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Headline: Street sellers struggle as Hanoi sweats through heat wave

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HANOI: Covered from head to toe to keep herself cool, Vu Thi Phuong pushes a trolley of coffee, lime juice and ice around Hanoi in the burning sun.

Thousands of street vendors, mostly women, in Vietnam's capital have had no choice but to work through a series of heat waves that have struck the north of the country in recent weeks.

Scientists say global warming is exacerbating adverse weather, and Vietnam is just one of many countries across South and Southeast Asia to have suffered record temperatures in recent weeks.

"Sometimes I just want to faint in the middle of the street. If the weather forecaster says it's 38 degrees Celsius, the temperature in the road feels even higher," Phuong said, sweat dripping off her nose.

In early May, Vietnam reported its highest-ever temperature — 44.1 degrees Celsius (111.38 degrees Fahrenheit) — prompting a warning from health officials to avoid the heat as much as possible.

As the temperature hit 38 degrees Celsius on Thursday, Hanoi's old quarter — usually buzzing with motorbikes, tourists and noodle sellers — was calm.

But for those like Phuong, whose livelihood is earned on the street, the advice is impossible to follow.

"I rest for about five minutes, then I have to continue," Phuong said. "It's not easy pushing this trolley in the heat, but I keep trying my best."

At a nearby corner, fruit seller Nguyen Thi Vinh, 60, complained of reduced profits.

"I don't sell much during hot days like this because people don't go out," she said.

A day earlier Vinh's income was down by a third, not helped by a lack of refreshing options to offer her customers.

"I would have sold more if I'd had some oranges," Vinh said from behind two baskets of custard apples and mangosteens.

Another vendor had opted to sell watermelon, but trade was still slow as she stood by her cart, a conical hat and two tiny fans around her neck keeping the worst of the heat at bay.

A 2021 environment ministry report said life in Hanoi had been seriously impacted by the urban heat island effect, a common environmental problem in which the air temperature in metropolitan areas is significantly higher than in suburban ones.

Overpopulation, increasing construction work and a high number of vehicles are partly to blame, it added.

The intense heat also impacts the flower sellers who navigate Hanoi's small alleys on bicycles, with buckets of roses, daisies or lotuses secured to the back.

"It's not easy to keep the flowers fresh on an extremely hot day," Tran Thi Hoa told Agence France-Presse (AFP), explaining that she switches to lilies, which can survive relatively well when the temperature is high.

"Hot or cold, life has always been a struggle. But I am not in a position to give up," said Hoa while dousing her flowers with water from a small bottle.