

Afghanistan's deadly crop flourishes again

LEVEL ONE - ELEMENTARY

A Discussion

Poor farmers in Afghanistan grow opium poppies to make money. The opium is then processed into heroin and sold to drug addicts around the world.

Do you agree or disagree with these statements:

1. Poor farmers have to make a living. They should be allowed to grow opium poppies.
2. Rich countries should give money to poor farmers so that they can grow other crops.
3. The United Nations should give money to Afghanistan to destroy the opium plants.
4. Drug addiction in the world is not the fault of Afghan farmers.

B Find the answers

Find the answers to these questions in the text:

1. What colour are opium poppy seeds?
2. Why is the village of Singesar famous?
3. When is the harvest season for opium poppies?
4. Who is the leader of Afghanistan's new government?
5. Where will a lot of Afghanistan's opium be sent this year?
6. What was closed down in Kandahar this month?
7. How much does a kilogram of opium cost this year?
8. How much did a kilo of opium cost last year?
9. How much was the opium trade worth to Afghanistan three years ago?
10. Why does opium grow easily in the dry climate of Afghanistan?

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When the war in Afghanistan began last year, Fahzel Rahman went to his cellar and got some tiny yellow seeds. He planted the seeds in his garden. Now he has a garden full of poppy plants. "You'd be stupid not to grow opium," he said, looking at the plants growing out of the dry earth. "If the Americans give us some money, we'll stop planting poppy." Mr Rahman lives in Singesar, a dusty village near the southern desert city of Kandahar. The village is famous because Mullah Mohammed Omar, the Taliban's leader, lived here in the past.

Two years ago Mullah Omar stopped opium production in Afghanistan, which was then the world's largest producer of heroin. "I grew tomatoes and other garden vegetables last year," Mr Rahman said.

United Nations officials last month said that poppy production in Afghanistan fell by 91% last year - from 82,172 hectares to 7,606. But now that the Taliban's rule has ended, farmers all over Afghanistan have begun to plant poppy seeds again.

"I can make \$1,600 from this small poppy field here," Mr Rahman

said, pointing to his small kitchen garden. "If I sell all of the grapes over there, I'll only make a fraction of that," he added. Another opium farmer, Abdul Ali, says the harvest season between May and July is a happy time in Singesar. "We all collect the poppy resin together, including the children. Even women do it, because the crop grows very high and nobody can see their faces. We are pleased to have the money."

Stopping the production of opium is one of the first big tests for Hamid Karzai, leader of Afghanistan's new government. He says he is against drugs and wants all poppy production to stop. But he does not control the whole country, his government does not have much money and people are not afraid of the new police authorities in the same way that they were afraid of the Taliban. United Nations officials think that Afghanistan will produce an enormous opium crop this year.

Mr Karzai's local representatives are doing their best. This month Kandahar's new governor, Gul Agha, closed down the city's opium bazaar. "There is nothing left for us now but to sit and drink tea," said

Shau Ali, 35, sitting on the carpet of his empty shop. "We are very sad because we don't have a job any more. We are asking the government to let us sell our remaining stocks of opium." Mr Ali said a kilogram of opium now costs between \$2,200 and \$2,700, down from last year's price of \$3,300 when there was no prospect of a new crop this year.

Gul Agha knows that if he tells his officials to dig up the poppy fields, he will be very unpopular with the farmers. They have already planted this year's crop so it is too late to change the situation. Now that the Taliban are gone, it will be difficult to stop the production of opium in Afghanistan. Three years ago, the opium trade was worth \$98m to Afghanistan's farmers. Most of the people who buy the opium are rich businessmen from Iran and Pakistan.

Opium has grown in Afghanistan since the time of Alexander the Great. It needs little water and grows easily in the dry climate. Not many people believe that Mr Karzai can stop its production.

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C True or false

TRUE FALSE

- | | | |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Opium poppy production rose by 91% in Afghanistan last year. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. Opium production was banned by the Taliban. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. Grapes are more profitable than opium poppies. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. Hamid Karzai, the leader of the new government, wants to continue opium production. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. People are afraid of the new police authorities. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. Opium is cheaper this year than it was last year. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. Most of the opium is bought by rich businessmen from Iran and Pakistan. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8. Most people believe Mr Karzai can stop opium production. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

D Vocabulary work

Find the words that mean:

1. A small room under the house, usually used for storing things.
2. The opposite of 'clever' or 'intelligent'.
3. Covered in dust.
4. 10,000 square metres.
5. A small part of something (for example, a quarter or a tenth).
6. The time of year when crops are collected (fruit, vegetables and so on)
7. Frightened.
8. Very big.
9. A market in Arabic and other Middle Eastern countries.
10. Not popular.

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E Prepositions

Fill the gaps using a preposition:

1. The farmer planted the seeds _____ in his garden.
2. The garden is full _____ poppy plants.
3. Afghanistan is the world's largest producer _____ heroin.
4. Poppy production fell _____ 91% last year.
5. The harvest season _____ May and July is a happy time.
6. People are not afraid _____ the new police authorities.
7. A lot of the opium will be sent _____ Europe.
8. The governor will be very unpopular _____ the farmers.
9. Opium has grown in Afghanistan _____ many years.
10. It grew _____ the Russian invasion.

Discussion

Should poor Afghan farmers be allowed to grow opium poppies to make money?

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Key

B

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. Yellow | 6. The opium bazaar |
| 2. It was the home of Mullah Omar | 7. Between \$2,200 and £2,700 |
| 3. Between May and July | 8. \$3,300 |
| 4. Hamid Karzai | 9. \$98m |
| 5. To Britain and the rest of Europe | 10. It needs little water |

C 1. false 2. true 3. false 4. false 5. false 6. true 7. true 8. false

D 1. cellar 2. stupid 3. dusty 4. a hectare 5. a fraction 6. harvest 7. afraid 8. enormous
9. a bazaar 10. unpopular

E 1. in 2. of 3. of 4. by 5. between 6. of 7. to 8. with 9. for 10. during
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