



Kartarpur Milestone

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This article is based on "Journey to a beginning" which was published in The Indian Express on 30/10/2019. It talks about various narratives of Kartarpur Corridor.

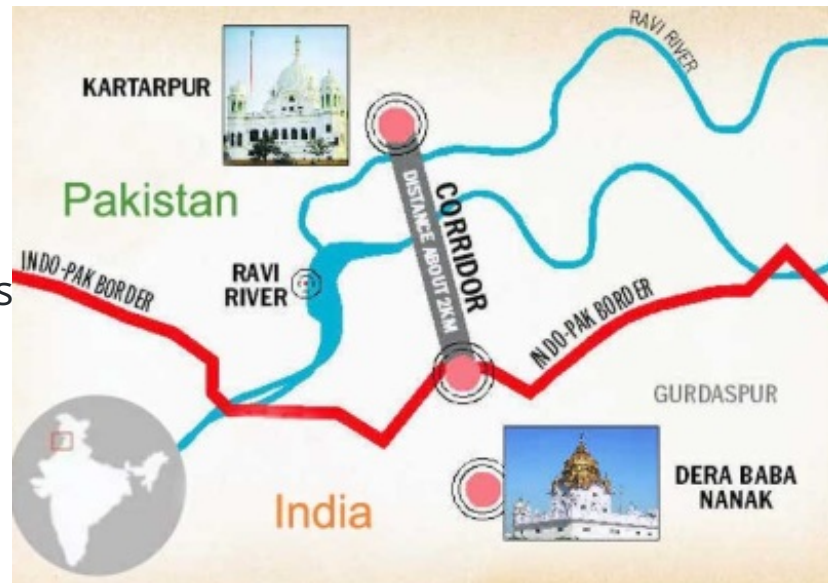
India and Pakistan signed a landmark agreement to operationalise the historic Kartarpur Corridor to allow Indian Sikh pilgrims to visit the holy Darbar Sahib in Pakistan.

- The agreement is **valid** initially for **five years**.
- Either party can terminate the agreement at any time by giving notice of **one month**.
- Also, the pact could be suspended in case of exigency or persistent violation of its provisions.
- Pilgrimages between India and Pakistan are governed by the **1974 Protocol on Visits to Religious Shrines**, which includes a list of shrines in Pakistan and India open for visitors from both countries.

Kartarpur Corridor

- The Kartarpur Corridor connects the Darbar Sahib Gurdwara in Narowal district of Pakistan with the Dera Baba Nanak shrine in Gurdaspur district in India's Punjab province.
- The agreement will facilitate visa-free movement of Indian pilgrims who would just need a permit to cross over to Pakistan.
- The Kartarpur Sahib corridor was **first proposed in 1999** when Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee took a bus ride to Lahore.

Importance for Sikhs



- The corridor was built to commemorate **550th birth anniversary** celebrations of Guru Nanak Dev, founder of Sikhism on 12th November 2019.
- It is one of the holiest places for Sikhs where **Baba Guru Nanak Dev Ji** settled and preached for the last 18 years of his life.
It was also his last resting place.

Significance of Kartarpur Corridor

Recent incidents of URI, Pulwama attack and surgical & air strike by India had led to a complete breakdown of peace initiatives between the two nations. In such circumstances, soft power diplomacy can be a potent tool for bringing harmonious relations and peace between the two Nuclear Powers and Kartarpur corridor is a step in the right direction.

- The corridor has the potential to bridge the differences that have assumed unnaturally grave proportions in the last seven decades.
- Through this corridor, the **ideology of universal love** and **tolerance** propagated by Guru Nanak Devji, will eventually pave the way for harmony between the two nations, whose people share common roots and a common aspiration for the future.
- Terror and violence have no place in this Corridor of Peace. It can be the burial ground for hatred and mistrust, and for all those inimical forces that have obstructed peace between the two nations all these years.
- The corridor can be step forward in Atal Bihari Vajpayee's formulation of "**breakfast in Amritsar, lunch in Lahore, dinner in Kabul**", which can pave the way for **greater cultural integration** and strengthening of ties.

- From Pakistan's perspective, the corridor conveys a message to the international community that it respects minorities and wants to create goodwill in the Sikh community, something that can become a factor in future relationship between the two nations.

In spite of strained relations and continuous attacks on Indian Military establishment by Pakistan backed terrorist organisations, Indian government responded positively to the proposal because it cannot afford to antagonise Sikhs community.

- It may be helpful in healing one of the wounds of Partition for the Sikh community.

Indo-Pak Relations and Peace in South Asia

- The **peace and stability in South Asia has been undermined** mostly due to the hostility between India and Pakistan, the two major players with significant population.
- **Conflicts on Kashmir Policy, border issues, terrorism, cross border ceasefire violations** have affected the **trade and economic cooperation in the region** and has disturbed the stability in the Indian subcontinent.
- **More than 70 years of strained relations between the two countries** have affected not only trade and economy, but also people to people interaction and common perception of the two countries for each other hindering attempts towards resolution.
- **Both India and Pakistan are suffering expenditure** in order to block out each others' trade routes this in turn affects the overall trade and connectivity. The internal differences have also **affected the global dialogues** at the platforms like the United Nations, Financial Action Task Force, International Court of Justice, and World Bank.
- The regional tensions have **negatively affected the connectivity and trade in the region**. cross-border energy grids and road rail network connectivity, shipping and air networks to consolidate connectivity have been hampered.
- Deteriorating Indo-Pakistan relations have led to the **weakened cooperation amongst the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) countries**. It has abysmally low intra-regional trade. The regional group is unable to push itself as a regional block because of instability.
- With the U.S. drawing India into its Afghanistan policy, and China's stakes in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, the subcontinent is becoming an area of contestation by players bigger than both India and Pakistan.

Resolving Differences: Way Forward

- **India should work on its 'Neighbourhood first' policy** by creating a mutually beneficial partnership with Pakistan. Kartarpur corridor is a good starting point for better relations.

- Both India and Pakistan as part of SAARC should learn from ASEAN and contribute to the larger goals for the region. **A strong dispute resolution mechanism can be framed** within SAARC in this context.
- The South Asian region faces many challenges that range from terrorism to climate change; **working together will help these countries leverage their collective strengths** to improve the lives of their people.
- Most of the South Asian countries have a shared culture, ethnicity and have shared experiences of historical events including British imperialism and its consequences. **Resolving the conflict between India and Pakistan can unite the entire subcontinent to work towards shared goals.**

Challenges in Successful Implementation of Agreement

- **Pilgrim Fee:** Pakistan had decided to levy a **fees of \$20 per pilgrim** for visiting the revered gurdwara. Indians claim that such charges are not aligned with the religious-cultural ethos of the country. The fringe elements in India viewed it as the imposition of **modern jaziya**.
However, the claims are not true because many big shrines in India charge worshippers for “special darshans” and China too charges for Mansarovar Yatra.
- **Security Issues:** They possess a grave threat to the sustainability of the project. Constant backing of terrorist organisation by Pakistan Army for carrying out attacks in India can be a major roadblock in the peaceful effort.
- **Termination Clause:** The agreement has the provision to terminate it by either party by giving just **one month notice**. This provision has the potential to threaten the continuity of project in case of terrorist attack under populist pressure.

Conclusion

As the historical ‘connectivity’ of the subcontinent crumbled after Partition, it created massive a dysfunction in cultural ties and people to people relations. The Kartarpur Corridor provides an opportunity to restore the strained relations and pave the way for a wider constructive engagement between the two countries.

Drishti Inputs:

Long standing peace between India and Pakistan is crucial regional integration. In this regard, explain the implication of Kartarpur Corridor on strained relations between two nuclear power.