India and Mongolia: Spiritual and Strategic Partners

The ties between India and Mongolia are centuries old. Mongolian khans and princes took their origin from Chakravartins, the legendary Indian kings. It was Indian monks who sown the seeds of Buddha's doctrine on the Mongolian ground some 2000 years ago. During the reign of Kublai Khan (1260-1294), a great grandson of Genghis Khan, Buddhism was proclaimed the state religion. At the end of the 16th, beginning of the 17th centuries it was reestablished in Mongolia for the second time, largely owing to Indian and Tibetan missionaries and scientists. Starting from that time and until the end of the 1930s, when the Buddhist church was eradicated by the Communist regime, the church, its clergy and lamas, many of whom received religious education in India, played a prominent role in the Mongolian history.

India made a generous contribution to the revival of Buddhism in Mongolia after the victory of the democratic revolution of 1990. Ultimately, Mr. Bakula Rinpoche, the Ambassador Extraordinaire and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of India to Mongolia and the holder of the high title of khobilgan (a "reincarnation" of one of the Buddhas) was the major driving force of the process. On January 1, 1990, at the age of 73, he was appointed the Ambassador to Mongolia. He held this position for 10 years and took an active part not only in the consecration of the Migjid Janraisig Temple—one of the major temples of Ulan Bator, but also in every major country's religious event. He is also remembered for funding the construction of the Baguthiyd temple in the capital of Mongolia with his own funds and other favors. Mongols also cherish the memory of that high praise, which Jawaharlal Nehru gave to the historic role of Genghis Khan, naming him "the greatest commander of all times" and appreciate that enthusiastic support, which their country received from India when joining the UN in 1961.

India was one of the first major powers to establish diplomatic relations with Mongolia back in 1955. The political aspect of the relations has been successfully developing and especially after 1990 high and top officials of the countries exchanged visits on many occasions.

However, it happened so that the first in the history of the Mongolian-Indian relations visit of Indian Prime Minister to Mongolia took place only recently. On May 16, 2015 Head of the Indian Government, Mr. Narendra Mody, a businessman, reformer, and a "politician of the new generation," as the Newsweek magazine had christened him, arrived at Ulan Bator with an official visit.

He enjoyed an extremely solemn treatment. A grandeur welcome reception was arranged for him in the central square of the capital, named after Genghis Khan.

Delivering a speech to the welcomers, who were holding Indian and Mongolian flags and greeting banners, Mr. Mody said that he was "happy to come to the cradle of a great nation and deliver warm greetings from 1 bln. 250 mln. friends from the neighboring country, who uphold the same spiritual values."

As Mr. Mody noted during the reception, although "some considerable spatial and territorial obstacles separate us, I am sure our mutual relations will continue developing in the future."

He reiterated the same idea in his grand speech at the plenary session of the Mongolian Parliament— the State Great Hural, which was held on the same day after the business negotiations with Mongolian Prime Minister, Mr. Saikhanbileg. Opening the session, Speaker of the Parliament, Mr. Enkhbold noted with satisfaction that the
traditionally amicable Mongolian-Indian relations are expanding and developing in accordance with the principle of full-fledged partnership in such domains as culture, education, information technologies, renewable sources of energy, industry and agriculture.

But most importantly, the parties agreed to advance their relations to a new level of a strategic partnership.

In his speech, Indian Prime Minister paid special attention to the spiritual kinship of India and Mongolia. India is not just another "next door" country, but rather Mongolia's spiritual neighbor. "We have proved to the rest of the world," said Mr. Mody, "that Mongolian-Indian ties, uniting our minds and souls, can overcome any distances and obstacles." He also added that, "Intellectual proximity is the supreme form of communication between people." Both Indians and Mongols share common democratic values and practice the same religion—Buddhism, in which these common values are reflected. That creates a robust foundation for our further rapprochement." "Only having joined our forces, were we able to protect each other against newly arising cyber dangers," concluded Mr. Mody.

Speaking before the Parliament and at the press conference held on May 18, Mr. Mody focused not only on the spiritual ties uniting India and Mongolia, but also on the expansion of cooperation in the extended number of domains outlined by the Speaker of the Parliament, Mr. Enkhbold.

Total of 14 intergovernmental and cross-sectoral agreements have been signed. The following agreements are considered of a paramount importance: agreements on the cooperation between the Foreign Ministries and National Security Councils of two countries; agreements on the cooperation in the field of culture for the period of 2015-2018 and cooperation on the international scene in years 2016-2020; an agreement on the air transport and on the creation of a Cybernetic Security Training Center in Ulan Bator. Prime Minister Mody also participated in the cornerstone laying ceremonies for the Center and a coeducational secondary school.

Agreements on the cooperation in the field of conventional medicine and homeopathy and on the cooperation of cancer centers of two countries are also regarded as very important. Mr. Mody delivered and transferred some equipment designated for the Mongolian Center and assured that India is willing to share its technological know-how in the dairy product processing and manufacturing of cashmere and wool textiles.

In the course of negotiations, Mr. Mody noted that up until the present time economic ties between the countries had been rather weak, but that Mongolia's abundant mineral resources were expected to be an engine driving their further strengthening. He assured that India is prepared to cooperate with Mongolia in such fields as nuclear research, development of infrastructure, agriculture, light industry, health care, education and others. He announced the resolution of the Indian Government to lend Mongolia $1 bln. on favorable conditions for the development of the country's infrastructure and human resources. Mr. Mody took part in the Besreg-naadom festival held at the Chingisiinkhuree entertainment center as well as in the meeting with the members of the Mongolian-Indian Community—a friendship society.

As we can see, the visit of Head of the Indian Government, Mr. Mody to Mongolia was very fruitful and significant and there are three reasons for that:

- It was indeed the first visit of such rank in the history of two countries

- It allowed to significantly expand mutual cooperation, but above all, it flagged a new milestone in the Mongolian-Indian relations—the development of a strategic partnership

- It promoted further spiritual fusion of India and Mongolia.

Beyond any doubt, this visit initiated a new stage in the centuries-old ties of two countries, a real breakthrough in their cooperation.

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