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Myanmar's opium cultivation up: UN

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The area of Myanmar under opium poppy cultivation increased 13% this year compared to 2012 to reach 57,800 hectares, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) said Wednesday.

"The best estimate for 2013 opium production in Myanmar alone is some 870 tonnes," said Yury Fedotov, UNODC executive director, in its annual update on opium production in the Golden Triangle - the area where the borders of Laos, Myanmar and Thailand meet.

Last year, Myanmar produced an estimated 690 tonnes of opium, compared with 41 tonnes in Laos and 3 tonnes in Thailand.

"This year's Southeast Asia Opium Survey shows that despite eradication efforts, opium poppy cultivation in the region

continues to increase," Fedotov said.

Myanmar was the world's largest source of opium and its derivative heroin in the early 1990s but is now ranked second after Afghanistan.

After significant decreases in opium cultivation in the region between 1998 and 2005, when UNODC and local governments initiated crop-substitution and eradication programmes with some initial successes, cultivation of the crop has increased annually since 2006, the report said.

"Opium poppy cultivation in Myanmar increased from 21,600 hectares in 2006, the year with the lowest level of cultivation, to 57,800 hectares in 2013," it said.

In Laos, cultivation increased from 1,500 hectares in 2006 to 6,800 hectares last year. Thailand's opium cultivation areas has generally remained small and stable, although there was a 27% jump this year when some 265 hectares were grown compared with 209 hectares in 2012.

Seizures of heroin in East and Southeast Asia reached 9 tonnes last year, compared with 6.5 tonnes in 2010.

UNODC said the rises in production and seizures demonstrated the need to increase alternative development projects in the region. "There is a strong link between poverty and poppy cultivation," the UNODC report said.

"In poppy-growing villages in Myanmar, significantly higher proportions of households are in debt and are exposed to food insecurity than in non-poppy-growing villages."

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