



The peaceful rise of China

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The Chinese are fond of new slogans. Mao had his "Let a hundred flowers bloom, let a hundred thoughts flourish", Deng had his "Four Modernisations" and Jiang Zemin "the Three Represents". Hu Jintao and his Fourth Generation colleagues coined a new slogan: "The Peaceful Rise of China."

In April 2004, Xinhua News Agency explained: "The 'Peaceful Rise' notion indicates China has chosen an unprecedented development(al) road different from one ever walked by other countries that rose in the last few centuries."

During the annual Bo'ao Asia forum held in Hainan province in 2004, Chinese President Hu Jintao used the word 'peace' 11 times in his inaugural speech. According to Xinhua News Agency, it was a way to answer "the people who may be truly worried for genuine reasons and those who may just want to advocate (the) 'China threat' for other motives."

Do not worry about the 'rise', says Beijing: "It will take time for China to be a real big power." It would take China 40-50 years to reach the level of development of the United States. Beijing believes that the 'China threat theory' was started in the US "to make sure no one can challenge [US] dominance in the 21st century."

However, for us in India, this 'peaceful rise' sounds like a new avatar of the Panchsheel policy: "The idea that the world, including other major countries, can live side by side with a rising giant as a peaceful

partner to do business with, not a big bully for others to contain or fear for."

The trigger to the new Chinese slogan was probably a report 'Indo-US Military Relations: Expectations and Perceptions' commissioned by the Pentagon and released in early 2004. According to the department of defence analysts, the US and India should be forging a long-term defence and security alliance aimed at containing China: "China represents the most significant threat to both countries' security in the future as well as an economic and military competitor."

During the annual session of the National People's Congress, Chinese Finance Minister Jin Renqing presented his Ministry's budget. He announced that he proposed to raise military spending in 2005 to 244.65 billion yuan (\$29.5 billion). This represents a 12.6 per cent increase over the previous year.

Over the last 15 years, most of China's 'official' military budgets have increased by double digits. In 2001 and 2002, defence spending rose by some 17 per cent.

Furthermore, if one is to believe the CIA, China's 'official' military budget is "less than half of China's actual defence spending". Some defence analysts consider that China's actual defence spending could be up to three times more than its 'official' figure. They state that Beijing does not include new arms purchases as well as research and development in new weaponry.

For India, the most important aspect of China's hidden budget is the railway line to Lhasa which will tremendously improve of China's capacity in case of a conflict with India. The Chinese openly declared that the railway was meant to 'strengthen their borders'.

In a white paper on defence published in December 2004, China had explained that the on-going military modernisation was aimed at

squashing "Taiwan independence forces". Already at that time, Beijing made clear that any attempt at independence would be dealt with militarily: "Should the Taiwan authorities go so far as to make a reckless attempt that constitutes a major incident of Taiwan independence, the Chinese people and armed forces will resolutely and thoroughly crush it at any cost." For Beijing, it was China's "sacred responsibility to stop Taiwan independence forces from splitting the country".

Since then, China has passed a legislation to officially authorise the Beijing Government to use force. Xinhua explained that the law is meant for "achieving national reunification through peaceful means, and taking non-peaceful means to stop Taiwan's secession from China by the 'Taiwan independence' secessionist forces". So much for the 'peaceful rise of China'.

During the same period, India had only a very marginal hike in its defence budget. Defence analyst Air Commodore Jasjit Singh commented: "The budget at Rs 83,000 crore for the next year represents an increase of 7.8 per cent over the current year. In turn, this translates into a reduction of defence expenditure as a proportion of the GDP in the current year from 2.5 per cent to an estimated 2.4 per cent for the next year."

Most of the increase will be absorbed by social sector spending commitments. It will translate into a minimal increase for overdue modernisation. Air Commodore Singh explained the budget allocation "was worrisome for the simple reason that it fails to address the crucial issue of defence modernisation adequately. For nearly two decades, (it) has been stagnating with weapons systems completing useful operational life without replacement".

With the return of the Panchsheel mood in New Delhi, nobody cares

too much about China's 'rise'. The PMO is said to have circulated a non-paper prepared by the National Security Advisor for a pre-budget Cabinet meeting. It claimed that, as relations with China and Pakistan were on 'even keel', threats to India's security were reduced and, therefore, higher defence spending could be provocative.

As Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao's visit to India approaches, 'friendship with China' indeed seems to deepen everyday.

Premier Wen declared during a press conference: "China and India are not rivals but friends. Both countries shall work together to tap the potential of bilateral cooperation and find a 'fair, reasonable and mutually acceptable plan' to solve the border dispute."

The 700 reporters attending the conference applauded in unison. Touched by the applause, he told the journalists: "I hope you can send my message back to the great Indian people, that we're not competitors, we are friends." And he recited a Sanskrit sloka: "May we not hate anyone. Let there be peace, let there be peace, let there be peace!"

The message about the 'peaceful rise of China' has been conveyed, particularly in Europe, where the EU is very keen to lift the arms embargo clamped on China after the 1989 Tiananmen massacre.

The day after the announcement of the budget, the spokesperson of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs could not even understand a journalist's question when the latter asked if there was any link between the military budget increase, the anti-cessation law and the lifting of the embargo.

In India, the media is happily biting the bait of Premier Wen's 'peaceful' words. As for the border issue, he wanted "a fair reasonable solution that is acceptable to both sides. It should also be found on the basis of equal-consultations, mutual understanding and mutual

accommodation, respect for history and accommodation of reality."

But while drafting the 'guiding principles' to solve the vexed issue, the Chinese side insisted to get 'back' parts of Arunachal Pradesh, more particularly the Tawang area. Can this be considered as a fair and peaceful solution?

In the meantime, New Delhi is creating more confusion by reviving the Joint Working Group, which according to agency reports "will discuss the issue of exchanging maps on the critical Western Sector, where 38,000 sq. km area in Aksai Chin is under Chinese occupation. If agreed, this will be a big stride forward."

After former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's 2003 visit to China, it was decided that the special representatives would look into the border issue. So why should a dual mechanism be set up? Why so many cooks?

More worrisome is the railway line which will be reaching Lhasa in two years. Is this different to the massive building of roads in Tibet in the 1950's undertaken 'to liberate Tibet and protect China's Western borders'? Let there be peace! Om Shanti!