the number of people suffering from chronic hunger in half by 2015.

"Since 2000 the world's richest countries have not found the \$82 billion needed every year for five years to fulfil its eight goals... such as putting an end to epidemics and hunger," he said.

Last weekend the head of the International Monetary Fund urged the world not to forget the "other crisis" of soaring food prices facing developing countries while it grapples with the global financial meltdown.

With rising food prices pushing millions of people below the poverty line, sparking protests and even riots in some parts of the world this year, World Food Day hopes to divert attention back onto this ongoing crisis. —AFP