



# Kartarpur focus

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## **Security concerns are high-priority, but blocking work on the corridor is not right**

- When India and Pakistan announced in November they would operationalise a corridor from Dera Baba Nanak in Punjab to Kartarpur Sahib Gurdwara in Pakistan's Punjab, it was hailed as a step forward in an otherwise fraught relationship.
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi appeared to share the optimism when he likened the initiative's potential to the fall of the Berlin Wall.
- What has followed, however, is round upon round of wrangling between the two governments over every detail: from the number of pilgrims to be accommodated, to the security restrictions, to the documentation and mode of transport to be used by pilgrims.
- At the base of the differences is the deep distrust between the two governments, a chasm that has deepened in the aftermath of the Pulwama attack and the Balakot strike.
- Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan's administration feels it should be given more credit for having cleared the Kartarpur proposal, something Indian Sikh pilgrims have demanded for decades, ever since the Radcliffe Line left their sacred shrine on the other side of the border in 1947.
- For its part, New Delhi refuses to acknowledge Pakistan's overture, and has made it clear the corridor will have no connection with furthering bilateral talks on other issues.
- Meanwhile, security agencies have voiced concerns about a possible attempt by Pakistan's military establishment to use the corridor to fuel separatist Khalistani sentiment.
- Pakistan's support to separatist Sikh groups goes back several decades, and India must work to secure its border from the threat even as it opens the gates for thousands of pilgrims to travel to Pakistan.

- National security must get priority.
- Modalities and technical issues, such as on the numbers, eligibility and identity proof required for the trip to Kartarpur Sahib, should be ironed out by both governments.
- Putting off meetings is hardly a constructive solution, given the proposed opening by November to mark the 550th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak.

The Hindu

