Inauguration of Kartarpur Corridor

Why in news?

Indian PM flagged off the first batch of over 500 pilgrims to the Kartarpur Sahib Gurudwara in Pakistan through the newly built corridor linking two important Sikh shrines.

How currently is India-Pakistan ties?

- Political and military tensions are running high since the Pulwama terror attack in February 2019.
- India's bombing of the Balakot terror training camp in response to this and the skirmish between the two air forces that followed worsened the situation.
- India's decision to change the constitutional status of Jammu and Kashmir and Pakistan's reaction to it was another irritant.
- With these, there is no formal dialogue between the two countries for quite some time now.
- There is not even any speculation about a back-channel dialogue that is sustaining a minimum level of communication between the two leaderships.

What is the significance with corridor inauguration?

- The corridor is a remarkable exception to the current dynamic between India and Pakistan.
- It will allow 5,000 Indian pilgrims a day to walk visa-free into Pakistan, pay obeisance and then return to India.
- Despite many critical voices on either side and some difficult negotiations between Delhi and Islamabad, the corridor is now open.
- The corridor could be a harbinger of improved relations between Delhi and Islamabad.

What is the Punjab connection in this?

- India-Pakistan partition happened with an arbitrary line drawn through Punjab.
- Ever since then, the placement of Kartarpur (where Guru Nanak spent his last years) has been a concern.
- While a majority of his devotees were left on one side of the border, his last resting place was left just four kilometres on the other side.

- The Kartarpur corridor now has realised the dream of many devout Sikhs.
- It has drawn attention to the Punjab question, which is an important but neglected dimension of the relations between Delhi and Islamabad.
- In contrast to J&K, there is shared ethnic, linguistic and cultural identity that binds the people of Punjab.
- This shared identity has indeed survived the many unspeakable tragedies that Partition inflicted upon the province.
- It is the cultural bond as well as the shared sorrow that makes the region most eager in the Subcontinent for a reconciliation between India and Pakistan.

What are the concerns involved?

- There are concerns with the possibility that the initiative is part of Pakistan's longstanding interest in fueling Sikh separatism.
- Pakistan's encouragement of Khalistani separatist groups to use Kartarpur as a platform has been a constant cause for suspicion for India.
- Besides, neither side has been able to build on the goodwill for the Kartarpur project in both countries to create an atmosphere for talks on other issues.
- This failure was most evident when both Mr. Modi and Mr. Khan (Pak. PM) carried out separate inauguration ceremonies.
- They failed to come together at the border for the launch of the project.
- Leaders will need to walk the extra mile for this to happen.
- If both governments are willing, it could lend itself to other cross-border connections for Hindus and Sikhs to visit shrines in Pakistan.
- Likewise, Muslims and Sufism followers could be allowed to visit shrines just across the border in Gujarat and Rajasthan.

Source: The Indian Express, The Hindu

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