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CORRECTION

In the photograph accompanying the article "Manga superheroes to the rescue" (Oct 28), it was captioned that "students Shameer Haijit ... and Phebe Lam, with teacher Evelyn Lem-Koh, showing off the Manga-inspired school bags they designed". The pupils' names should be Shameer Harjit and Phebe Lau. We apologise for the error.

XTRA DIET

EATING GREEN

How that burger, nugget or plate of chicken rice hurts the earth

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THIS month, Al Gore, the Nobel Prize-winning ex-Vice-President of the United States, pleaded with President-elect Barack Obama to "begin an emergency rescue of human civilisation".

The President of the Maldives has floated the radical idea of buying another nation because his beautiful island state might sink beneath the turquoise waves from climate mayhem.

And Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao reminded rich nations of their responsibility to ditch their "unsustainable way of life".

The world's finest brains are struggling to come up with solutions to allow humanity to live a fairly prosperous life without gouging our carbon footprints even deeper on Mother Nature's battered face.

It can be argued that climate change is, at heart, a lifestyle problem. Dr Rajendra Pachauri, the 2007 Nobel prize-winning head of the United Nations inter-governmental panel on climate change, suggested that people living in rich nations should be vegetarian once a week.

"Give up meat for one day (a week) initially, and decrease it from there," Dr Pachauri, who is a vegetarian, told *The Observer* newspaper in September.

He pointed out that if people in rich countries just halved their meat consumption, it would do more to reduce CO₂ emissions than if they halved their car usage.

"The human appetite for animal flesh is a driving force behind virtually every major category of environmental



damage now threatening the human future: Deforestation, erosion, fresh water scarcity, air and water pollution, climate change, biodiversity loss, social injustice, the destabilisation of communities and the spread of disease," the Worldwatch Institute has warned.

It says that each person on the planet eats on average 43kg of meat a year. Americans, the world's most extravagant carnivores, ate double the world's average — about 90.7kg of meat and fish per person per year.

Singaporeans have the dubious distinction of matching the Americans; according to the Agri-Food & Veterinary Authority of Singapore, we ate 90kg of meat and fish per person in 2007. The difference in the numbers is 700 g of roast chicken. Cowabunga!

Do we really want an American reputation of resource profligacy?

Here are some mind-numbing factoids of the devastation wrecked by our addiction to eating animals.

Global warming: A 2006 UN report

concluded that global livestock farming generates roughly one-fifth of global greenhouse gas emissions, more than all of transport combined. Jokes aside, cows belch and fart methane, which is 23 times more poisonous than CO₂, the gas belched by jumbo jets, SUVs, and 18-wheeler trucks. Animal manure generates nitrous oxide, a greenhouse gas that has 296 times the warming effect of CO₂.

Rainforest destruction: Every year, 32 million acres of rainforest — an area the size of England — is destroyed for the meat industry.

Water scarcity: Environmental author John Robbins estimates that it takes about 1,135 litres of water to feed a vegan for a day, while a carnivore consumes about 14 times more.

Ocean depletion: Very tiny ocean fish are turned into animal feed. A *New York Times* report says: "When it comes to farmed fish, there is a net protein loss: it takes three pounds (1.36kg) of fish feed to produce one pound of farmed salmon. This protein pyramid is unsustainable. It threatens the foundation of oceanic life."

So, are Singaporeans willing to give up chicken rice, beef rendang, roast pork and curry fish head permanently?

"No," said Loh Yeow Nguan, a vegan triathlete and education officer of the Vegetarian Society. "To them, no chicken rice is unthinkable. But I think they're willing to reduce it."

He added: "I've noticed a subtle shift in attitudes in the past year — people pay more attention now when we talk of meat reduction to slow down climate change. Three years ago, they would not have listened."

When culinary authority Mark Bittman, who fronts the influential *Minimalist* column in *New York Times* and who describes himself as a "meat-first kind of guy" writes a 996-page vegetarian cookbook, you know attitudes have shifted by a quantum of solace. He's now a "flexitarian" — because "the world is changing in a way that is going to push all of us, reluctantly or not towards being at least semi-vegetarian."

Do a green, effective "Pachauri" sacrifice for Earth; ditch the chicken rice once a week and learn to cook buckwheat noodles with garlicky peanut sauce instead. If being a herbivore seems impossible, aim for green carnivore status.

Anyway, did your frugal great-grandmother ever say you've got to eat meat three times a day? She treated her meat like a very precious condiment, because she knew its real price. We've forgotten.

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