



**BANGKOK:** In this April 7, 2017 photo, people eat noodles at a street food shop during lunch on Thonglor road. — AP

# BANGKOK SIDEWALKS GET LESS SPICY AS FOOD CARTS REMOVED

## POOR BEAR BRUNT OF JUNTA-BACKED CAMPAIGNS

**BANGKOK:** Efforts by authorities in military-ruled Thailand to impose order on the chaotic capital city have a fresh target: cheap and tasty pad thai. The latest crackdown by Bangkok city officials is going after the vendors whose carts sell everything from Thailand's signature noodles to spicy tom yum goong soup have become institutions on the capital's hot and humid sidewalks. The stalls with their metal folding tables and rickety plastic stools serve as a gastronomic go-to for budget-conscious locals and adventurous tourists alike.

"Street food is a big part of daily life," said Nont Nontiskul, 29, a stockbroker who has lived in the city's trendy Thonglor area for more than a decade. "Even people who eat at pricy restaurants every day can't avoid street food. It's faster, tastes better, and costs less than half the price."

Officials see street food as an illegal nuisance and have warned hawkers in Thonglor to clear out by Monday. They've said the evictions soon will expand to other neighborhoods. Officials have been emboldened by the military junta that has ruled the country since a 2014 coup and has stressed the need to clean up Thai society, whether it is corrupt politicians or crowded footpaths.

That has led to sometimes ham-fisted crackdowns on everything from street markets to beach umbrellas to overpriced lottery tickets. Observers say the poor, many of whom were supporters of the ousted government and its populist policies, have borne the brunt of many of the junta-backed campaigns and that the clean sidewalk effort will hit the vendors and their working-class customers hardest.

Thai crackdowns on corruption, prostitution, pollution, road safety and what-have-you - even those by the junta - are notoriously ephemeral, but officials are talking tough. Boontham Huiprasert, a Bangkok district chief tasked with clearing out the sidewalks under his jurisdiction, said street food vendors are being evicted to fight traffic congestion and the accumulations of garbage. About 90 Thonglor vendors and their carts will have to leave by Monday, after which the crackdowns will expand to neighboring streets, Boontham said. Violators could be fined up to 2,000 baht (\$57). "Just don't sell on the sidewalks," Boontham said. "People who sell stuff on the sidewalks, they don't pay rent. There are so many out there now, so we have to organize society."

### Payoffs

In fact, the food sellers say they do pay rent in the form of small monthly under-the-table payments to city officials. It's an open secret that Bangkok's sprawling shadow economy is made possible by payoffs to powerful figures, often with ties to police or the military. Boontham said he was unaware of any payoffs and that it was not official practice.

Suchin Wannasutr has been selling khao kha moo - stewed pork leg - for 40 baht (\$1.15) a plate on Thonglor's sidewalks for more than 20 years. The 47-year-old said he has been diligent about keeping up his monthly payoffs of 1,000 baht (\$28.60), which is the same sum neighboring vendors say they have been charged. He is now preparing to open a real restaurant, about 1.5 km away from his sidewalk spot. He will share the rent of 35,000 baht (\$1,000) a month with three fellow street vendors. "I have to stay in the area because I have regular customers here," Suchin said. "I'm doing whatever I can just to send my kid through school. Once she graduates, I will move out of Bangkok. It's tough here."

Critics say the government needs to do more to help vendors and to help preserve some of the unique chaos that gives Bangkok its soul, which is rapidly being lost to government regulations and redevelopment for condos, shopping malls and office towers. If the campaign against street food sticks, tourists will no longer stumble upon fried worms, grilled pork intestines or the legendarily smelly fruit durian. And it's unlikely the hip bars and fancy restaurants will be handing out food in plastic bags sealed tight with a knotted rubber band.

"I feel like I am losing my job and I have no idea what to do next," said 39-year old Ubolwattana Mingkwan, who sells coffee for 30 baht (85 cents) a cup. "I can't afford to pay Thonglor's rent prices." "I've asked city officials for help and understanding," she said. "All they say now is 'No, no, no.' They said they've already received their orders." — AP

## STRONG US DOLLAR A THREAT TO TRUMP CAMPAIGN PLEDGES

**WASHINGTON:** US President Donald Trump takes credit for revitalizing the US economy even though he has not yet been in office for 100 days. But the new president's boasts of breathing life into the world's biggest markets may come with an unwelcome corollary: A rising dollar and the Trump campaign promises it threatens. Trump acknowledged as much this week in a Wall Street Journal interview. "I think our dollar is getting too strong and partially that's my fault because people have confidence in me," he said. "That will hurt ultimately."

Since his shock rise to the White House, major indicators have continued to portray an economy in increasingly good health. Consumer sentiment and Wall Street have both hit successive records, boosted by Trump's promises of tax cuts, infrastructure spending and slashed regulation. As a result, investors have pumped cash into American equities markets, driving up a dollar which had already been on the rise. It is up more than six percent against a basket of six major currencies in the last year. "The dollar is high because the US economy is a stronger performer right now than any other advanced economy," said Barry Bosworth, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution.

### Contradicting a core message

Trump cannot claim credit for all of this. By hiking its benchmark interest rates twice since December, the Federal Reserve has also bolstered the dollar by tightening the flow of credit and enticing investors with the prospect of higher returns. To be sure, a strong dollar is not all bad: It lowers import prices while also supporting access to lower-cost credit by supporting the inbound flow of cash.

On the other hand, it hurts American exports and directly threatens Trump's campaign pledge to correct the US trade deficit, particularly in the manufacturing sector, which has withered from Chinese and Mexican competition. "There's a contradiction that goes back to one of the core messages of his campaign," said Nathan Sheets, who served as undersecretary for international affairs at the US Treasury under former president Barack Obama.

Eswar Prasad, a professor at Cornell University, said Trump was acknowledging he had arrived at a certain impasse. "Mr Trump seems to recognize the economic reality that a stronger dollar will make it harder to achieve some of his policy objectives," he said. Since the mid-1990s, the United States has consistently defended a strong dollar policy, saying it stood for a robust, attractive economy.

But with one eye on the colossal US trade deficit, Trump sees things a little differently. "Look, there are some very good things about a strong dollar, but usually speaking the best thing about it is that it sounds good," he told The Journal. Still, Trump has only narrow room to maneuver. His remarks on the dollar sparked a selloff against the euro but such a strategy is unsustainable. "Comments by presidents and finance ministers about exchange rate have a very short life expectancy," said Bosworth of Brookings. — AFP

## ABK ANNOUNCES WINNERS OF 50TH WEEKLY DRAWS

**KUWAIT:** Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) held its 50th 'Double Your Salary' weekly draw on April 11, 2017 at the Bank's Head Office in the presence of a representative from the Ministry of Commerce, announcing the names of the winners for this week. The promotion includes weekly draws, with two winners per draw. The campaign will run until June 27, 2017.

### The winners of this week were:

- 1) Yousef Ali Hasan Al-Qedheeb, Salmiya Branch
- 2) Jassim Ahmad Jassim Al-Shatti, Salmiya Branch

New customers who transfer their salary to ABK receive KD 100 and will automatically be entered into the weekly draws to double their salaries. Existing customers who are already transferring their salary to ABK are entered into a separate draw. The next 'Double Your Salary' draw will be held on 18th April, 2017 where two new lucky winners will

be announced. All winners will be contacted personally and a weekly announcement will be made through the media with the winners' names.

