

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