

Xi's 'new era' plan reveals Dragon's global ambition

Chinese President Xi Jinping's "Socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era" was elucidated at the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China held at the Tiananmen Square in Beijing on October 19. Listing his 14-point fundamental principles that are central to China's envisioned socialism, Xi reiterated that the CPC must ensure a "people-centric" developmental approach, while the nation must equally ensure party's supremacy in a "new era". What does Xi's advocacy of "Socialism with Chinese characteristics" in a new era mean for China's regional and global standing?

Charting out the success that China has attained within the purview of the CPC, the Chinese President eloquently expressed that the developmental path of the nation is witnessing a "period of strategic opportunity". Xi emphasised how China achieved rapid urbanisation. He also stressed on development, tackling corruption in the system to offer a new image to the CPC, and addressing the existing provincial disparities in the country. Underlining the success of lifting 60 million people out of poverty over the last five years, Xi highlighted the gross domestic product (GDP) of China rising from \$8 trillion to \$12 trillion, thus making the Communist state an attractive investment destination for the world. These narrations were on expected lines as the Congress is one forum where the President of China and the party's General Secretary would like to highlight the success story the country has written under their leadership. As it goes with any Congress, the 19th National Congress of the CPC prepared a road map for China's developmental path domestically under Xi till 2022 and beyond. What, however, is interesting to note is that Xi's "14-point" fundamental principles equally emphasised on key foreign policy issues which are crucial to China's national interest.

Underlining a "holistic approach on national security", Xi strongly advocated "one country, two systems", "national unifications" and Beijing taking a lead for shared future of mankind. What do these mean in China's overseas national interests?

Underlying these issues are China's national security matters concerning Xinjiang, Tibet, Hong Kong and Taiwan, and matters linked to land and maritime territorial interests. Building a holistic "national security" approach has been a prime goal under the Xi regime for some time now where the focus is on strategic hinterland, mainly Xinjiang and Tibet. Even though Beijing launched a "go West" strategy in 2000 to promote economic development in the hinterland, both Xinjiang and Tibet have been problematic regions for the Dragon in the past



Chinese President Xi Jinping presides over the opening ceremony of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing on Wednesday

AP

two decades. Xi's stress on "national security" is meant to tighten Beijing's grip further on Xinjiang and Tibet. In fact, exerting control over domestic security matters has been pursued concurrently along with the overseas security and strategic matters in China. Xi's speech at the CPC Congress made it clear that the same approach will continue.

The Chinese narration of national security is closely linked to territorial integrity and sovereignty. Beijing, under the Xi leadership, has been making a statement in recent past that China would not compromise on matters linked to national security. This was candidly spelled out in Xi's speech at the 19th National Congress. Passing a strong message to Hong Kong and Taiwan, Xi drew a red-line saying that Hong Kong and Taiwan could enjoy prosperity and growth only under the "one country, two systems" without being ambitious to seek an

autonomous future without mainland China. Xi was, therefore, quite straightforward about Taiwan in his 19th National Congress speech. In fact, without offering any remote prospect to Taiwan's bid for independence, Xi was categorical in making a reference that Taiwan must aim to have a "peaceful national unification" that both Hong Kong and Macao enjoy with mainland China. The Chinese assertion over Taiwan in Xi's speech is not entirely a new phenomenon: Beijing time and again has made clear its intentions and strategies towards Taipei. What is new, however, is the Chinese assertion that is linked to Beijing's ambitious grand strategy in a "new era" which signals that the country has made a departure from its "peaceful rise" strategy. Xi's assertion that the CPC is in the process of building a "world-class" armed forces by the middle of 21st century explains this intent. It is a clear mes-

sage to the region and the world at large that China will aim to assert itself over national security issues, mainly matters relating to territorial integrity and sovereignty.

A direct message to India could probably stem from Xi's speech where he said that Beijing would like to settle disputes with neighbours "through dialogue" without making any compromise on its national interests. This is in reference to India on the boundary dispute as much as a reference towards the Southeast Asian countries who claim free navigation rights on the South China Sea. A flexible approach from Beijing, therefore, may not be really an expected proposition in future. Besides, Xi's emphasis that China would like to continue to emerge as a leader of the developing world comes as a conflicting subject matter since the intent is to deny India the requisite space to lead the developing world groupings. Beijing,

under Xi's stewardship, is trying to make it clear that no other country, other than China, is the leader of the developing world.

In brief, Xi's emphasis to build a "moderately prosperous society" is a new national security strategy which should not be seen in isolation. This vision of Xi is not entirely a domestic economic proposition, rather it is a strategy linked to Beijing's overseas national security interests which might pose challenge to other rising countries in the region, particularly India. This is associated with China's rise. Xi also emphasised on revitalising the role of the state-owned enterprises (SOEs) to help China build good and stable overseas deals. Striving for "moderately prosperous society" and achieving a "socialist modernisation" by 2035 is, therefore, a strategy linked to the CPC's overseas interests to secure more energy and financial resources, to eventually promote Xi's pet-project "Belt and

Road Initiative", and to keep up the economic development momentum. The aim is to expand China's overseas economic interests through connectivity and corridor projects by establishing robust trade and economic contacts and to build a regional and global consensus in Beijing's favour to position China as the driver of globalisation. This would pose a stronger challenge to India since New Delhi has seen the Belt and Road Initiative not so much positively. With the 19th National Congress, the promotion of the Belt and Road Initiative has entered into the second stage where the Chinese thrust is to execute connectivity and corridor initiatives along with other projects. India needs to take a serious note of this.

(Dr Jagannath Panda is a Research Fellow and Centre Coordinator for East Asia at the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, New Delhi)

At the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, Xi Jinping's grand 'new era' game plan signals the Dragon's departure from its 'peaceful rise' strategy. Xi's emphasis to build a 'moderately prosperous society' should not be seen in isolation. His vision that is linked to Beijing's overseas national security interests may pose challenge to other rising countries in the region, particularly India



JAGANNATH PANDA

PERSPECTIVE

Jinping emerges as China's most powerful leader since Mao

On October 18, Beijing organised a week-long 19th National Congress of Communist Party of China, an event that the world is following closely. The summit — being attended by 2,287 party members from various provinces — is important as it will select its new brand of leadership, agendas and goals for the next five years and ahead.

Moreover, the 19th National Congress is a significant political event for Chinese President Xi Jinping himself. Since assuming power in 2012, he has envisioned a "national rejuvenation" programme for China under the theme of "Chinese dream". This is attached to two major centenary goals: To make China moderately prosperous society by 2020, a year before centenary celebration of the Communist Party of China (CPC), and to aim to establish a prosperous and powerful nation by 2049 to commemorate the centenary year of the People's Republic of China (PRC).

These goals have been planned to be fulfilled with a number of reform programmes and the highlights are: Reforms in the army, fight to root out corruption from political, military and public spheres, and poverty eradication.

Xi in his October 18 speech at the Congress highlighted that in the last five years China has made drastic progress through these reforms. It aims to lift total 98 million people from poverty trap in eight years, which shall be a remarkable feat. In addition, China has worked towards right-sizing of military and its modernisation. The country's fight against corruption has seen prominent military and political bigwigs falling from the grace. Progress in reforms in the last five years under



Chinese President Xi Jinping sits with former Chinese Presidents Hu Jintao and Jiang Zemin after delivering his speech at the opening ceremony of the 19th National Congress of CPC in Beijing on Wednesday

AP

Xi's leadership has been promising, however the road ahead is fraught with daunting internal and external challenges, primarily concerning the economic slowdown, the promotion of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), North Korean crisis, etc.

Politically, the 19th National Congress will entail selection of around 200 full members and 100 alternate members, finalisation of 25-member Politburo Committee and seven-member Politburo Standing Committee and lastly the members of the anti-corruption watchdog CCDI, currently being headed by Xi's

loyalist Wang Qishan.

In 1980, President Deng Xiaoping had put in place the concept of collective leadership to prevent or guard return to arbitrary abuses of Mao's final decades (the cultural revolution). Similarly, the Article 79 of the party constitution restricts tenures of President and Premier to 10 years, however there are no restrictions on general secretary of the CPC and chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC). There has been an unofficial but consistent rule called "seven up, eight down" according to which if a

Politburo Standing Committee member is 68 or older at the time of a party Congress, he must retire, but if he is 67 or younger, he may still enter the committee.

In the current situation, five of the seven PSC members are about to complete 68 years of age. However, the speculation is rife that the "seven up, eight down" rule will be violated to allow Wang Qishan, head of the CCDI, to stay put beyond the retirement age. As per certain analysts, this could be indicative of President Xi's intention to retain power beyond 2022.

President Xi has amassed much control and his predominance is clearly established in the Chinese political spectrum. He is now regarded as the most powerful leader in decades after Mao. He has taken charge of most of the portfolios and ruling through the leading small groups and has placed his key aides at various nerve centres.

The communique of the sixth plenum of the 8th Congress clearly insists that the principles of collective leadership must always be followed and should not be violated by any organisation or individual under

any circumstances or any reasons.

Such statements accentuate the hypothesis above. As regard the chain of succession is concerned, the concept of patronage underscores in China's Communist Party. The senior party members identify promising stars/ protégés and nurture them for higher dispensations. This ensures loyalty in the lineage. As per certain political analysts, 23 politburo members are of the fifth generation (1953 born like President Xi), and there is speculation that President Xi may block their advancement to the Politburo Standing Committee, while promoting own sixth generation protégés or loyalists to fill the politburo, thereby creating conditions to extend the tenure beyond the 20th Congress, in the absence of qualified members.

It may be pertinent to mention that the erstwhile Soviet Union too faced similar conditions of slowing economy and systemic corruption in political, military and military spheres, which led to its final collapse. President Xi, out of concern or fears, has perhaps taken actions to guard China against such situations.

All these assumptions and conjectures will be put to rest by the end of the 19th National Congress, which would have selected the members of the politburo committee, Politburo Standing Committee and members of the Central Military Commission.

Speculation, however, is mounting rapidly in favour of President Xi that he may be nominated as the general secretary of the CPC and chairman of the CMC for life-term to steer the nation towards achieving the momentous centenary goals.

(The author is a Research Fellow at the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA), New Delhi)

Speculation is rife that the 'seven up, eight down' rule will be violated to allow Xi's loyalist Wang Qishan to stay as chief of anti-corruption watchdog beyond the retirement age. This could be indicative of Xi's intention to hold on to power beyond 2022



GAURAV MISRA