Sikh Pilgrimage to Pakistan

Why in news?

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Members of a pilgrims' jatha protest at Attari station after being prevented from boarding the Samjauta Express to Pakistan.

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Why Sikh jathas travel to Pakistan?

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- Jathas are group of pilgrims.
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- In the Sikh tradition Jatha means a '**group of volunteers'** formed to carry out a specific task.
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- The **1972 Simla Agreement** provided for promoting travel facilities in order to normalise relations.
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- In 1974, India and Pakistan signed a visa agreement to allow each other's nationals unfettered access to certain places of religious worship.
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- There are **18 historical gurdwaras in Pakistan** to which Indian pilgrims are allowed to visit.
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- Pilgrims go to Pakistan on four occasions every year.
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- For the birth anniversary of the first Guru, to Nankana Sahib, the birth place of Guru Nanak.
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- For the Baisakhi festival in April.

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- In May-June for the Martyrdom Day of the fifth Guru, Arjan Dev, who was sentenced to death in Lahore.
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- For the death anniversary of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, who died in Lahore.
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Why the pilgrims were stopped?

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- The government has issued no public advisory against the pilgrimages.
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- Neither did Pakistan gave any announcement to stop them.
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- But Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), which sends jathas to Pakistan claimed that MEA did not give permission to some pilgrims to travel to Pakistan for the Arjan Dev anniversary.
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- It also claimed that for the Ranjit Singh anniversary the MEA had said that SGPC itself would have to bear the responsibility of the security of the jatha.
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- Some others who applied through the direct method to get visas were allegedly not allowed to board the train to Pakistan.
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\n**Source: Indian Express**

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