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The 'Harvest' China Wants is One India Cannot Afford

Context

- The **India-China boundary dispute** remains one of the most complex geopolitical challenges in Asia.
- Recent discussions regarding an **early harvest settlement** in the **Sikkim sector** have generated concerns about the future of boundary negotiations.
- Although such a proposal appears to offer diplomatic progress, it risks undermining India's long-term **strategic interests** and weakening the framework established under the **2005 Agreement on Political Parameters and Guiding Principles**.
- A sector-specific settlement could strengthen China's position while leaving larger disputes unresolved.
- Therefore, India must continue to pursue a **comprehensive settlement** rather than isolated agreements.

Understanding the Early Harvest Proposal

- **Nature of the Proposal**
 - The concept of an early harvest involves resolving a relatively less contentious sector before addressing more complicated disputes.

- China has repeatedly advocated this approach in the Sikkim sector, portraying it as a practical confidence-building measure.

- **Conflict with the 2005 Agreement**

- The 2005 Agreement established a three-stage process involving political parameters, a framework for settlement, and finally delineation and demarcation.
- It also emphasized a package settlement covering all sectors of the boundary dispute.
- A standalone settlement in Sikkim would reverse this agreed sequence and weaken the principle of comprehensive negotiations.

Strategic Importance of a Package Settlement

- **Interconnected Nature of Boundary Sectors**

- The India-China boundary consists of multiple strategically linked sectors.
- A **package settlement** allows for balanced negotiations and reciprocal concessions across regions.

- **Preserving India's Negotiating Leverage**

- Sector-by-sector settlements may enable China to secure advantages incrementally while postponing resolution of more contentious disputes.
- Such an approach could diminish India's **negotiating leverage** and reduce its ability to seek concessions in other sectors.
- Maintaining the comprehensive framework is therefore essential for protecting India's long-term interests.

The Significance of the Sikkim Sector

- **The Trijunction Dispute**

- The Sikkim sector remains linked to disagreements over the India-Bhutan-China trijunction.
- China interprets the 1890 Great Britain-China Convention as placing the trijunction at Mount Gipmochi, whereas India and Bhutan identify Batang La as the correct point based on the watershed principle.

- **Security of the Siliguri Corridor**

- The dispute has direct implications for the **Siliguri Corridor**, the narrow land passage connecting mainland India with its northeastern states.
- Any settlement that strengthens China's claims in the region could increase pressure on one of India's most vulnerable strategic corridors.

The Doklam Dimension

- **Impact of Chinese Infrastructure Expansion**

- Since the 2017 Doklam standoff, China has expanded roads, military facilities, and settlements in western Bhutan.
- These developments have increased concerns regarding Chinese access to the Jampheri Ridge, which overlooks the Siliguri Corridor.

- **Implications for Bhutan and India**

- A settlement in Sikkim could indirectly strengthen China's position in Doklam and increase pressure on Bhutan to settle its own boundary dispute on terms favourable to Beijing.
- This would have significant consequences for India's regional security interests.

China's Broader Border Strategy

• Post-2020 Developments

- Since the Eastern Ladakh crisis of 2020, China has pursued a multi-dimensional strategy involving military consolidation along the Line of Actual Control (LAC).
- It involves promotion of the Zangnan (South Tibet) narrative, renaming locations in Arunachal Pradesh, and constructing border defence villages.

• Strategic Implications

- These measures indicate a broader effort to strengthen China's position on the ground while simultaneously engaging in diplomatic negotiations.
- Consequently, any proposal for partial settlement must be assessed within this wider strategic context.

Principles for India's Future Approach

• Upholding the 2005 Framework

- India should firmly reject any standalone Sikkim delimitation or demarcation exercise and preserve the integrity of the package settlement framework.

• Ensuring Stability on the LAC

- Peace and tranquillity along the LAC must remain a non-negotiable condition for progress in bilateral relations.
- Unilateral changes to the status quo should not be normalised.

• Pursuing Comprehensive Political Engagement

- A durable solution requires meaningful political engagement aimed at a comprehensive boundary settlement rather than symbolic measures or procedural negotiations.

Conclusion

- The resumption of high-level India-China boundary talks is a positive development, but diplomacy should not come at the expense of national security.
- An early harvest settlement in Sikkim may create an appearance of progress, yet it risks weakening the established framework of negotiations and strengthening China's strategic position.
- By preserving the **package settlement** approach, insisting on stability along the **LAC**, and pursuing a genuine **comprehensive settlement**, India can safeguard its strategic interests and maintain its bargaining power.
- Lasting solutions require **strategic clarity**, patience, and a commitment to long-term national interests rather than short-term diplomatic gains.

The 'Harvest' China Wants is One India Cannot Afford FAQs

Q1. What is an “early harvest” settlement in the India-China boundary dispute?

Ans. An early harvest settlement refers to resolving one sector of the boundary dispute, such as Sikkim, before achieving a comprehensive settlement of all sectors.

Q2. Why does India oppose a standalone settlement in the Sikkim sector?

Ans. India opposes it because it could weaken its negotiating leverage and undermine the package settlement framework established in the 2005 Agreement.

Q3. Why is the Sikkim sector strategically important for India?

Ans. The Sikkim sector is strategically important because it is linked to the security of the Siliguri Corridor and the India-Bhutan-China trijunction dispute.

Q4. How has China strengthened its position along the border in recent years?

Ans. China has strengthened its position through military consolidation, infrastructure development, border villages, and territorial claims along the LAC.

Q5. What should be India’s approach to future boundary negotiations?

Ans. India should uphold the 2005 Agreement, ensure peace along the LAC, and pursue a comprehensive political settlement of the boundary dispute.

Source: **The Hindu**

How Land Pooling Solves Acquisition Woes

Context

- Rapid **urbanization** in India has created a growing demand for **roads, housing**, public amenities, and other infrastructure.
- Traditionally, governments have relied on **land acquisition** to secure land for development projects, however, increasing costs, legal complexities, and social resistance have made this approach less effective.
- In this context, **land pooling** has emerged as a practical and sustainable alternative.
- Rajasthan’s decision to introduce its first land pooling scheme reflects a broader shift toward more collaborative models of urban development.

The Challenges of Land Acquisition

- The limitations of conventional land acquisition have become more evident after the enactment of the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013.
- While the law strengthened the rights of landowners, it also increased the financial burden on governments through higher **compensation, rehabilitation, and resettlement**.
- Additionally, acquisition processes often face legal disputes and administrative delays.
- As a result, many infrastructure projects experience setbacks, creating a gap between urban planning goals and implementation.

Land Pooling as an Alternative

- Under this system, landowners voluntarily contribute a portion of their land for infrastructure creation and receive a share of the developed land in return.
- The **Town Planning (TP) Scheme**, widely used in Gujarat and Maharashtra, is a notable example.
- Typically, landowners contribute 25–40% of their land, which is used for roads, parks, public amenities, and housing for the Economically Weaker Sections (EWS).
- The remaining 60–75% is returned as reconstituted plots with improved infrastructure and higher market value.
- This mechanism combines **land assembly**, infrastructure development, and **cost recovery** within a single framework.

Advantages of Land Pooling

- One of the major strengths of land pooling is its **participatory approach**. Instead of compulsory acquisition, landowners become partners in the development process.
- This reduces conflict and promotes **equitable benefit-sharing**.
- The model is also **financially sustainable**, as development costs are recovered through increased land values rather than requiring large upfront government expenditure.
- Furthermore, land pooling minimizes **displacement**, preserves community ties, and supports **environmentally sensitive** urban planning.
- These advantages make it an attractive solution for expanding cities and improving urban infrastructure.

State-Level Experiences

- **Gujarat: A Proven Success**
 - Gujarat represents the most successful example of land pooling in India.
 - The concept was introduced nearly a century ago and later formalized through the **Gujarat Town Planning and Urban Development Act, 1976**.
 - More than 1,000 sq. km. across cities such as Ahmedabad, Surat, Rajkot, Vadodara, and Gandhinagar have been developed through TP schemes.
 - Strong legal support and administrative experience have been crucial to this success.
- **Maharashtra: Reviving the Model**
 - Maharashtra initially struggled because statutory provisions were not updated to support evolving urban needs.
 - However, TP schemes have recently been reintroduced in Pune and the **Mumbai Metropolitan Region**, demonstrating how legal reforms and renewed policy focus can revive effective planning mechanisms.
- **Guwahati: Innovation in Practice**
 - Guwahati faced several obstacles, including unclear legal provisions, non-digitized **land records**, and inconsistencies between official records and actual land conditions.

- To overcome these challenges, authorities simplified procedures by relying on existing records and reducing landowner contributions to **12-15%**. These adaptations increased public acceptance and accelerated implementation.

- **Rajasthan: An Emerging Model**

- Rajasthan has recognized the need to tailor land pooling to local conditions.
- The state is modifying **land-value calculations** and absorbing part of the development cost to reduce the burden on landowners.
- Such measures improve fairness and make participation more attractive.

The Way Forward

- The experiences of different states show that there is no universal formula for successful land pooling.
- States such as **Tamil Nadu**, **Madhya Pradesh**, and **Delhi** must adapt the model to their own legal, administrative, and socio-economic contexts.
- Building trust among landholders, ensuring transparency, strengthening legislation, and designing fair contribution mechanisms will be essential for long-term success.

Conclusion

- Land pooling represents a significant shift from traditional land acquisition toward a more collaborative and sustainable model of urban development.
- By enabling governments to secure land for infrastructure while allowing landowners to share in the benefits of development, it creates a balanced framework for growth.
- With effective legislation, strong institutions, public participation, and context-specific implementation, land pooling can play a transformative role in shaping India's urban future.

How Land Pooling Solves Acquisition Woes FAQs

Q1. What is land pooling?

Ans. Land pooling is a system in which landowners voluntarily contribute a portion of their land for infrastructure development and receive developed land in return.

Q2. Why has land acquisition become difficult in India?

Ans. Land acquisition has become difficult because it involves high compensation costs, rehabilitation obligations, and lengthy legal procedures.

Q3. What is the main advantage of the Town Planning (TP) Scheme?

Ans. The main advantage of the TP Scheme is that it enables infrastructure development while allowing landowners to share in the benefits of increased land value.

Q4. Why is Gujarat considered a successful example of land pooling?

Ans. Gujarat is considered successful because it has effectively implemented TP schemes across more than 1,000 square kilometres with strong legal and institutional support.

Q5. What factors are essential for the success of land pooling schemes?

Ans. Effective legislation, public participation, institutional capacity, and local adaptation are essential for the success of land pooling schemes.

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