

Evaluating Mongolia's Experience of Democratization: The Post-Soviet Scenario

Sharad K. Soni (India)

As the 7th Ministerial Conference of the Community of Democracies is all set to convene on April 27-29, 2013 in Ulaanbaatar, it is high time to make an assessment of what a small but geostrategically important country like Mongolia has experienced in the last two decades or so since it opted for democratization. Several quarters believe that Mongolia has made great strides towards its goal of accomplishing the task of building a lasting democracy. But one may wonder if the Mongolians ever thought that Asia's first and the world's second communist state would set an example of becoming an Asian model of democratization in the post-Soviet era. Mongolia's international profile became impressive in July 2011 when it took over the Chair of the Community of Democracies, an intergovernmental organization established in 2000 with a commitment to strengthening and deepening democratic norms and practices within emerging democracies worldwide. In September 2011, at the meeting of the United Nations Democracy Caucus, Mongolian President declared "Education for Democracy" to be the priority theme of the tenure of its chairmanship (2011-13). The declaration was significant in the sense that it came after years of advocacy for "Education for Democracy" by Council for a Community of Democracies (CCD), which describes democracy education as "an essential element of successful long-term consolidation of democratic transition".¹

Now that Mongolia's chairmanship of the Community of Democracies is coming to an end, it is being described as a leading democracy on the Asian map, particularly in the mainland East Asia. This has also been attested by the remarks made by Hillary Clinton who visited Mongolia as the US Secretary of State last year on July 9, 2012 as part of her Asia tour intended to boost US economic engagement with the region. Enthused by the way Mongolia underwent transition to democracy she said, "If you want to see democracy in action, if you want to see progress being shaped by leaders who are more concerned about lifting up their people than fattening their bank accounts, come to Mongolia".² What basically needs to be pointed out is that Mongolia is a nation attracting

international attention today due to two key reasons: booming economic growth and democracy at work. The Mongolian economy grew in 2011 at a rate of 17.3 per cent as against 6.4 per cent in 2010 and continued more or less so in 2012 as well largely because of the mining boom in coal, gold, copper, rare earths and uranium deposits. The mining boom is likely to make Mongolia's economy the fastest growing in the world as projected by the International Monetary Fund as well as the World Bank that put the annual GDP growth rate for Mongolia at almost 23 per cent in 2013.³

It has been more than two decades now since Mongolia opted for transition to democracy and market economy. During this period the country has faced with the incredible task of implementing democratic norms and practices in its socio-economic and political fields. What is striking is that a small country like Mongolia, which has just 2.9 million population besides having a geographical compulsion of being sandwiched between its two giant neighbours- Russia and China, has now come a long way in raising its profile on the world map. Significantly, since the adoption of democratization and market economy it appears that the country stands out as a unique case where a new democratic civilian society has evolved, the role of which remains vital in deciding the political future of the country, whether it's domestic or foreign policy. As such Mongolia provides a classic case study, which unlike post-Soviet Central Asian Republics has witnessed a relatively peaceful transition to a democratic society. However, it is also to be noted that election related disturbances during the 2008 parliamentary elections highlighted the fact that achieving electoral democracy does not complete a country's transition as it is only the beginning of the path of reforms that must strengthen democratic and market institutions if democracy is to survive in the long run. Even the controversial arrest of former President N. Enkhbayar on charges of corruption ahead of June 2012 parliamentary elections drew condemnation from several quarters so much so that it points to the defects in the Mongolian arrest procedures, thus putting a question mark on the success of democratization in Mongolia. Nevertheless, a look at the June 28, 2012 parliamentary elections confirms the dedication of Mongolians to the task of building a durable democracy.

It is against this background that the whole idea of this article is to evaluate Mongolia's experience of democratic transition to the extent of becoming "the only post-socialist democracy in Asia". While doing so it seeks to analyze whether two decades of democratization of Mongolia's domestic and foreign affairs has been a success story. In the conclusion, it also examines if Mongolia has completed its democratic transition and indeed democracy in the country has been consolidated.

Democratic Transition: A Major Policy Shift

For almost seven decades in the pre-1991 period, the system of government in Mongolia was based on the Soviet model, and the Communist Party– the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (MPRP) was the only party which was officially permitted to function. However, the commencement of *glasnost* and *perestroika* in the former Soviet Union and the ensuing process of reforms and restructuring in the Soviet domestic and foreign policies left a direct impact over Mongolia. It was in 1987 that Mongolia began to diversify itself as Soviets became less inclined to provide economic support to Mongolia and even withdrew subsidies. This was more so because “the Soviets had begun to turn inward, evincing a new preoccupation with internal affairs”.⁴ But then at the same time, establishment of diplomatic relations with the United States and normalization of relations with China provided Mongolia fair opportunities to look for “new options and greater chances to stand on its own.”⁵ The process of Soviet-style reforms and restructuring through *Il tod* and *Orchilan baigalalt* and the democracy movement in Eastern Europe were imitated in Mongolia. As such there was a dramatic shift towards democratic reforms which began in the winter of 1989-90 when the first organized opposition group, the Mongolian Democratic Union (MDU), appeared on Mongolia's political scene.

Though the countrywide democratic movement started bringing aggressive reforms in the country's political and economic spheres, it soon turned out to be a struggle against Communism, which was held responsible for ruining the country. It essentially provided a fair chance for both the government and the people to carry out open discussions on the prevailing situation and find out ways to overcome the problems. Reforms, therefore, were urgently required for the prosperity of the Mongolian people not only in the domestic political, social and economic fields but also in the foreign affairs. It further gained momentum due to the collapse of the former Soviet Union in 1991 and the end of the Cold War. Having made a critical reappraisal of its own policy Mongolia began changing many of its existing policies which were believed to have prevented country's progress at the domestic level. In May 1990, the Constitution was amended by deleting reference to the MPRP's role as the “guiding force” in the country, legalizing the new ‘informal’ parties through official registration, creating a standing legislative body called the State Little *Hural*, elected by proportional representation of parties, and establishing the office of the President. Besides, a new electoral law was approved and the first multi-party elections for a People's Great *Hural* were held on July 29, 1990.

In November 1991, the People's Great *Hural* began discussion on a new Constitution. The new Constitution, the fourth one since 1921, was finally adopted on January 13, 1992 replacing the 1960 Constitution, which brought considerable changes in Mongolia's political system. Key elements in the new Constitution emphasised the "establishment of democracy" contrary to the previous Constitutions, which had stressed "building the State through socialism." As such the traditional Leninist ideology was abandoned. The most notable change made in this Constitution was the replacement of the two-chamber Parliament (bicameral) known as the Great and Little *Hurals* with that of a single chamber (unicameral), which came to be known as the *State Great Hural* (SGH) comprising 76 Deputies. It was for the first time that a multi-ownership economy was introduced by this Constitution, which would go with the mainstream of the world economy and conform to the special conditions of the country.⁶ In order to distance itself from its Communist past, the country's name was also changed from "Mongolian People's Republic" to "Mongolia" and the Communist gold star was removed from the national flag under the new Constitution which entered into force on February 12, 1992.⁷

Over the years one can witness significant changes in Mongolia's political, economic and social fields, which further gave boost to radical transformation of Mongolia's economy. To begin with, initiatives towards liberalization of Mongolia's economy with establishment of a new banking and financial system as well as privatization laid the foundation for the development of a market economy. In fact, a rapid transition in Mongolia's economy was achieved by "shock therapy" mainly through adoption of three key mechanisms, i.e., privatization, currency reform, and price and wage liberalization.⁸ Not only the livestock sector, the backbone of Mongolia's economy witnessed privatization but also a number of private companies were allowed to operate in key sectors.⁹ The main focus of economic growth was given on the utilization of natural resources including agricultural, mineral, oil and water. As a result there has been surge in industrial sector, which led the growth of manufacturing units as well. Joint ventures with foreign companies have also helped the country to witness growth in several key sectors of the economy. Interestingly, in July 2003 the agreement on the cancellation of 98 per cent of Ulaanbaatar's Rb 11.4 billion debt owed to the former Soviet Union, removed a considerable financial burden from Mongolia, which proved to be beneficial in confidence building among foreign companies that considered the financial risk of investing in Mongolia was too high at that point of time.¹⁰

Democratic transition, thus, was a major policy shift in the contemporary history of Mongolia that has brought the country on a new stage of development where democracy at work is visible even in forming political parties. Since the end of the single-party rule, numerous parties and groups have been organized and reorganized or renamed in the process of democratization. But, there remained only a few political parties with major influence and stable membership.¹¹ Needless to say, Parliamentary elections have been playing an important role in “the consolidation of political parties and redefining their national agendas”.¹²

Redefining Election Norms to Strengthen Democratization Process

While evaluating the experience of democratization in Mongolia, John Tkacik of the Heritage Foundation describes the country as “a poster child for democracy in Eurasia”.¹³ He stresses that Mongolia’s “messy, multi-party parliamentary system with its liberal election calendar has yielded an open society where political dissent is the norm, parliamentary debate is spirited, and compromise between parties and interest groups is common.” This, he says, “contrasts starkly with the rest of the post-Soviet Central Asia, where Presidential governments have resulted uniformly in strong, single-minded dictatorships.” Looking at Mongolia’s democratic credentials, it appears that multi-party elections constitute an important component of the democratization process. Mongolia has been demarcated into 76 constituencies, which fall under 21 *aimags* or provinces and one municipality. Soon after the adoption of the 1992 Constitution, the first multi-party election was held on June 30, 1992 in accordance with the new law to elect members to the SGH. Although the outcome of the election was disproportionate, the MPRP won a landslide victory with 70 seats while the remaining seats went to the democratic parties with the MDP-MNPP-UP Alliance winning four and the MSDP and independent one each. The reason behind the clean sweep of the MPRP was that the party leaders were popular and well-known figures, and that helped greatly in their campaigns. They even promised to meet serious challenges Mongolia was facing after the advent of democracy in 1990. But they failed to fulfill their promises and Mongolia reeled under inflation and unemployment.

After amendments to the Election law the second general election was held on June 30, 1996. The main contestants were MPRP and Democratic Coalition. During the electioneering political observers cautiously predicted that the ruling MPRP would retain its majority in Parliament. This time

too observers expected the voting to be held on the basis of personalities of individual candidates rather than the political parties to which they belonged. However, after final results of the polling were declared, Mongolia's Democratic Coalition emerged triumphant by winning 50 seats as against six in the previous legislature. The unexpected results of 1996 elections indeed marked the first major change of political power in Mongolia in its almost 75 years of history. With all this sudden change there was an obvious sense of excitement among the young people in the government who wished to move the country and its people ahead with a number of ambitious plans at hand. The first session of the newly-elected SGH opened in mid-July 1996 amidst confusion, the Democratic Alliance being somewhat inexperienced, and the MPRP, now in opposition, deeply dissatisfied and determined to extract every possible political concession from the victors.

However, during the next four years the ruling Democratic Coalition had to face stiff resistance from the MPRP in its efforts to promote privatization and the development of a market economy in the face of industrial stagnation, increasing poverty and unemployment. Besides, the Democratic Coalition's four years in power had been "characterized by revolving-door governments (four in four years), political infighting within the Coalition itself, a corruption scandal, and an attitude among Coalition members that often seemed to put personal political ambition over Coalition or national interests."¹⁴ While the Coalition tried to do everything it could to run the government, the MPRP did everything it could to help them "self-destruct." Interestingly, the MPRP, which never had to worry about democratic procedures in its past, learned quickly as to how to use principles of parliamentary procedures and Constitutional law to obstruct the Coalition's reform agenda.¹⁵

The July 2000 parliamentary elections resulted in the pendulum of power swung back again to the MPRP. Surprisingly, they won 72 of 76 seats (95%) in the Parliament, creating another one-party government, similar in numbers to that in 1992. But the magnitude of victory surprised not only the voters but the leaders of the MPRP as well. The new Democratic Coalition and Social Democrats had to satisfy themselves with 13% and 9% of the votes respectively but without winning a single seat. Overall the result was so unbelievable that many in the political circles thought that the election law needed to be reformed so that the number of seats held by different parties in the Parliament could more closely reflect the popular vote besides leading to more meaningful debate of the government's legislative agenda.¹⁶

Although concerns were raised over uncertainties as to which direction the new MPRP government will go in the next four years, the year 2001 saw the MPRP consolidating its political power and demonstrating its

resolve to keep market economy reforms on track.¹⁷ On the other side, after their defeat the two main democratic parties, the National Democrats and Social Democrats joined hands together to form a single Democratic Party. However, the strong presence of the MPRP in Mongolia's political arena was also felt when the incumbent President N. Bagabandi easily won the 2001 presidential election for his second term. Until the next election held in June 2004, the MPRP tried to convince not only the West and the international donor community but also the people as a whole about its resolve to keep economic and political reforms in Mongolia on track. But the final outcome of the 2004 elections has revealed that the people exercised their franchise against the ruling MPRP. Voter turnout was over 75 per cent, which was remarkable considering the fact that a sizeable number of Mongolian voters live in remote areas far from polling stations and had to travel by horse, camel, or four-wheelers to cast their ballots.

When the final results of the election held on June 27, 2004 came out, the ruling MPRP won 37 seats and the opposition MDC 34 seats, but as neither had the minimum required 39 seats to form a government, a grand coalition government of the MPRP and the MDC under Prime Minister Tsakhiagiyn Elbegdorj of the Democratic Party was formed. But the fragile coalition government did not remain intact for long and lastly on January 11, 2006 collapsed altogether when all the MPRP cabinet members resigned in protest to what they described as "the coalition's ineffective governance and loss of public support."¹⁸ The reason behind the collapse of the democratically elected government was cited as the troubled government's struggle with growing unemployment, allegations of corruption, and factional differences. The ever-growing disillusionment with the coalition's rule was reflected in presidential elections in May 2005, when the former Prime Minister Nambaryn Enkhbayar of the MPRP won the presidency with 53.4% of the vote as against 19.7% mustered by his Democratic Party rival, Mendsaikhani Enkhsaikhan.¹⁹ The collapse was followed by days of protests in the Mongolian capital which witnessed some protesting government corruption and economic deprivation, while some accusing the MPRP of attempting to seize power for itself.²⁰ Finally, the Democratic Party declined the MPRP's proposal of entering what the latter called as the government of "national unity" and instead decided to function as an opposition or build an alternative "shadow government".²¹ However, nothing sort of a so-called "shadow government" came into being.

The fifth Parliamentary election was held on 29 June 2008, in which 46 seats went to the ruling MPRP, 27 seats went to main opposition party, the Democrats (DP) and one each was shared by Civic Will Party, Civic Coalition

and Independent. Protests against the election results turned violent on the evening of July 1, and protesters sacked the MPRP headquarters in Ulaanbaatar. Five protesters were killed, and around midnight a four-day state of emergency was declared. The violence dampened hopes for a period of stable government to develop the mining sector and tackle inflation in the country. But the outcome of the Presidential election of 2009 was all the more significant in the light of the July 2008 violence following the highly charged parliamentary elections. While the violence, the only incident in Mongolia's independent history, shocked the nation, the victory of Ts. Elbegdorj of Democratic Party over incumbent President N. Enkhbayar of the MPRP took the people by surprise. Elbegdorj's elevation to presidency indicated positive hallmarks, such as restoration of balance in governance, agreements on badly-needed mining and energy investments and commitment to remain oriented towards the West and other Asian democracies.²²

The latest Parliamentary election, the sixth in a row, was held on June 28, 2012 which saw the Democratic Party winning 31 seats, while the ruling Mongolian People's Party (the new name the MPRP gave itself in 2010) capturing 26 seats, hence neither of the two having a required majority to form the government. However, after negotiations the new government was formed with a coalition of three parties, i.e., the Democratic Party (DP), the MPRP-MNDP "Justice" Coalition and the Civil Will Green Party. Since the election results have been honoured by all, this smooth transition once again proves Mongolia's status as the "only" post-socialist democracy in Asia. What's more, it now appears that "even without an ideological profile, an effective government through a grand coalition may still contribute to the building of trust in political parties and thus the continued institutionalization of democracy in Mongolia".²³ Nevertheless, in all probability, as Alicia Campi opines, "this new populist government will support legislation less attractive to investors from big foreign mineral companies".²⁴ How Mongolia's current domestic political scenario would take a shape is yet to be seen given the fact that the new government led by democrats have to deal with many issues, including "changes to the parliamentary election law, especially the introduction of proportional voting that will facilitate the rise of smaller political parties and mostly ad-hoc coalitions".²⁵

Evolution of Security and Foreign Policies: Impact of Democratization

Following the collapse of the erstwhile Soviet Union not only the democratization of domestic affairs but also alteration in geostrategic

environment pushed Mongolia to redefine its security and foreign policy objectives which figured prominently in debates among the country's think-tanks.²⁶ It was then understood that Mongolia's national security could only be ensured by securing international guarantees "through a combination of unilateral, bilateral and multilateral measures."²⁷ Consequently, in June 1994 Mongolia made sweeping changes in its national security and foreign policies by adopting three basic documents— National Security and Foreign Policy Concepts as well as the Military Doctrine, which were finally endorsed by the Mongolian Parliament. The overall concerns for Mongolia's security centred around achieving favourable internal and external conditions for ensuring vital national interests, which included the existence of the Mongolian people and their civilization, the country's independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, inviolability of State frontiers, relative economic independence, sustainable ecological development and national unity.²⁸

Post-Soviet democratic changes can sharply be witnessed in the National Security Concept, according to which Mongolia believes that the security of its existence can be ensured by strictly observing the policy of not allowing the use of the country's territory against other States; ensuring its Nuclear-Weapons-Free Status at the international level and making it an important element of strengthening the country's national security. More encouraging concerns on the part of Mongolia was expressed on September 29, 2003 when the then President Bagabandi during his address to the 58th Session of the UN General Assembly reaffirmed Mongolia's support to the establishment of Nuclear-Weapons-Free Zone (NWFZ) in other parts of the world as well.²⁹ Mongolia made serious provisions for banning the deployment and transit of foreign troops as well as nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction on its territory.

As Regards Mongolia's foreign policy, there is no doubt that national interests remain the major concerns in its formulation which is specified in the Foreign Policy Concept focussing on "safeguarding of its security and vital national interests by political and diplomatic means, and creating a favourable external environment for its economic, scientific and technological development."³⁰ By adopting what is termed as a "multi-pillar" foreign policy Mongolia has broadened its diplomatic outlook and the scope of its international activities. Intrinsicly, it now adheres to the principle of flexible priorities in the foreign policy implementation with due consideration given to the changes taking place in the international environment due to globalisation.³¹ In that sense, pragmatism seems to be the core of Mongolia's foreign policy, and therefore, it relies on ongoing international political reality as well as the trends of international economic development. At the

same time, Mongolia's foreign policy aims at ensuring the security and prosperity of the country both internally and externally by "forming with influential countries in the region and in the world a network of relationships based on the interdependence of political, economic and other interests."³²

Compliant with its foreign policy objectives Mongolia forged new relationship with global and regional powers to muster their support not only in the democratic development of the country but also in the rebuilding its economy. Besides, it gave a focussed attention towards developing political and economic cooperation with the United States, Japan, European Union especially Germany, Britain, France as well as Australia, Canada and other western countries. Simultaneously, in order to make its presence felt in Asia, Mongolia gave due importance towards expanding its relations with India, the Republic of Korea, Turkey, Thailand, Singapore and other ASEAN member countries. In the past few decades, Mongolia's desire of promoting cooperation with the countries of North East Asia as well as its own integration with this region has evolved to a great extent. It is more so because the North East Asian region is a major component of the broader Asia-Pacific economic structure and a pivot of the world power equation with the increasing interaction of China, Japan, Russia and the United States.³³ Evidently, during the period of democratic reforms especially in the mid-1990s when no single nation came forward to be understood in real terms as Mongolia's "Third Neighbour", Ulaanbaatar's thinking took a definite turn to forge a new relationship with North East Asia that went beyond economic ties to include political concerns.³⁴

The entire period of democratic transition has also witnessed a smooth sailing in Mongolia's relations with both Russia and China on quite a new basis. It is also due to the fact that the Sino-Soviet rapprochement process resulting from Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev's proposals during his seminal speech at Vladivostok in July 1986 has had positive impact on the normalisation of Mongolia-China relations particularly in the 1990s. The withdrawal of Soviet/Russian military forces stationed on the territory of Mongolia too contributed greatly not only to the normalisation of Sino-Russian as well as Sino-Mongolian relations but also led to the beginning of a new era in Mongolia's security environment which was hitherto affected by the Sino-Soviet confrontation.³⁵ Mongolia, on its part, by the mid-1990s made it clear to both Russia and China that it should no longer be treated to be within the sphere of influence of either of the two neighbours. What one can witness is that Mongolia accords top priority to the question of relations with these two neighbouring countries and adheres to the principle of a balanced relationship with them. Even Mongolia's foreign policy too

stresses that “Mongolia will not interfere in the disputes between its two neighbouring countries unless the disputes affect Mongolia’s national interests.”³⁶ It further says that Mongolia “shall pursue a policy of refraining from joining any military alliance or grouping, allowing the use of its territory or air space against any other country, and the stationing of foreign troops or weapons, including nuclear or any other type of mass destruction weapons in its territory.”³⁷ Thus following its national security and foreign policy objectives Mongolia has been maintaining “complete equality” in its relations with Russia and China.

On their part both Russia and China respect the territorial integrity of Mongolia. However, due to its geographical disadvantage of being landlocked any future external threat to Mongolia’s security could be related directly or indirectly with either or both of its two neighbours. This may be viewed as one of the biggest challenges Mongolia could potentially face in the future. Even though close connection between Russia-China and Mongolia-China relations would continue to be a part of the ongoing international order particularly in North East Asia which has provided Mongolia a new regional identity. Though China does not want Mongolia to consolidate its identity as a democracy, the latter’s democratic credentials show that this small country has come a long way and is marching ahead on the right track.

Search for Third Neighbours: A Realistic Approach

One of the key elements in Mongolia’s multi-pillar foreign policy has been to find out what it calls its “third neighbors.” Since the country shares borders only with Russia and China, such strategy aims at forging special ties with more distant countries that might be willing to make investments and support Mongolia’s development, continued democratization and security, both economic as well as territorial. In the current scenario, Mongolian diplomacy is indeed characterized by the “Third Neighbour” policy. This is more so because even Mongolia’s revised National Security Concept makes it clear that the third neighbour policy is aimed at developing bilateral and multilateral cooperation with highly developed democracies in the areas of politics, economy, culture and humanitarian affairs.³⁸ Taking into account the current challenges faced by Mongolia, the principles and objectives of the country’s foreign policy have also been revised. As such the revised Foreign Policy Concept unveils the names of Mongolia’s desired third neighbours that include the U.S., Japan, the European Union, India, South Korea and Turkey.³⁹

However, it is to be noted that while both Moscow and Beijing remain concerned to ensure that the other does not dominate Mongolia, the emergence of the U.S. as an actor in Mongolia's development is equally disturbing to them. In the two and half decades or so since the U.S. and Mongolia established diplomatic relations in 1987, the U.S. has made its presence felt by paying much attention, especially after Ulaanbaatar came out of being a so called "satellite" of Moscow. It was in 1990 that U.S. Secretary of State James Baker visited Mongolia and extended a hand of partnership to Mongolia as a "Third Neighbour." The concept thrilled Mongolians, who for centuries had never thought of anything beyond a pawn between the Russians and Chinese. This followed a number of visits to Mongolia by American political and military luminaries including George W. Bush who became the first sitting U.S. President to visit Mongolia in 2005. And the latest in the list now includes the US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton who visited Mongolia in July 2012.

Bearing in mind Russian and Chinese geostrategic concerns about Mongolia, the role of third neighbours, raises a strategic question as to whether Ulaanbaatar's democratic "third neighbours" assist Mongolia primarily because of ideological urges to nurture a young democracy, or because of where Mongolia is located, or for some admixture of both reasons? Perhaps Mongolia itself could answer perfectly but one thing is for sure that Mongolia's policy at the moment is to take maximum benefits from the outside world to strengthen its democratic institutions as well as ensure economic security. Though Mongolia is one of a group of states that undertook the transition from authoritarianism to democracy in the late twentieth century, it has also become "the only post-communist country east of the Baltic states to have consolidated democracy."⁴⁰ Indeed, American officials in Washington and at the U.S. Embassy in Ulaanbaatar are quick to underscore, as President Bush did in a speech to the Mongolian people that "Mongolia has made the transition from communism to freedom, and in just 15 years, you've established a vibrant democracy and opened up your economy. You're an example of success for this region and for the world."⁴¹ And more recently, describing Mongolia as the only post-socialist democracy in Asia US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton credited Mongolia for its "courage" in building a democratic system in its territory and sustaining it so much so that it has now become a model of democracy.

At this point, it is noteworthy that even the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon during his visit to Mongolia on 28 July 2009 described Mongolia as "a role model for many developing countries," making progress in the fight against poverty, successfully transiting to

democracy and taking an active role in United Nations peacekeeping missions. While praising Mongolia for making “a successful transition to democracy and a market economy with an accountable and responsive government”, he stated: “You have not only made progress here at home, you have leveraged your experience to show leadership on democracy at the global level. You have made good progress on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and have set an example globally by placing these goals at the heart of your national development planning.”⁴²

However, it is also true that severe economic crisis (GDP contracted by around 40 per cent between 1990 and 1995) together with considerable social dislocation (like emergence of street children) which coincided with the initial period of democratization might have made democracy as a system of government rather unpopular. But Mongolia preferred to go on substantial democratization, and support for democracy as a regime has lately been found to be rather high.

Conclusion

Mongolia's experience of democratization suggests that to a large extent, peaceful democratic transition has been a fruit of its long quest for an independent identity after remaining six centuries as a Chinese vassal and seven decades under Soviet control. This small country is now a democracy characterized by transparency, accountability, rule of law and respect for human rights. According to World Bank indicators on political stability, measuring the perceptions that a government in power will be destabilized by unconstitutional or violent means as was the situation after the 2008 Mongolian parliamentary elections, Mongolia has been found to be quite different. It offers a highly stable environment and remains a stable, democratic country. Mongolians enjoy a degree of political openness that sets the country apart from its Asian neighbors and from many other developing and transitional countries. Regardless of how international donors or academic think tanks rate the extent of democracy in Mongolia, this form of regime seems to have consolidated there as the bulk of the Mongolian citizens believe that democracy is the best form of government for their society. Mongolia has, indeed, shown real improvement across many of the indicators that are used to measure the quality of democracy. Says Landman, “the trial of the former President N. Enkhbayar [ahead of 2012 parliamentary elections] joins a list of aberrations seen over the years, but is not a fatal obstacle in the country's transition toward democracy”.⁴³

Moreover, Mongolia's internal and external situation since the beginning of its democratic transition points to Ulaanbaatar's continuing efforts to readjust itself with the new geo-strategic situation emerged out of the dissolution of the former Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. Given that democratic transition in the country has been showing positive results, it doesn't look to be an ending task at least at the moment. Because realization of much of its domestic and foreign policy objectives, especially in the political and economic fields, depends on how they are able to meet the needs of its immediate national interests as well as security concerns. At the domestic level, looking at the results of the previous Parliamentary elections, it becomes clear that it is the voters' power which is crucial in deciding not only the fate of the political leaders and the parties but the country's destiny as well. At the external level, relations with the outside world, particularly the "third neighbours" have significant roles to play. Nevertheless, it is also true that despite ever-growing bilateral and multilateral ties, Mongolia's relations with Russia and China are still of principal importance. The emerging equation among the three nations provides great opportunity for Mongolia to become a bridge of close cooperation between its two geographic neighbours.

In sum, whatever success Mongolia has achieved or may achieve at its domestic and foreign policies in the post-Soviet period, one thing is clear that democracy has been successful at least in the political realm: (a) implementation of electoral democracy combined with civil and political liberties, i.e., liberal democracy, and (b) creation of an independent political identity. Today it is being complemented by wider economic development and reforms that help improve governance more broadly. The Mongolian economy has now become one of the world's fastest growing due to having a mineral wealth of US \$1.3 trillion, which creates wonderful opportunities for this tiny populated country to further consolidate democracy and expand its international relations. On this count, the upcoming Ulaanbaatar Ministerial Conference of the Community of Democracies brings new hopes for young democracies like Mongolia because an Asian network of democratic countries has been planned to be launched at this occasion. One may, thus, witness a re-energized Community of Democracies that is ready to play a leading role in the promotion of democracy not only in Asia but also the world over.

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