



Corridor of hope

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Corridor of hope-Movement on the Kartarpur proposal is timely and potentially game-changing

- The announcement by India and Pakistan of plans to operationalise a visa-free corridor between Dera Baba Nanak in Indian Punjab and Kartarpur Sahib in Pakistan's Punjab heeds a longstanding plea of Sikh pilgrims.
- That demand had gathered pace in 1995, when Pakistan renovated the Kartarpur gurdwara, situated on the site on the bank of the Ravi where the founder of Sikhism, Guru Nanak, spent his last 18 years.
- Given its easy logistics, the 4-km-long Kartarpur corridor is a low-hanging fruit as a meaningful confidence-building measure.
- The announcement now is particularly timely, with the 550th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak falling in November 2019.
- The initiative can also become a template for cross-border exchanges based on faith, which could provide a balm for many communities such as Kashmiri Pandits, who have long asked for access to visit the Sharda Peeth in the Neelum Valley in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir; Sufis in Pakistan who wish to visit the dargah of Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti in Ajmer, Rajasthan; and Sikhs in India and Pakistan wanting to visit important shrines on both sides of the border.
- Much will depend on how quickly India and Pakistan act on their commitment, once President Ram Nath Kovind lays the foundation stone at the corridor's India end on November 26, and Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan does so at the other end on November 28.
- Even more will depend on how the two governments manage their relationship in a way that avoids making pilgrims a pawn in bilateral tensions.
- Given the bilateral freeze, the Kartarpur project will compel India and Pakistan to engage in a positive and purposeful manner, at a time when few other avenues for engagement exist.
- It is a reminder that dialogue and search for areas of concord are the

only way forward for both countries.

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