

2nd round of discussions on Kartarpur Sahib Corridor

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The second round of talks with Pakistan on the modalities for operationalisation of the Kartarpur Sahib Corridor was held at Wagah, Pakistan today. The Indian delegation was led by Shri S.C.L. Das, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs and comprised of representatives from the Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of External Affairs, Ministry of Defence, Government of Punjab and the National Highway Authorities of India.

The meeting today discussed the modalities and draft Agreement for facilitation of Pilgrims on the Kartarpur Sahib Corridor, as also the infrastructure being developed for the corridor.

The meeting reviewed the progress reached in the three rounds of technical meeting that were held in March, April and May 2019. They endorsed the crossing point /'zero point' coordinates that were agreed to at the technical level.

The Indian side conveyed concerns regarding the possible flooding of the Dera Baba Nanak and adjoining areas on the Indian side as a result of earth filled embankment road or a causeway that is proposed to be built by Pakistan on their side. The Indian delegation shared detailed flood analysis with Pakistan to underscore these concerns. It was clearly conveyed that an earth filled embankment or a causeway will create problems for our people and should not be built even in the interim. Details of the bridge that India is building on its side were shared, and Pakistan side was urged to also build a bridge on their side. This would not only address the flooding related concerns, but also ensure smooth, hassle free, all-weather pilgrimage to the Holy Gurudwara Kartarpur Sahib, throughout the year. Pakistan side agreed, in principle, to build a bridge at the earliest. Pending the construction of a bridge over the old Ravi creek by Pakistan on their territory, India offered to make interim arrangements for making the corridor operational in November 2019, given the historic importance of the 550th Birth Anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev Ji.

India urged Pakistan to take into consideration the sentiments of the pilgrims to have smooth, easy, unrestricted access throughout the year to be able to visit the Holy Gurudwara Kartarpur Sahib. In this context, the following requests were reiterated:

- 5,000 pilgrims be allowed to visit Gurudwara Kartarpur Sahib using the corridor everyday given the expected high demand on our side;
- 10,000 additional pilgrims be allowed to visit on special occasions;
- there should be no restrictions on the pilgrims in terms of their faith;
- not only Indian nationals, but also the Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs) holding OCI cards be allowed to use the Kartarpur Corridor facility;
- the movement should be visa free and Pakistan should reconsider charging any fee or introducing any permit system;
- pilgrims should be allowed to visit throughout the year, seven days a week;
- pilgrims should have the choice to visit as individuals or in a group;
- pilgrims should have the choice to visit on-foot on pilgrimage to the holy shrine;

· provisions should be made for preparation and distribution of langar and prasad for the pilgrims.

The importance for ensuring safe and secure environment for the pilgrims was underscored. In this context, concerns regarding individuals or organisations based in Pakistan who may try to disrupt the pilgrimage and misuse the opportunity to play with the sentiments of the pilgrims were shared. A dossier was handed over to Pakistan side to highlight concerns in the matter. The Indian delegation has also sought consular presence in Kartarpur Sahib Gurudwara to be able to provide assistance to the pilgrims, if required. Pakistan side assured our delegation that no anti-India activity would be allowed.

Based on the representations that were received by the Government, the issue of encroachment of the land belonging to the Gurudwara was once again raised and Pakistan authorities were asked to restore this land to the Gurudwara to honor religious sentiments. Pakistan side agreed to look at this issue.

The Government of India has made significant progress to build a state of art infrastructure, including passenger terminal on the Indian side that can handle over 15000 pilgrims in a day. This is targeted to be completed by 31 October 2019. The work on the 4-lane highway to the crossing point at the International Boundary is progressing satisfactorily and is on schedule. It will be completed by end September 2019. The Government is fully confident that India would be ready to commence the pilgrimage through Kartarpur corridor on the auspicious occasion of the 550th birth Anniversary of Guru Nanak Devji.

The Pakistan side has been separately requested to permit and facilitate 'Nagar Kirtan' from Delhi to Nankana Sahib in Pakistan in July 2019 and then again in October/ November 2019 that is proposed to be organised by Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) and Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee (DSGMC), the apex bodies involved in organising pilgrims visits to Pakistan under the 1974 Bilateral protocol. It has also been proposed to Pakistan to allow 10,000 Indian pilgrims to visit Pakistan under the 1974 Protocol on the auspicious occasion of 550th Birth Anniversary of Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji.

Progress was made in finalising the draft Agreement with regard to the modalities. It was agreed to allow visa free travel for the Indian passport holders and OCI card holders seven days a week. Throughout the year, 5000 pilgrims will be allowed to visit Kartarpur Sahib Gurudwara per day. The pilgrims will be allowed to travel as individuals or in groups and also on foot. Pakistan highlighted the infrastructural constraints on their side and conveyed that they may be able to accommodate many of the Indian proposals in a phased manner. Pakistan was asked to reconsider its position as Kartarpur Sahib Corridor is a long pending demand of the pilgrims and there is expectation that Pakistan would be liberal in allowing more pilgrims and facilities for them through this corridor.

Both sides have agreed to maintain a channel of communication and work towards finalisation of the Agreement on Kartarpur Sahib Corridor. The technical teams would meet again to ensure a seamless connectivity for the Kartarpur corridor is operational in time so that the pilgrimage can begin in November 2019.

BB/VM