

## Bangladesh battles rat infestation

*by UPI*

DHAKA, Bangladesh -- A once-in-50-years rat infestation predicted in local folklore has struck Bangladesh this year, decimating the crops of tens of thousands of people. The last rat plague hit the Asian country in 1958 and the current one has affected residents in the country's remote Chittagong Hill Tracts, the BBC reported Friday. Crop losses are so alarming international aid workers describe it as a "near-famine situation," the report said. Pransanjit Chakma, a member of the U.N. Development Program, told the BBC people in the region are eating roots to survive but that food source will soon run out. "The rats are much bigger than usual. They eat everything that is fresh and green," he said. Local authorities say the rat population begins to soar when the bamboo forests begin to blossom. The crop, which has not blossomed for decades, began to do so this year. Healthy rodents, feasting on bamboo blossom, can breed up to eight times a year, far higher than normal. The BBC said states in neighboring India also are experiencing a rat problem. India farmers also believe the rodent plague occurs once in 50 years. Chakma warned the rat plague can last three to four years until the population declines.

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