

WHAT DOES CHINA'S RISE MEAN FOR CHINESE INDONESIANS?

Sinophobia lurks beneath the surface in Indonesia

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Following Chinese Vice-Premier Liu Yandong's official visit to Jakarta late last month, a number of ultra-nationalist and hard-line Muslim news websites began circulating "reports" claiming that either 10 or 30 million Chinese nationals would be admitted into Indonesia by 2020 under a new agreement between Jakarta and Beijing.

In what was clearly the start of a scare-mongering campaign, they also predicted the end of economic sovereignty for "native" Indonesians. These articles were widely shared by Indonesian netizens on social media, generating mostly Sinophobic and anti-government responses.

However, the claim proved to be a hoax since the joint communique by the Indone-

sian and Chinese governments stated that the "Indonesian side expressed the hope that the number of tourists between the two countries in 2020 would reach 10 million people".

Judging from the intensity of the comments on the social media, it is difficult to avoid concluding that anti-Chinese sentiments in the country are still widespread.

As such, China's rise as a regional hegemon, the South China Sea powder keg and the forthcoming sizeable Chinese investments in Indonesia may prove to be a combination that affects the security of Indonesia's ethnic Chinese minority.

NATIONALISM AND ECONOMICS

Historically, Chinese Indonesians have always been an easy scapegoat during na-

tional crises. During the 1998 riots, thousands of their homes and businesses were looted or attacked by the masses while many Chinese Indonesian women, especially in Jakarta, were sexually assaulted.

Although a number of studies, such as Dr Jemma Purdey's "Anti Chinese Violence in Indonesia, 1996-1999", suggest that the riots were politically motivated, it would not

have been easy to incite the masses to violence without the pre-existing Sinophobia.

Future violence against Chinese Indonesians remains a possibility. While heightened economic engagement between Jakarta and Beijing may be mutually beneficial, it may also have the side effect of aggravating Sinophobia in Indonesia, and inadvertently

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plan for tram stops since they are above-ground, said Mr Jung. To ensure this push for trams is successful, it's all "about education, having your own dedicated lanes and enforcement," he added.

The Land Transport Authority (LTA) and Urban Redevelopment Authority were previously reported to be considering bringing trams to the One-North and Marina Bay area. But no decision appears to have been made.

PRIORITISING LAND USE

Beyond simply offering transport alternatives, perhaps the whole overarching masterplan for land use needs to be re-examined. The LTA aims to have 75 per cent of trips during both the morning and evening peak hours made by public transport by 2030.

In February, it was reported that public transport ridership grew last year by

4.6 per cent to hit a record 6.65 million trips per day, while the car population had shrunk to a four-year low.

The Republic has been trying to steer people towards public transport and while signs show it is moving in the right direction, progress has been slow.

Many Singaporeans aspire to own a car for social status, and lack a more diverse range of travel alternatives to impel them to give up cars. Perceived unreliability and overcrowding also put some Singaporeans off public transport while cycling is deemed to be dangerous, due to a lack of dedicated lanes and a general sense of aggressive behaviour by drivers.

The National Cycling Plan envisions a cycling network of more than 700km by 2030, and some HDB towns have already been equipped with intra-town cycling path networks. But these are not dedicated cycling lanes, and cyclists who are riding longer distances often have to jostle for a tiny space on the left hand side of the left lane,

or ride on the pavement — and risk a fine.

Some experts have suggested that policy makers should use a tougher carrot-and-stick approach to push people towards taking public transport.

Mr Jose Viegas, secretary-general of the International Transport Forum at the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, who has visited Singapore many times, said what the Republic may need is "stronger doses" of the medicine.

Too many cars? Increase the tolls. Too little space for dedicated cycling lanes? Take away the land meant for cars, he said.

Priority in land use should first go to pe-

destrians, then cyclists. "And then whatever is left is for the cars ... It's what (we call) priority in allocation," he said.

"People will adjust. If it's a public interest, governments will have to be smart enough, bold enough to convey this to the population and say we have to follow it."

With Singapore's small size and high technological adoption, the odds are in the Republic's favour in its drive towards achieving a public-transport-centred city. And as Mr Viegas pointed out, small tentative adjustments may not work. Perhaps it is time for bolder measures to bring about changes in Singaporeans' mindsets and behaviour.