**[Not worth it?](https://www.dawn.com/news/1782287/not-worth-it)**

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THE appointment of caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar from Balochistan kindled hope for some measure of equity for the largest, rich-in-natural-resources, but most cash-strapped province. It has also revived the debate around the creation of smaller provinces, a realisation rooted in the Baloch feeling abandoned, helpless and perpetually on the receiving end of injustice.

The stark reality of Balochistan’s marginalisation is visible in its sparse population, dismal literacy rate and an inadequate administrative infrastructure. As a result, this vast land is marginally deve­loped. However, its situation does not make it insignificant; such an interpretation reflects a subjective orientation in denial of established global parameters. In the modern era, the size of a country or its population do not determine its worth. A region’s value is defined by resources, human capital and productivity.

Singapore, a small country with 728 square kilometres of land and a population of 5.6 million, attained the status of a rich nation in 2011 and has since ranked among the world’s high-income economies. In 1957, South Korean income levels were comparable to newly independent Ghana and development economists believed that Ghana had brighter prospects. Today, South Korea is among the top-performing economies in the world. We consider population to be the primary criterion for wealth distribution, which is an impediment in the pursuit of prosperity. We are unable to provide basic amenities, education and skills in a country where a baby is born every seven seconds. There are 17,726 births and 4,351 deaths, along with 454 migrations per day, resulting in a net daily change of 12,920. Pakistan is also expected to surpass Indonesia as the most populated Muslim country in 2048.

Population-based resource distribution has stimulated population growth and raised vested interests in voter pool and new constituencies. Considering this, the voices of most of Balochistan’s political leadership are audible in the recent census. But they were silent on education which, despite the provincial constitutional mandate, is a federal issue. Also, the province possesses mineral reserves estimated to be worth $1 trillion, yet it is unable to contribute to the economic well-being of its populace.

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This wealth of national resources can be termed a ‘natural resource curse’, where countries and regions have performed more poorly than those without such wealth. Technically, it is high costs upfront, lengthy production timelines, site-specificity, scale (sometimes referred to as high rents), price and production volatility, non-renewable resources, and industry opacity. Regions afflicted with this ‘curse’ are more susceptible to exploitation and are mostly politically, financially and culturally managed, leaving little room for real leadership to emerge and for regional prosperity.

For instance, Balochistan’s known natural gas reserves have been more or less exhausted. An erudite friend’s response to the lack of access to gas in major parts of the province was shocking: “What was the benefit of providing gas to Balochistan’s scattered locations with fewer consumers?” In his province, a few districts with the same number of consumers as Balochistan’s entire population were deemed to benefit more from the gas. Such a mindset showcases our inability to distinguish between fundamental rights and commercial parameters. States are not corporations. They are guardians of the rights of citizens.

Regardless of our interpretations, history teaches us that a region’s prosperity and dominance are not subject to its size or population. Small countries have proved more capable of experimenting with new policies and institutions, whereas larger ones have come close to economic default. However, this progress depends on the space available to establish their own objectives, priorities and decisions.

Whether or not a Baloch caretaker prime minister represents an equity measure is a critical aspect to explore. Some may argue that Balochistan has more representation in the existing national legislation landscape, and rightly so, but the province is far from affluent. This reinforces the fact that allocating resources on the basis of population or emphasising statistical representation are inappropriate solutions. What matters is a leadership that originates from within and is truly representative of the province’s people. A transition from centralised, top-down governance to a more decentralised, bottom-up approach that ensures accountability is the need of the hour. Leaders will not only be accountable but also transparent in their actions, which guarantees empowerment for the people.

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