

DEBATES

Mounir ABDEL-NOUR

Mr President, I have been extremely impressed at the pace with which your country has been able to democratise its system, yet there are many countries which have tried for 30 years or more to do this but have failed. What is your secret, and why did you succeed while the others did not?

Nambaryn ENKHBAYAR

This is an evening for disclosing classified information, and I have to disclose the secret of Mongolian democracy. It is always very difficult to be sure you have achieved democracy, as it is always a process, never a result, and you have to work hard to maintain it. We have been successful so far, but everyone should participate actively in ensuring it works.

A lot of authors have studied the Mongolian case and tried to understand why we have been more or less successful. Some of them traced it to the nomadic mindset, where people readily adapt themselves to new demands of a changing world, and maybe that is one explanation as to why we were able to transform ourselves. Secondly, we were tightly controlled by the former Soviet Union, were left to ourselves when it collapsed, and found no better solution than to become democratic. Maybe that is another explanation. A third explanation is that we have always been between two big powers, China and the Soviet Union, now Russia, and in such a circumstance it is useful to have a third power, the US, Japan, Korea, India or Europe, who can ensure your sovereignty, development and independence, so we became democratic.

Therefore, there are a lot of possible explanations, but I would like to say that it is still a young democracy, and we all have to make the effort in ensuring that the process is ongoing and brings good results.

Yim SUNG-JOON

I would like to welcome the President of Mongolia, a country with which my country has a very friendly relationship. I was very interested in your anecdote about trying to measure the height of the North Korean leader Kim Jong-Il.

Nambaryn ENKHBAYAR

I did not say height. I said size.

Yim SUNG-JOON

Regrettably, North Korea and its leader remain in seclusion, and we hope it decides to open up. Our country and neighbours face the grave problem of North Korea's nuclear weapons programme, as you know. They have already declared that they possess nuclear weapons, and we have to deal with this. I hope tomorrow's panels address this very important issue. My question is as follows. I hope Mongolia has tried to assess the gravity of this situation. What is Mongolia's position vis-a-vis North Korea in relation to its weapons of mass destruction?

Nambaryn ENKHBAYAR

Mongolia thinks that this is a very important issue, and whatever happens on the Korean peninsula is very important for my country as well. We are doing all we can to assist in solving this problem, and we have many advantages in this regard as well as some disadvantages. We are a small country, which is a disadvantage from one viewpoint, but it is an advantage in that we are not a threat to North Korea. We have the disadvantage of not being a direct neighbour, but this is also an advantage, because we are not a direct threat either.

I tried to engage North Koreans in a dialogue with other countries while I was working with the Prime Minister and the President, trying to play the role of mediator. We organised discussions between Japan and North Korea in Ulan Bator three years ago, and again last year. We have acted as a mediator between North Korea and the US, South Korea and Japan, and I personally visited North Korea in 2003 with a message from then Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi and the South Korean Leaders. Unfortunately, I could not meet with Kim Jong-Il because he was on his regular tour to visit the armed forces, but I met some of the other leaders, and they listened very carefully to the messages.

Kim Yong-Nam is the former President of North Korea and Speaker of the Parliament, and he told me that there were some opportunities to discuss these pressing issues during the Clinton administration. I told this to President Clinton in 2005 when I met him in Davos, and he was very interested in engaging in negotiations. We still have opportunities to speak with North Korea. We have to built up trust, and maybe to be more patient. It is important that we do this together.

The second point I wanted to make is that there are the so-called Six-Party Talks on North Korean issues. We hope that these are successful, and that the decisions are implemented by all sides. This is our position. However, we also think that other countries such as Mongolia or Australia should be involved in these talks, because we are also part of the Asia-Pacific region, and we want the talks to become a permanent framework for discussions and negotiations.

Robert BLACKWELL

Thank you, Mr President, for a presentation that was both elegant and pointed, which is quite an unusual combination. You answered a previous question about Mongolian democracy in a systemic and analytic way, but I want to ask a more autobiographical question. How did you personally become involved? You said earlier that you grew up in the Soviet period, where you certainly did not get advice from Moscow along these lines. Where did these ideas come from?

Nambaryn ENKHBAYAR

My background is as a student of literature in Moscow. There is a very strange institute called the Institute of Literature, and nobody understands what it teaches. It teaches world literature, starting from the Greek and Roman authors, then the European, Chinese and Japanese medieval periods, then Russian classic literature and 20th century world literature, especially French and American. However, studying literature in Russia is very interesting. It involves a lot of drinking. I do not drink myself, because I have inherited from my mother the fact that I feel sick if I drink vodka. However, I learned from my roommates that it involved a lot of drinking and a lot of discussion about the ultimate goal of life, about samizdat books.

I said earlier that this evening is about disclosing classified information. I read all these so-called forbidden books as a student in Moscow, such as Solzhenitsyn and all the European authors who were forbidden at the time. I finished my studies with the firm understanding that the gulag was a great crime, and that the system should be changed, but it was difficult to bring the things I had learned into being in my own country, and it took some years for me to find myself. All these democratic changes started happening across the world in the 1990s, including in Mongolia, and, perhaps because of this background, I found myself very much involved in all these political activities.

I think that was the experience of many Mongolian people in the early 1990s. I became a member of parliament in 1992, then Minister for Culture, then the leader of the opposition. Then I became Prime Minister, then Speaker, and then President for the last four years. The main conclusions to be drawn from my years in politics may still lie ahead of me, but I believe that leaders should be dissatisfied with the work they have done, though hopefully they are more or less satisfied with your work. It is a common belief in Mongolia and other countries that it is more important for the leaders to be satisfied than the people, whereas I believe that leaders should be dissatisfied with the work they have done, because all this power gives opportunity, but you only use part of it. I think that is the main lesson to be drawn from our experience with democracy.