Context:

India and Pakistan signed agreement on Kartarpur corridor.

The agreement relates to the modalities for operationalisation of the Kartarpur Sahib Corridor at Zero Point, International Boundary, Dera Baba Nanak.

Indian pilgrims of all faiths and persons of Indian origin can use the corridor and the travel will be Visa Free

Pilgrims need to carry only a valid passport and the Corridor is open from dawn to dusk

Pilgrims travelling in the morning will have to return on the same day.

NEWS:

Currently pilgrims from India have to take a bus to Lahore to get to Kartarpur, which is a 125 km journey although people on the Indian side of the border can physically see Gurdwara Darbar Sahib Kartarpur on the Pakistani side.

An elevated platform has also been constructed for the same on the Indian side, where people use binoculars to get a good view

Concern:

Under the agreement, Pakistan will charge a very nominal USD 20 from every Indian Sikh pilgrim for a single trip

India continues to urge this issue with the Government of Pakistan to reconsider its insistence on levying the fee.

Indian pilgrims who enter Pakistan through the Kartarpur corridor will not be allowed to visit other gurdwaras in the Punjab province of that country. They would have to go via the normal route, after applying for a visa, and paying the requisite fees.

Concerns about the pilgrims being exposed to the propaganda of pro-Khalistan elements.

Why Pakistan charges $20 per pilgrim?

Pakistan has spent about Rs 1,000 crore on the Kartarpur corridor infrastructure. It would be providing langar to the pilgrims who visit Gurdwara Darbar Sahib.

It would also be providing e-rickshaws to ferry the pilgrims from Dera Baba Nanak on the Indian side.

The fee has triggered a political controversy within India, and Punjab Chief Minister Capt Amarinder Singh has called the fee a “jazia” tax on pilgrims.

Gurdwara in Kartarpur

The gurdwara in Kartarpur is located on the bank of river Ravi in Pakistan

It is about four km from the Dera Baba Nanak shrine, and about 120 km northeast of Lahore

It was here that Guru Nanak assembled a Sikh community and lived for 18 years until his death in 1539

The shrine is visible from the Indian side, as Pakistani authorities generally trim the elephant grass that would otherwise obstruct the view

Indian Sikhs gather in large numbers for darshan from the Indian side, and binoculars are installed at Gurdwara Dera Baba Nanak

The gurdwara was opened to pilgrims after repairs and restoration in 1999, and Sikh jathas have been visiting the shrine regularly ever since
Sikh jathas from India travel to Pakistan on four occasions every year- for Baishakhi, the martyrdom day of Guru Arjan Dev, the death anniversary of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, and the birthday of Guru Nanak Dev.

**Significance:**

First proposed in 1999 by the prime ministers of India and Pakistan, Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Nawaz Sharif, respectively, as part of the Delhi–Lahore Bus diplomacy

Implemented as an integrated development project with Government of India funding.


Until now, most Indian devotees have had to contend with a darshan using binoculars installed at Dera Baba Nanak Sahib.

This can be considered a big development since despite the India-Pakistan deadlock in talks, both India and Pakistan have been able to form a consensus on the issue.

**Way forward:**

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

there must be an effort by all stakeholders in India — the Centre, the State government and the leadership of the BJP, the Akalis and the Congress — to resist scoring political points against one another.

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.

India must negotiate with the Government of Pakistan to reconsider its insistence on levying the fee.

**Conclusion:**

It will be unfortunate if Pakistan uses the Kartarpur Corridor to fish in troubled waters and cause instability for its political ends.