



## Rats spark Bangladesh plague fear

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**Scientists have warned of the possibility of an outbreak of bubonic plague in south-east Bangladesh because of the growing population of rats.**

The rat population has soared in the past year as they feed off the region's bamboo forests, which are blossoming for the first time in decades.

Neighbouring regions in India and Burma have suffered from the same problem.

Bubonic plague, carried by rats, killed millions of Europeans during the Black Death of the 14th Century.

### 'Rat-flood'

Swarms of rats have been terrorising the Chittagong Hill Tracts since they crossed over the border from India in 2007.

They have destroyed the crops of about 130,000 tribal people living in this remote and impoverished region in the far south-east of Bangladesh.

A panel of scientists, sponsored by the United Nations Development Programme, now warns that what is known in Bangladesh as the rat-flood could also result in an outbreak of bubonic plague, unless the rapidly growing rat population is brought under control.

Their report states that there is already an increasing incidence of disease and fever.

They also say many have complained of being bitten by rats, though the scientists say they cannot determine whether the two facts are related.

Bubonic plague is no longer a fatal disease if treated promptly with antibiotics.

The scientists say that the Bangladeshi government should step up support for health centres so they will be ready if an outbreak occurs.

The cause of the trouble is the flowering of the region's huge bamboo forests.

Rodents multiply at an alarming rate because they can breed eight times a year after eating the bamboo blossom - four times more often than normal.

According to local folklore, the flowering of the bamboo, the subsequent surge in rat numbers and the famine that follows occur every 50 years.

Story from BBC NEWS:  
[http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/south\\_asia/7907772.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/south_asia/7907772.stm)

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