

A country in transformation

By HE DALRAIN DAVAASAMBUU

AMBASSADOR OF MONGOLIA TO THE COURT OF ST JAMES'S



DALRAIN DAVAASAMBUU is Mongolian Ambassador to the United Kingdom and has had a distinguished diplomatic career.

Mongolia's 2.6 million people who live on a vast territory between Russia and China are trying to create a modern democracy and market economy. Mongolia wants to be a democratic model for the region. Most historians connect Mongolia's history with the appearance of Hun-Nu of Xiung-nu in about the fourth century BC, who established a vast confederation encompassing today's Mongolia. It is also known that Turks and Uighurs left their traces and marks on the territory of today's Mongolia.

Chinggis Khan in 1026 united Mongolian tribes and laid the foundation of the Mongolian Empire, which was the biggest land empire in the world. Chinggis Khan was an astute statesman who established many important fundamentals of statecraft, such as sound administrative and management systems, free trade, liberal taxation, religious tolerance and diplomatic immunity. Chinggis Khan and his descendants ruled Mongolia until the 17th century. Manchurian and Chinese rule followed, but by the beginning of the 20th century internal pressures were becoming apparent for a return to independent statehood. This culminated in the revolution of 1911, after which independence was regained, at first as a kingdom.

The People's Revolution of 1921, with the help of the Russians, was the second socialist revolution in the world. It established the People's Republic. Since that period until 1990, Mongolia and Russia became close friends and Mongolian Chinese relations were influenced by the nature of relations between China and Russia. When these two neighbours had good relations, we benefited from good relations with them. When they had problems starting from the 1960s, Mongolia was in a difficult position regarding China.

The ethnic origin and language of Mongolians are quite uniform. Nearly 80 per cent of the population of 2.6 million people are Khalkha Mongols. 15 per cent are of various Mongol minorities, such as the Darkhad, Bayad, Buriat, Dariganga, Zakhchin, Urainkhai, Oold and Toorguud. A further 5 per cent are Kazakhs. The country has an annual population growth rate of around 2 per cent.

Religious freedom is a hallmark and the main religion is Buddhism, which is practised widely, many monasteries having been reopened over the past few years. The official national language is Khalkha Mongolian, which is related to the Altaic family of languages. Those who were educated before 1990 speak Russian, and since 1990 English is becoming very popular due to Mongolia's

Westernisation and its expanding foreign relations. Several thousand nationals have trained overseas, or are currently studying abroad.

Mongolia had a high standard of education and health care when Mongolia enjoyed close relations with Russia and the other former socialist countries. The Mongolian literacy rate is high, it stands at more than 90 per cent. Today's task is to maintain this high rate and these social achievements, as well as to enrich them with international best practices.

Multi-party democracy has been in effect since 1990 and the directly elected Ikh Khural (Parliament) enjoys supreme legislative powers and guides executive bodies like the Cabinet and Central Bank. In other words, Mongolia is a real parliamentary state. The Mongolian President is directly elected, but he does not have as strong powers and rights as the US President, for example. The President is the Head of State, he chairs the National Security Council and he is the Armed Forces Commander-in-Chief. In addition, he appoints all judges, public prosecutors and ambassadors. Cabinet members including the Prime Minister are approved by the President prior to being elected by the Ikh Khural.

The economy is dominated by agriculture and mining. Animal husbandry accounts for three-quarters of the country's agricultural output, most animals being reared in the traditional nomadic way. It is difficult to change this tradition. Since our soil is poor and thin the herders have to move from time to time to avoid over-grazing. Mongolia has over 30 million head of livestock including more than 12 million sheep, 13 millions goats, 2 million horses, 2 millions cattle and about 250,000 camels. I think that the Mongolian soil would be seriously damaged if we were to have more than 40 millions head. Agriculture accounts for about 30 per cent of Mongolia's GDP.

Industry mostly processes wool, cashmere (3,500 metric tonnes a year, 20-25 per cent of world production), leather, meat and dairy products. Mining and manufacturing account for 40 per cent of GDP and more than 60 per cent of exports. The private sector has adopted a predominant role in the economy. Free market economic relations have been put in place and the country has been increasingly opening up to the outside world. We have achieved significant results in guaranteeing human rights and fundamental freedoms and ensuring the freedom of the press, but we still have to work hard to improve democracy, freedom and protection of human rights. **F**