THE EDITORIAL PAGE

REPRESSION OF BALOCH PEOPLE

Balochistan was an independent country till the partition of India. Its ruler, the Khan of Kalat, had appointed the founder of Pakistan, M. A. Jinnah, as his legal counsel to represent his case of sovereignty when the British wanted to subsume his country into undivided India. It was Jinnah's betrayal of ordering the newly carved Pakistan to usurp the State of Kalat and turn it into its fourth province that kicked off the first wave of rebellion against Islamabad. The people of Balochistan never quite liked Pakistan, as both people have different ethos and are divided by big cultural differences. While the Baloch people do not follow political Islam and have multi-faith traditions, Pakistan is just the opposite. For this reason, Baloch people are not involved in the Pakistan-raised terrorist organisations like Jaish-e-Muhammad or Lashkar-e-Toiba. Moreover, Pakistan never took care of the people of the province, which is mineral-rich and also happens to be the largest province of Pakistan. The most obvious sign of exploitation is that of Sui (Natural gas) gas that is sourced from Balochistan and is supplied to the entire Pakistan. Baloch people, it seems, have no right over the gas produced from their land. Likewise, Balochistan remains the most backward and underdeveloped region of Pakistan. So when the Chinese took up the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) through Balochistan to the Gwadar port and isolated the locals from either gaining employment or economic dividends from this project, people's anger flared up, and it gave rise to a fresh wave of militancy. Now, Pakistan is not even ready to open a dialogue with the Baloch rebels and has let loose a reign of repression, including forced disappearances and custodial killings of rebels and their family members. Baloch rebels are continuing their armed struggle for freedom. The state of Pakistan has neither a plan for reconciliation nor does it have the intention to undo the injustice done to Balochistan.

How India is reclaiming its economic destiny

R K Pachnanda

"India has boarded a speedy reforms express......" .." The world is tilting towards India .." commented the Prime Minister of India. India's historical trajectory from antiquity to the early modern period was marked by multiple phases of progress. A striking feature common to these phases was the development of institutional frameworks and technological innovations that integrated large parts of South Asia with Africa, West Asia and Europe. India emerged as a major producer of textiles, spices (notably black pepper), aromatics, precious stones and metals, all of which were in high global demand. The subcontinent functioned as a central hub of the Indian Ocean trade.

Trade in the Indus Valley civilisation was largely organised, with a wide range of goods circulated across regions. The presence of standardised weights and seals suggests a regulated internal trade system.

The sixth century BCE marked a decisive phase with the emergence of janapadas and mahajanapadas, signalling a shift from lineage-based societies to territorial states. Urban centres initially developed in the middle Gangetic plains and later spread to the Deccan and South India. Trade operated at local, regional, interregional and international levels.

A notable development was the localisation of industries. The growth of guilds (shreni, gana, puga, sangha) further strengthened commerce. Trade also benefited from improved transport, with large caravans of carts moving goods across regions.

The diffusion of literacy and the circulation of punch-marked coins enhanced commercial transactions, although barter continued alongside monetisation. From the first century BCE, long-distance maritime trade expanded significantly.

The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea documents regular traffic between Indian ports, Arabia, and Egypt, with Bharuch emerging as a major hub. Indian and foreign vessels shared commercial traffic, and Indian goods--especially textiles and spices--were exported to the Roman world. Until about 1800, international exchange was concentrated in littoral and river-delta regions, while inland areas participated indirectly through riverine and caravan networks. Premodern trade was characterised by monsoon-driven seasonality, reliance on river-port complexes, preference for high-value-to-bulk commodities, and trading practices centred on fairs, auctions, and short-term transactions.

Indian states periodically facilitated trade by integrating land and maritime zones, as seen under the Satavahanas, Kushanas, Guptas and especially the Cholas. Most states remained agrarian and land-revenue based, with inland capitals and limited direct involvement in commerce.

Maritime commerce expanded as a consequence of inland stability rather than naval innovation.

According to Angus Maddison's estimates, India accounted for approximately 22 - 24 per cent of world GDP around 1600 CE, reflecting the scale of production, manufacturing (especially textiles) and commercial integration achieved before European political dominance. With the advent of the British, the Indian economy was subsumed by the imperialist economy and drastically fell to 4.2 per cent by 1950.

However, today, India has resurged in its economic power and has become the fastest growing economy in the world. In the words of IMF, India is the 'only bright light in the otherwise dark horizon'. India is all set to become the third-largest economy in a few years. The last decade has witnessed a truly transformational change, marked by focused and sustained execution.

This transformation has been built on four key pillars. The first is public investment in physical, digital, and social infrastructure.

The second pillar is inclusive growth, ensuring that the benefits of national growth are shared across society. The third pillar is manufacturing and innovation, while the fourth is simplification.

Together, these pillars, supported by a strong technological base, are enabling robust real growth in the range of 7 to 8 per cent. India achieved a growth rate of 8.2 per cent in the last quarter, proving our mettle and economic buoyancy.

What is working particularly well is that the benefits of growth are being experienced across society. India has therefore emerged as a long-term anchor for global investment, with investors increasingly viewing the country as a driver of sustained growth.

India is also universally recognised as a credible and reliable trade partner, with consistent delivery strengthening global confidence. Rapid AI adoption under Industry 5.0 is transforming Indian industries, while digital public infrastructure is enabling innovation at scale.

As a result, India is emerging as a global hub for technological transformation driven by the application of AI and advanced digital technologies.

The next generation of GST reforms--GST 2.0--will catapult India to parity with advanced economies. Enhanced simplification and improved compliance frameworks for MSMEs will strengthen India's manufacturing capabilities, while enforcing strategic disinvestment and asset monetisation will propel the growth of free enterprise. India's demographic dividend, supported by a large and increasingly skilled workforce, is widely seen as a global advantage. Corporate giants increasingly view India as central to their long-term growth strategies, as stability and resilience make the country a dependable market that combines high growth with long-term reliability. India is also shaping global collaboration by playing a key role in building global platforms and is increasingly perceived as a strategic alternative to China.

Atmanirbhar Bharat transformed the crisis into an opportunity during COVID-19, leading to a leap in economic growth. 250 million people have been lifted above the poverty line.

Our infrastructural progress is equally remarkable: from constructing 14 km of road space per day in 2014, we now achieve over 34 km per day. India emerged as the 'Vishwamitra'--the pharmacy of the world-during COVID-19, showcasing our pharmaceutical capabilities on a global scale.

The continued momentum of our 'Make in India' initiative will culminate in achieving 500 GW of clean green energy by 2030. The IMF projects a growth rate of 7 to 7.5 per cent for India over the next two to three years. The government has also built a strong JAM Trinity--Jan Dhan accounts, Aadhaar-enabled payment systems and mobile connectivity.

India has navigated global tariff pressures with considerable astuteness by diversifying its trade partnerships. The country has signed free trade agreements with New Zealand and Oman, CETA with the UK as well as the landmark FTA with the European Union, regarded as the largest trade agreement in India's history; and now the trade pact with USA. It is because of the sagacious economic policies and economic resilience that, despite tariff pressures in certain sectors, trade figures have continued to grow. India has always come out victorious in every crisis, irrespective of global vicissitudes and challenges.

WHY LAND OWNERSHIP IS STILL A LEGAL ILLUSION

Vivek Kumar Singh

In popular understanding, land ownership in India is treated as a settled fact. Put simply, it is a matter of having the 'right papers', a registered sale deed, and entries in revenue records. Yet this belief rests on a fragile legal foundation. In reality, land title in India is less a legal certainty and more a working assumption, one that remains perpetually open to challenge. The notion of a clear, absolute and state-guaranteed land title is, in many ways, a myth.

Unlike several modern jurisdictions that follow a conclusive or Torrens system of title, India has never enacted a comprehensive statute defining or guaranteeing land ownership. There is no single law that clearly establishes what constitutes a land title or assures its indefeasibility. Instead, land rights are governed by a patchwork of laws like the Transfer of Property Act, 1882; the Registration Act, 1908; state land revenue codes; tenancy laws; and judicial precedents. None of these provides a definitive answer to the question: who is the absolute owner of land?

This ambiguity has deep historical roots. Under pre-colonial systems, particularly during Mughal rule, land was not owned by individuals in the modern sense. The sovereign was regarded as the ultimate owner, while cultivators possessed rights of use and occupancy. These rights were inheritable and transferable in practice, but they were not proprietary in the civil-law sense.

The situation did not fundamentally change with the advent of British rule. After the grant of Diwani rights in 1765, the East India Company acquired the right to collect revenue. It, however, did not confer ownership of land itself. The Permanent Settlement of 1793 introduced zamindars as revenue intermediaries, but even then, ownership remained conceptually ambiguous. Zamindars were responsible for revenue collection and enjoyed heritable interests, yet the underlying premise was that land existed primarily as a source of revenue for the state.

Other colonial systems such as Ryotwari and Mahalwari likewise treated cultivators as occupants or tenure holders rather than absolute proprietors. Thus, ownership as a legally perfected right never fully crystallised during the colonial period.

After independence, India undertook sweeping land reforms, most notably the abolition of the zamindari system. While these reforms removed intermediaries and redistributed land rights, they did not create a modern title system. The post-independence state largely inherited the colonial revenue framework, merely substituting the zamindar with the recorded occupant or tenure holder.

As a result, land rights in India today are derived from a combination of possession, inheritance, revenue records and registered transactions. Crucially, none of these confers an indefeasible title. Revenue records such as jamabandi, khasra, khatauni or record of rights are widely assumed to prove ownership, but courts have consistently held otherwise. The Supreme Court has repeatedly ruled that revenue entries are not documents of title. Rather, they merely indicate possession and revenue liability.

Registration, often seen as the gold standard of ownership proof, fares no better. A registered sale deed does not guarantee title. It merely records a transaction. If the seller's title is defective, the buyer acquires no better right. This principle, firmly entrenched in Indian law, is the reason multiple sales of the same land, overlapping claims and decades-long litigation are so common.

India follows what is known as a presumptive title system. Under this framework, ownership is presumed to be valid based on available records, but this presumption is always rebuttable. Any competing claimant can challenge the title in a civil court, often by tracing defects decades or even a century old. Final determination of ownership rests not with land records or registrars, but with the judiciary.

The consequences of this system are visible in India's litigation landscape. Land disputes account for a substantial portion of civil cases, clogging courts and undermining economic activity. Infrastructure projects, urban development and private investment are routinely delayed due to unclear titles and protracted disputes.

The government itself has acknowledged this structural flaw. Initiatives such as the Digital India Land Records Modernisation Programme aim to integrate textual and spatial records and eventually move towards conclusive titles. However, progress has been uneven, and the transition from presumptive to guaranteed title remains aspirational rather than real.

Calling land title in India a myth is, therefore, not rhetorical excess. It is a reflection of legal reality. Ownership is not a settled fact but an inference. It survives only until it is challenged and undone. In practice, land in India is not owned with certainty. It is held subject to perpetual verification.

What India must fix before embracing free trade

Santhosh Mathew

When the proposed India-US interim trade agreement was hailed as the "father of all free trade deals," it sounded impressive-almost civilisational in scale. But from an Indian perspective, the phrase raises an uncomfortable question: what kind of economic child is this father expected to produce? For Western economies, such trade deals are engines of growth. For India, they often feel like threats. The reason lies not in the agreement itself, but in the structure of India's economy-still weighed down by an excessive dependence on agriculture for employment. Every trade negotiation with the United States or Europe eventually circles back to one flashpoint: agriculture. Soyabean oil, dairy products, fruits, animal feed, genetically modified crops-each item triggers anxiety, protests, and political assurances. Commerce ministers promise protection, farmers fear displacement, and the nation debates food security as if it were under siege. Yet the deeper truth is rarely stated openly. India's problem is not trade liberalisation; **it is that too many Indians are still trapped in farming.

Nearly 45 percent of India's workforce depends on agriculture, while the sector contributes only around 16 percent of GDP. No major economy in the world carries such an imbalance. In the United States, agriculture employs barely 1.2 percent of the workforce; in the European Union, about 1.6 percent. Even countries that loudly defend farmers-France, Germany, Japan-do so with a small, technologically empowered agricultural population. Their farms are productive; their farmers are few. India's farms, by contrast, are crowded. Millions work on tiny, fragmented plots that cannot generate sustainable incomes. Climate uncertainty, volatile prices, rising input costs, and shrinking landholdings have turned agriculture into a livelihood of last resort rather than choice.

People remain on farms not because farming is profitable, but because alternatives are scarce. This is why free trade agreements appear frightening. When half the population depends on agriculture, even modest imports can disrupt millions of lives. What is a routine policy adjustment for Washington becomes an existential issue in rural India. From a Western lens-where agriculture barely registers in GDP-calling an India-US FTA the "father of all deals" makes sense. From India's vantage point, it exposes how long we have delayed our economic transition.

Modern technology has fundamentally changed agriculture. Precision farming, mechanisation, artificial intelligence, improved seeds, and data-driven irrigation mean that "a very small percentage of people can now feed entire nations". Globally, food security is no longer a function of manpower, but of technology and logistics. In pure economic terms, India needs "no more than 1 percent of its population in agriculture" to ensure food security-perhaps 5 percent if one accounts for transition and diversity. Anything beyond that is disguised unemployment. Yet we continue to hold nearly half the workforce on the land.

The result is predictable: low incomes, high distress, and generational stagnation. Agricultural growth struggles to cross 4-4.5 per cent even when the overall economy grows above 7 percent. This gap is not accidental; it is structural. The greatest casualty of this delay is India's youth. Every year, millions of young Indians enter the labour market. Encouraging them-directly or indirectly-to remain in agriculture is an economic injustice. Landholdings are shrinking, not expanding. Farming incomes remain unstable. Climate risks are intensifying.

India's youth belong in industry and services, not on ever-smaller farms. The country's global reputation today is not built on wheat or rice, but on software engineers, doctors, nurses, technicians, managers, and service professionals. Services already contribute more than half of India's GDP and dominate export earnings. Manufacturing, too, holds enormous potential to absorb semi-skilled labour if supported by infrastructure, investment, and policy clarity. India's true natural resource is not land; it is human capital.

Unlike land, it multiplies when invested in. Skill development, vocational training, digital literacy, and industry-linked education must therefore be treated as national infrastructure. In a globalised economy, skill is the new land, and productivity is the new harvest. Manpower export, often viewed with suspicion, is actually a strategic advantage. Remittances already form a critical part of India's foreign exchange earnings. This is where the irony of the "father of all trade deals" becomes clear. Free trade agreements are designed for economies where agriculture is marginal, productivity is high, and labour is mobile. India enters these agreements carrying the weight of an unfinished transition. That is why every FTA feels unequal, every tariff cut appears dangerous, and every import triggers panic. Protectionism may seem comforting, but it is not a long-term solution. No country has ever grown rich by shielding low-productivity sectors indefinitely. Tariffs can buy time, but they cannot buy prosperity. Without structural change, protection merely delays the inevitable-and increases the eventual cost.

Moving people out of agriculture does not mean abandoning farming. On the contrary, it is the only way to rescue it. Fewer farmers mean larger holdings, better technology adoption, higher productivity, and dignified incomes.

Agriculture must evolve into a high-value, high-tech sector, not a social safety net for surplus labour.India's own experience proves this point. Operation Flood transformed the country into the world's largest milk producer not by employing more people, but by improving efficiency, supply chains, and market access. The Green Revolution succeeded through science, not numbers. The next transformation must reduce manpower while increasing value.

As long as half the population depends on agriculture, India will negotiate trade deals from a position of fear. A confident India, by contrast, would enter global markets knowing that most of its people work in services and industry, while a small, skilled farming population ensures food security efficiently. The plough fed India for centuries. But the future will be built by skills, machines, and services.

The real challenge before India is not whether to sign the "father of all trade deals," but whether it is ready to raise a new economic generation-one that earns its living not from protection, but from productivity. Or, as one blunt economic truth puts it, "Nations do not grow rich by protecting old livelihoods forever, but by creating better ones for the next generation."