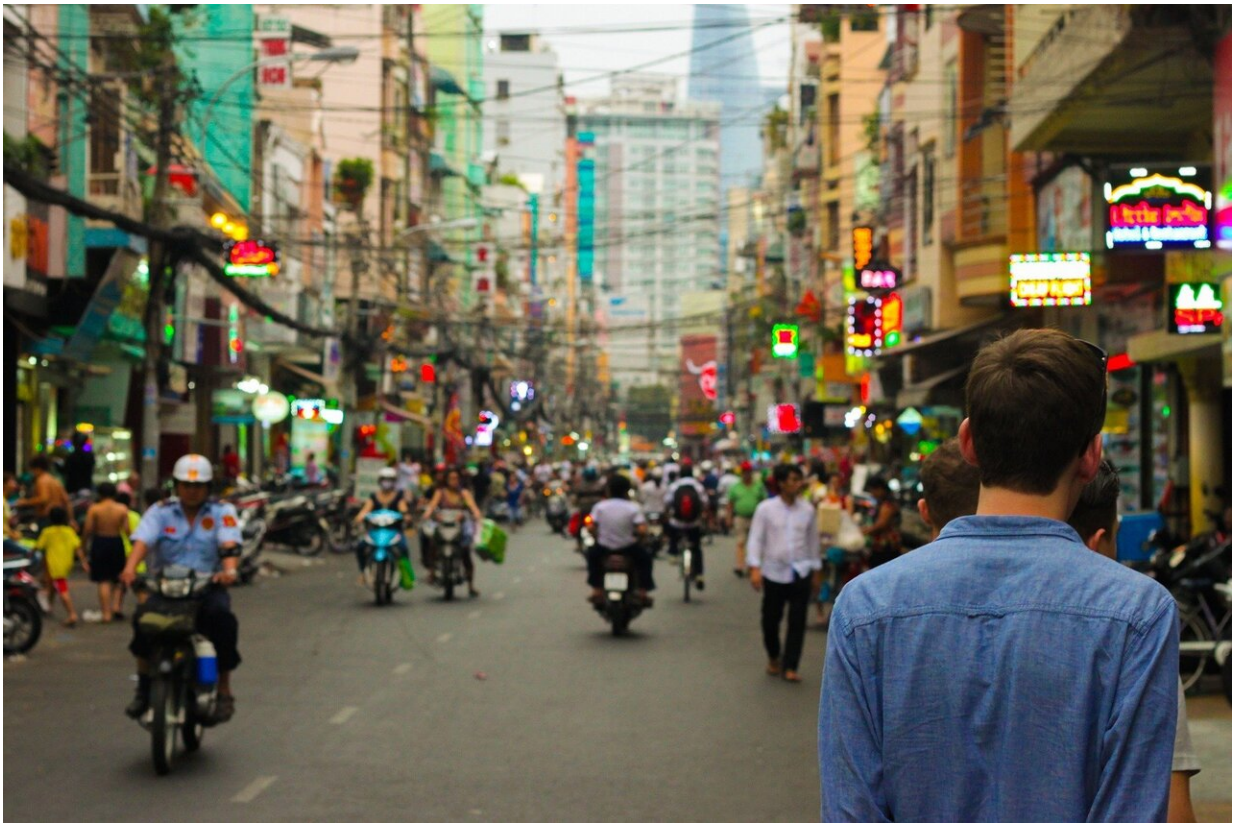


# Upbeat Chinese FM says virus control efforts 'are working'

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China's efforts to control the deadly outbreak of a new coronavirus "are working", Beijing's top diplomat said Thursday, attributing an easing in new cases to his country's "forceful action" against the illness.

Speaking in Laos after talks with peers from the 10 Southeast Asian (ASEAN) countries, Wang Yi said the outbreak was "controllable and curable" despite the global panic it has seeded.

"China is not only protecting its own people but also the rest of the world," he told the summit in Vientiane, referencing a recent sharp drop in new cases of the virus inside China, where it has killed more than 2,100 people.

The hastily-convened summit with ASEAN neighbours comes as a region dependent on the flow of Chinese goods and tourists faces a steep bill following restrictions on movement from China.

A similar meeting was held in 2003 following the outbreak of SARS.

Originating in the central Chinese city of Wuhan, the new coronavirus—known as COVID-19—has infected more than 74,000 people inside China.

The government has locked down tens of millions of people in several virus-hit cities, extended Lunar New Year holidays and pulled flights in a scramble to contain the virus.

Still the health scare has cascaded across Southeast Asia, with cases recorded in the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

The Philippines, Singapore and Vietnam have restricted flights from mainland China and suspended visa-free arrivals as health screening ramps up at entry points.

Thailand, which has imposed no such restrictions, reported a 90 percent slump in arrivals from the mainland this month, a gut punch to an already beleaguered tourist sector which makes up nearly a fifth of the

economy.

Thailand anticipates a loss of more than \$8 billion by year's end from the tourist tail-off.

In Laos, Beijing will be eager to "project regional solidarity with its anti-pandemic efforts" a Southeast Asian diplomat told AFP, declining to be named.

China sees ASEAN as its backyard and has ramped up economic, diplomatic and cultural influence over recent years with billions of dollars of investment, tourist outflows and a bigger presence at regional summits.

There are fears prolonged disruption by the virus could slow work on the massive China-backed "Belt and Road" infrastructure schemes which criss-cross ASEAN.

Philippine Foreign Minister Teodoro Locsin Jr thanked China for its "unprecedented domestic measures and quick action"—apparently referring to the lockdowns of several large cities as the virus billowed out.

But he recognised the "massively detrimental" economic impact of the disease, which has constricted [global trade](#) and tourism vital to many Southeast Asian economies.

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