

Chinese President Xi Jinping pledges peace with Australia and others

The Australian, November 17, 2014, 7:42PM
David Crowe, Political Correspondent, Canberra

CHINESE President Xi Jinping pledged to pursue “peaceful development” with Australia and other nations as he sought to ease any fears of the threat of his country’s growing power in the region and the world.

Upon the signing of a major trade deal between the two countries, Mr Xi assured the Australian parliament that the Chinese people would never trigger the conflict that their people had suffered during the past century of world wars.

Mr Xi referred indirectly to the territorial disputes China had in the region but insisted these would be settled peacefully.

“We Chinese are striving to achieve the Chinese dream, which is the great renewal of the Chinese nation,” President Xi told federal parliament in a rare address to a joint sitting of the Senate and House of Representatives.

Confronting the fears about China’s rise, Mr Xi sought to ease the concerns about the impact of his country’s growth on the security of others.

“Many people applaud China’s achievements and have great confidence in China while some others have concerns about China and others find fault with everything China does,” he said.

That was only to be expected, he said, as he compared his country to a “big guy in the crowd” that might worry others about how it could push people around.

But Mr Xi said peace was of “paramount importance” to China and the nation’s people would never subject other countries to the ordeal their country had been through in the wars of the last century.

“Country remains unshakable in its resolve to achieve peaceful development,” he said.

“China is dedicated to upholding peace. There is only one trend in today’s world and that is peace, development and win-win cooperation.

“Those who follow it will prosper and those who go against it will perish.”

Mr Xi emphasised the peaceful rise of China and a long-term partnership with Australia, on the day the two nations signed a far-reaching agreement expected to increase two-way trade by billions of dollars.

He talked of increasing China’s wellbeing and prosperity through two goals: doubling GDP by 2020 and turning the country into a “modern socialist country which is prosperous and democratic by the middle of the century.

Mr Xi noted said this was fifth visit to Australia and that all of them had left a “great impression” on him including his memories of the “strange” Kangaroo and “cute” Koala bear and “ingenious” Sydney Opera House.

“Everywhere I went I have personally experienced the goodwill of the Australian people to the Chinese people,” he said.

Those in the audience included Seven West chairman Kerry Stokes, Fortescue Metals Group chairman Andrew “Twiggy” Forrest, Rio Tinto chief executive Sam Walsh, Westpac chief executive Gail Kelly and Qantas chief executive Alan Joyce.

Margy Abbott watched from the public gallery alongside Peng Liyuan, the wife of President Xi.

Tasmanian premier Will Hodgman, who will host the Chinese President in Tasmania on Tuesday, listened from the visitor’s chairs on the edge of the chamber. Also attending were US Ambassador to Australia John Berry and the head of the Asia Society in Australia, Warwick Smith.

Mr Abbott welcomed Mr Xi by noting the Chinese President had visited most Australian states during his career, seeing more of the country than many of its citizens.

“Yes, Australia and China have different systems of government. One is a young country, the other an ancient country that is being renewed.”

Mr Abbott cited a Chinese proverb to suggest the countries seek “harmony” rather than “conformity”.

The Prime Minister sought to send a message directly to the Chinese people that the Australian government would not rest until it had found missing Malaysian Airlines Flight 370, which carried 153 Chinese passengers.

Mr Abbott said the Chinese community in Australia formed a “human arch” between the two countries and he emphasised the tightening of the ties between the two countries in new investment deals.

“We trade with people when we need them but we invest with people when we trust them,” Mr Abbott said.

Bill Shorten noted the trade ties between the two countries hundreds of years ago and the steady increasing of trade ties since Labor prime minister Gough Whitlam recognised modern China.

The Opposition Leader touched on two points of political division to salt his address with barbs aimed at Mr Abbott.

Mr Shorten praised Mr Xi’s proposal for an Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the subject of differences of opinion within federal cabinet over whether Australia should sign up to the \$50 billion scheme.

Mr Shorten strongly praised Mr Xi’s agreement with US President Barack Obama on climate change, emphasising the importance of it in the face of Mr Abbott’s reluctance to devote significant time to the issue at the G20.

Mr Xi said the relationship between the two countries had reached a new and higher level – citing the trade deal – but said there was much further to go.

The countries should be “trustworthy partners” given the two nations had no history of conflict and no dispute over long-term interests.

“We have every reason to go beyond a commercial partnership to be strategic partners who have shared vision and common goals,” he told the parliament.

The address was a rare honour for a foreign leader. Chinese president Hu Jintao addressed the parliament in 2003 – the first from his country to do so – while UK Prime Minister addressed the parliament last Friday and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi will do on Tuesday.