

ULAANBAATAR FORUM FOR EAST ASIA February 24, 2006

ULAANBAATAR FORUM: WHY AND WHAT FOR?

By Ts. Batbayar (Mongolia)

First, why do we need the Ulaanbaatar (UB) Forum for East Asia? Today we face the twin forces of globalization and regionalization which are going to change entire societies in every corner of the world. President N. Enkhbayar, in his lecture at Beijing University in November 2005, said that “We all would arguably agree that the globalization facing the mankind today is an objective process. Not a single country can afford to isolate itself from this global process without damage to itself and even if we suppose for a moment that there is a country that succeeds to stay out of this all-embracing process it would rather be a loser, not a winner.” I completely agree with him. We have no choice other than to confront this reality.

With the help of globalization we have acquired powerful tools which are going to change our way of life. We Mongolians like to talk about geography, about the land-locked nature of our country with certain frustration. However, as Thomas Friedman wrote “The world is becoming flat”, i.e. interconnected. In his opinion, several technological and political forces have converged, and that process has produced a global, Web-enabled playing field that allows for multiple forms of collaboration without regard to geography or distance – or soon, even language.” The Globalization 3.0, as he calls it, gives Mongolians an unprecedented access to an enormous pool of knowledge, technology and culture, and provides ample opportunities for further growth. As an example of our enthusiasm for connections, today we have approximately six hundred thousand cell phone subscribers in Mongolia, which represents 24 percent of our entire population.

On the other hand, we are witnessing another powerful storm coming from East Asia in the form of regionalization. The East Asia Summit held in Kuala Lumpur (December 2005) was the most visible demonstration of that process. Sixteen Asian and Pacific countries gathered to declare that Asia is taking center stage in the world. They are united to move towards an Asian

economic community that would include half the world's population and a gross domestic product of US\$ 8.3 trillion.

Asians started to talk about common Asian identity. The topic of last year's Boao Forum in China was "Asia searching for win-win: New Role of Asia". The topic of another influential Beijing Forum was "Harmony of Civilizations: Asia's opportunities". The agenda of World Economic Forum 2006 meeting in Davos was dominated by the emerging powers of China and India. No doubt, Asia is gaining prominence.

Second, what has inspired us to take the UB Forum initiative? Our two neighbours are staging influential fora such as the Boao Forum in China since February 2001 (modeled after the Davos World Economic Forum) and the Baikal Forum in Russia since 2000. A Mongolian perspective is therefore important in this context.

Where do we now stand in the region? High level visits demonstrate our standing in the region. In 2005, we received Russian Speaker Sergei Mironov, Chinese Vice-Premier Wu Yi, Australian Speaker David Hawker, US President G.W. Bush, and US Speaker Dennis Hastert. In addition, Mongolia has carried out academic exchanges with East Asia. However, Mongolia is not and cannot be satisfied with its present limited participation in the regional multilateral institutions and dialogues.

Third, what are the advantages of convening the UB Forum?

- Networking
- Capacity Building
- Regional identity and recognition
- APEC membership

Concerning this last point, Professor Joseph Nye wrote and introduced the concept of a nation's soft power. We need to build our own soft power. What does it mean? "Soft power is the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments. It arises from the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideals, and policies." I think we already have some soft power exercised abroad. Chinggis Khan's legacy and rich historical traditions, Urtiin Duu and Morin Huur, Sumo wrestlers like Asasyoryu and Rock pop stars like Ariunaa, the annual Naadam Festival and Horse race, are all expressions of our soft power. The UB Forum will be an additional tool to add to our soft power.