

## Kartarpur Corridor – A Welcome Move

**True;** Kartarpur Corridor project is aimed at removing the hurdles and pave the way for the Sikh pilgrims to visit a historic and much revered Gurdwara shrine situated in Pakistan. At the same time, it also opens up the lid on the feelings of oneness strong among the Sikh people in India as well as Pakistan.

How and where the idea of corridor had originated was made a point of debate in India. Yet, it remains a fact that Sikh people in India as well as Pakistan had been demanding for several decades for this corridor. The building of the corridor will cut down the distance between Dera Baba Nanak – 2 km inside India (Gurudaspur) and Kartarpur shrine in Pakistan [ where, it is believed, the last Guru Nanak stayed for 18 years and ended his life in 1539] from 200 km to 6 km. Only in August 2018, on the eve of Pakistan new PM Imran Khan's oath taking ceremony, Pakistan's Army Chief Qamar Bajwa informed Navjot Sidhu, a Minister of Punjab (India) the decision of Pakistan Govt. to build the Kartarpur corridor. The Pakistan Govt. proposes to complete and inaugurate the corridor on November 23, 2019 – 550th Birth Anniversary of Guru Nanak. The construction includes a boarding terminal from where the shrine buses will run to Kartarpur shrine, and an 800 meter – long bridge over the Ravi. There will also be temporary accommodation and tents for pilgrims, who will require special permits, but no visas.

Every one knows that the relations between India and Pakistan are not normal for several years. Tensions and clashes are continuous and unending on the borders. The Indian Govt. alleges that Pakistan shelters prominent terrorists who had committed serious crimes in India. Pakistan equips and sends the Islamic terrorists to India to strike terror and create anarchy. The Indian Govt. led by BJP had closed various avenues and channels of interaction and dialogue with Pakistan and maintains that the relations cannot improve unless and until Pakistan stops patronizing the terrorists.

Pakistan's approval of Kartarpur corridor proposal came as disturbing news for Indian rulers. The proposal has evoked a lot of joy and enthusiasm among the Sikh population because it was their long cherished dream. The Indian rulers know that any outright or crude rejection of the proposal is sure to invite anger and protest from the Sikh population in India. So, they thought it advisable to accept the proposal. At the same time, the Indian rulers do not want to give the impression that Kartarpur corridor is a move towards improving the relations between India and Pakistan as they are in need of playing the card of national chauvinism. Keeping the fire of anti-Pakistaism burning is very much essential for this. So, the Indian Govt. has decided to co-operate with the corridor project while delinking it with India-Pakistan relations, so that the tensions and hostilities between the two countries can be continued as usual.

The present Pakistan Govt. seems to view the Kartarpur corridor as a part of a comprehensive move to improve the relations between India and Pakistan and, if possible, attempt to resolve the problems. It can be a part of peace offensive diplomatically on their part.

On India's side, the India's Vice President Venkaiah Naidu laid the foundation stone for the four – lane human corridor on Nov 26, 2018 at Dera Baba Nanak of Gurudaspur, Punjab, 2km from the International Border with Pakistan. In the midst of thousands of cheering people, he expressed the hope that the corridor would "pave the way for peace and greater progress of all our people."

On Pakistan side, Pakistan PM Imran Khan has laid down the foundation stone at Kartarpur shrine for four km corridor from the border with India. Addressing a large gathering of Sikhs from Pakistan and Sikh pilgrims from India, Imran Khan said: ".....today I as the Prime Minister (of Pakistan), my party, all our political parties, and our Army are on one page. We want to move forward." He expressed the desire and hope to "break the shackles of the past." He noted, "the past is for learning from, not for living in." and there is need to restart engagement between India and Pakistan as there is no way other than dialogue to resolve the problems between India and Pakistan. "It is not in Pakistan's interest that our soil be used for terrorism."

Here the Pakistan's political leadership as well as all powerful Army spoke in one voice when they expressed the urge to turn Pakistan and India relations for better and resolve the problems through dialogue. How for their urges are earnest can be tested and proved only in practice. Yet, for the present, we can say that these statements reflect the genuine urges and aspirations of people in both Countries for peaceful and fraternal relations between the two countries and two people.

But there reflected contra-dictory views in India. The Indian Govt. laid the foundation stone for the corridor. But it maintains that Pakistan Govt. must stop all its crimes against India before any move on India's side towards normal relations between the two countries. India's Army Chief of Staff GL. Bipin Rawat said that Kartarpur corridor "needs to be seen in isolation" and must not be linked to anybody else. He even advised that the Islamic state of Pakistan "must willingly become a secular country." Punjab CM Capt. Amrindar Singh has declined the invitation to attend the foundation stone laying

ceremony in Kartarpur because, he said, not a single day passes without killing or injuring the Indian soldier on the Loc of Jammu and Kashmir and the ISI is engaged in nefarious activities in Punjab. The Punjab Minister Navjot Siddhu, however, gladly attended the Kartarpur ceremony. But it became a point of controversy in Punjab.

Once the channel of interaction or dialogue is closed one will be left with only option: to live in an endless state of hostilities, tensions and mutual bloodshed. It will be a sheer immaturity and lack of responsibility for a govt. or political leadership to refuse to pick up even a weakest and thinnest thread that may help to take the issues into the realm of dialogue. This is what the Indian rulers are choosing to do.

The US imperialists never tired of preaching about peace between India and Pakistan. But they never wanted India and Pakistan to resolve their problems on their own peacefully and through dialogue. In reality, they have vested interests in the persistence of tensions, hostilities, war like situations and even wars between India and Pakistan as these conditions provided them unlimited opportunities to earn super profits in arms business with both countries. These conditions also provided them abundant opportunities to keep the ruling classes of these Countries perennially and pathetically dependant on the imperialist aid. The ruling classes of these countries also had developed a vested interest in these conditions as they provide a convenient alibi for them to impose more economic burdens on the people and keep them diverted from the real problems. The weaponisation also had become a big source of earning for the ruling classes of the concerned countries.

For long, the Pakistan rulers had been serving the US imperialists as dependable allies. They served virtually as mercenaries of US in its war of invasion and occupation against Afghanistan. Presently, they are passing through a critical phase in the relations with the US as the US imperialists are angry with Pakistan's growing economic, political and military relations with China. The US is building pressure on the Pakistan rulers (stopping aid to Pakistan is one of its form) to stop their drift and retain them in their own fold. Present moves of Pakistan rulers to improve relations with India can be an attempt to tide over the present crisis. On India's side, the Indian rulers had gone a long way in tying themselves to the strategy of US for domination in Asia, Asia – Pacific region. In the days to come, there is every possibility for the US to rely more on the services of Indian rulers in the region. It will be disastrous for India. It will be in the interests of India and Pakistan to break free from the octopus embrace of US imperialists. India and Pakistan resolving their problems through dialogue and forging unity will be in the best interests of people of both countries. This will foil the nefarious game of imperialists to use each country separately and by pitting one country against the other to tighten their imperialist hold on both and in the interests of imposing their domination over the entire region.

Let Kartarpur shrine corridor project serve as a small positive step towards improving the relations and forging unity and fraternal bondage between the people of India and Pakistan.

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