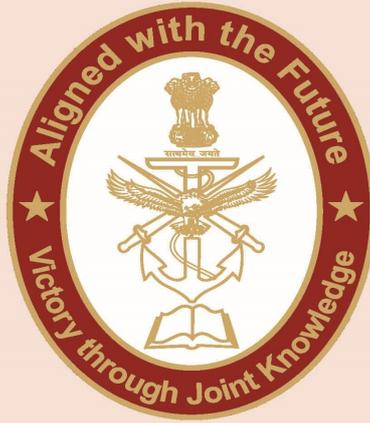


# CENTRE FOR JOINT WARFARE STUDIES



## CENJOWS

**PAK MAY HAVE ULTERIOR MOTIVES BEHIND THE OPENING**  
**OF THE KARTARPUR CORRIDOR**  
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The opening of the Kartarpur corridor has been a long-standing demand by India to meet the aspirations of the Sikh community, which considers the Kartarpur Gurdwara as amongst its holiest shrines. The Gurdwara is located inside Pak, approximately 3–4 Kms from the international border. The Gurdwara was established in 1522 by the First Sikh Guru on the banks of the river Ravi. It is an important place of pilgrimage as Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji spent his last 18 years there.

India first proposed the opening of the corridor in 1988, but to no avail. The present announcement by Pak followed the decision of the Indian cabinet which met on 22 Nov and announced the opening of the corridor. Thus, there would have been diplomatic moves which would have preceded the announcement as the timings of both countries were near synchronised. Pak may have insisted that India first announce before they follow.

It is also possible that this message could have come from Pak stating that they are ready to announce, hence India was forced to act. Had India rejected the demand, the government could have faced a political backlash. Hence the comment by the Pak foreign minister of Imran bowling a googly could be partially correct.

The first indication of Pak's decision flowed from Navjot Sidhu, when he attended the swearing in ceremony of Imran Khan. He stated, in defence of his hugging the Pak army chief, that it was General Bajwa who had mentioned that Pak was considering opening the corridor. Therefore, the decision was neither that of the Pak government nor of Imran Khan, but bulldozed by their 'dirty tricks department', the ISI. Its announcement as India moves into the election mode is a possible indicator of ulterior motives.

Since it concerns religious sentiments of the Sikh community, no government in India could have ever considered anything else but accepting the same. This is therefore a victory for the Pak army. Some ulterior motives were evident even at the ground-breaking ceremony.

The presence of Pak based Khalistan supporter, Gopal Singh Chawla, at the ceremony and his interaction with the Pak army chief indicates that there are designs behind this decision. The Gurdwara was adorned with posters of the Khalistan Referendum 2020, none of which were removed, even in the presence of Indian ministers. Most posters depicted his photograph. Even when Indian Sikhs visited the Gurdwara recently, members of the Indian consulate were prevented from entering by Chawla and his supporters, not Pak security personnel.

Chawla in a video has also termed the corridor as 'a bridge to Khalistan'. This alongside a statement issued by the Sikhs For Justice (SFJ) is indicative of their interest to exploit the corridor for furthering the cause for Khalistan, in league with the ISI. They plan to conduct a "Kartarpur Sahib Convention -2019" in Pak coinciding with the 550<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary celebrations of Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji.

During this convention they have announced to open voter registration at Kartarpur Sahib as also provide inputs on the referendum which it plans for 2020. SFJ legal advisor, Pannun, stated 'Kartarpur sahib convention will be the first ever gathering of Sikh separatists from foreign countries with Sikhs from Punjab.' SFJ plans to sponsor and host 10,000 Sikhs from Punjab. While presently, India has few takers for Khalistan, the future may be different.

There are a growing number of Khalistan supporters in Punjab all supported by Pak. The breaking of over 80 Pak created Khalistan modules and the recent grenade attack on a peaceful congregation in Amritsar are examples. It was with this anger that Captain Amarinder Singh, the Punjab CM, attacked Pak during the path breaking ceremony on the Indian side on 26<sup>th</sup> Nov.

Further, Pak had initially stated that the opening of the corridor would be dependent on India commencing talks with Pak. Its foreign office spokesperson had mentioned the same in early Oct. He stated that the decision to open the corridor, 'will not see any forward movement if India does not hold talks with Pakistan'. Their sudden change would have reasons, none of which could be solely to meet the religious demand of Sikhs.

The adorning of the Gurdwara with referendum posters, despite the presence of Indian ministers only added to misuse of the religious significance of the event. Pak attempted to convert a religious event into a political one, when Imran raised the issue of Kashmir and talks with India, all of which was rebuked. The Indian army chief also delinked the issue of talks and stated that the opening of the corridor should be viewed as a stand-alone event.

The raising of talks has now gained significance for Pak. Its terrorists are being systematically being gunned down in Kashmir. Their influence on the local population is receding. The present governor is winning the support of valley based political parties for his fair and just handling of the political situation. Stone throwing and joining militant ranks is on the wane. Militants are now being compelled to scout universities for recruits as locals appear to shun them. Thus, Punjab appears as the next target, as Kashmir recedes.

The corridor would open doors to formally interact with those whom they manage to recruit through social media and through their few existing cells. It would aim to open a new route for movement of funds to finance anti-India activities in Punjab. It will not be a conduit for arms and ammunition, as the BSF would impose its own checks.

While the intention appears noble and should have been so, Pak seems to be seeking to exploit the same. The opening of the corridor has been warmly welcomed by the Indian government as it desires to meet the aspirations of the Indian Sikh community, however it needs to keep possible Pak intentions under consideration. It has rightfully turned away all suggestions of talks as also of participation in the SAARC summit. It may need to implement strict security measures to continue to thwart possible Pak intentions. For the Sikh community it is a welcome step and should be exploited.

**Disclaimer:** Views expressed are of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of CENJOWS.