

Approval on Kartarpur Corridor

Why in news?

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The Cabinet approved the development of a corridor to enable smooth passage of pilgrims seeking to visit Pakistan's Kartarpur Sahib.

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What is the Kartarpur corridor?

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- **Kartarpur Sahib** - The gurdwara in Kartarpur stands on the bank of River Ravi, about 120 km northeast of Lahore.

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- Kartarpur Sahib is revered as Guru Nanak's final resting place.

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- It was here that Guru Nanak assembled a Sikh community and lived for 18 years until his death in 1539.

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- **Corridor** - It is a long-standing demand from the Sikh community for easy access to the revered shrine across the border.

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- The Kartarpur corridor was first proposed in 1999 when PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee took a bus ride to Lahore.

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- It is now conceived as a visa-free corridor for Sikhs from India to Pakistan's Kartarpur Sahib.

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- It will be developed from Dera Baba Nanak village in Gurdaspur, Punjab to Gurdwara Darbar Sahib, Kartarpur.

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- The length of the corridor is about 4 km, 2 km on either side of the International Border.

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How did the decision come about?

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 - Few months back, Punjab minister Navjot Singh Sidhu attended the swearing-in ceremony of PM Imran Khan in Pakistan.
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 - Pakistan's Army Chief General had then told Sidhu that Pakistan hoped to build the corridor.
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 - But the Indian government refused to respond to this informal proposal.

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 - However, the Punjab government moved a resolution in the Punjab Assembly.
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 - It adopted unanimously, seeking an uninterrupted corridor from Dera Baba Nanak to Kartarpur Sahib.
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 - Indian government has now announced that it would develop a corridor up to the International Border.
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 - The government also asked Pakistan to develop a corridor with suitable facilities in its territory.
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 - It comes at the time of the start of 550th birth anniversary year of Guru Nanak.
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 - The Pakistan government responded that it has already decided to open the corridor for the anniversary.

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What is India's rationale?

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 - The announcements were a coordinated step by the two countries, despite the big chill in the relationship.

- India decided to go ahead because it did not want to be upstaged by Pakistan, which proposed it first.
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- This is despite the misgivings in the security establishment with the Kartarpur corridor.
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- As, it may be another attempt by Pakistan to woo the Sikh community, aimed eventually at creating unrest in Punjab.
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- India could not be seen denying its Sikh community what Pakistan was ready to roll out for it.
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- In all, the corridor is seen to be a big leap forward for people-to-people relations.
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- It will facilitate easier access and smooth passage of Indian pilgrims throughout the year.
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What next?

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- Pilgrimages between India and Pakistan are governed by the 1974 Protocol on Visits to Religious Shrines.
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- It includes a list of shrines in Pakistan and India open for visitors from the other country, and for which visas are required.
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- The Kartarpur Corridor, which will provide visa-free access from India to the shrine inside Pakistan, may need a separate treaty.
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- Also, officials from India and Pakistan will meet soon to discuss the logistics of the corridor and point of border crossing.
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Source: Indian Express, The Hindu

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