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India's Kartarpur corridor projects on completion mode

The plan is to complete the whole Kartarpur corridor work by October end as the 550th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, is on November 29.



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Pilgrims at the Kartarpur shrine. (Photo | EPS)

By IANS

NEW DELHI: Ahead of the scheduled opening of the Kartarpur corridor on 550th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak in November, India is almost on the verge of completing its two projects, a four-lane highway and a passenger terminal, by the first week of November and the final round of talks on modalities and a draft agreement to facilitate pilgrims reach the historic gurdwara across the border in Pakistan is to be held with the neighbouring country in the beginning of October.

Construction of passenger terminal building at the corridor, being handled by renowned contractor Shapoorji Pallonji, will be completed by October 15 with final touches by the first week of November while the construction of the highway is also expected to be completed during the same period, persons in the know of the developments told IANS.

An official, requesting anonymity, said that general timing for construction of terminal building of such magnitude takes two years but the project would be completed in six months for which Delhi-based architectural consultant, Creative Group, was appointed with its vast terminal design experience.

Explaining in detail, the official said, the sub-station building foundation and steelwork as been completed while terminal building casting of plinth beam, erection of columns and trusses and roof sheeting work would commence from September 15.

"Around 1,000 people are working day and night at the corridor while over 200 people are working round the clock for steel fabrication and transportation at the company's yard in Delhi's Nizamuddin and another place."

Other buildings like the utility block and parking area development will likely to be completed by October 15, as per schedule, the official said.

On the four-lane highway, being constructed by private construction company, Ceigall India Ltd, under the watch of the National Highway Authority of India, the official said a 4.25-km road with 3.6 km being the linear stretch is under construction and is expected to be completed by the end of October or first week of November.

The road, he said, would be equipped with median lights, carriageway and raised footpaths on both sides. "The remaining 0.6 km stretch comprises the approach roads from the historical Gurdwara Sahib in Dera Baba Nanak and that from the Border Security Force (BSF) Check Post."

"In order to facilitate the inflow of pilgrims, all roads connected to the corridor have been strengthened. Keeping in view the inflow of pilgrims from all quarters the approach roads to Dera Baba Nanak from Batala, Fatehgarh Churian and Ramdas are also being strengthened and upgraded to facilitate the pilgrims," said the official.

The plan is to complete the whole work by October end as the 550th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, is on November 29, he said.

India and Pakistan have done three rounds of talks with regard to the construction of Kartarpur Sahib corridor and the final round is to be held in October first week on Wagah in Pakistan, the official said.

The first round of talks between the two sides was held at Attari in India's Punjab state on March 14, second round at Wagah on July 14 and the third round on September 4 again at Attari during which issues like the finalisation of the draft agreement between the two countries were discussed.

As third round of talks remained inconclusive with **Pakistan showing "inflexibility"** and insisting on charging \$20 as service fee from each pilgrim for allowing him/her to visit Gurudwara Kartarpur Sahib among some other issues which India rejected, the fourth round is expected to resolve the issues, the official said.

"The fourth round of discussion would focus on issues on which there were differences on the two sides in third round of talks."

In the third round, there was no agreement over another issue when the Indian side asked the Pakistan delegation involved in the talks to reconsider their position on not agreeing to indicate 10,000 as the number of additional pilgrims allowed on special occasions.

Pakistan also showed "inflexibility" in allowing Indian consular presence or permitting protocol officials to travel every day to facilitate pilgrims going to Gurudwara Kartarpur Sahib through the corridor.

India has also asked Pakistan to increase the number of pilgrims allowed to visit religious shrines in the neighbouring country under the 1974 Protocol on Visits to Religious Shrines to 100,000 for this year in view of the birth anniversary celebrations.

Besides, various rounds of technical meetings have been held in March, April and May this year in which discussions were held on crossing point or "zero point".

The government in November 22 last year approved the building and development of the Kartarpur corridor from Dera Baba Nanak in Gurdaspur district to the international border to facilitate pilgrims from India to visit Gurdwara Darbar Sahib Kartarpur on the banks of the Ravi river in Pakistan where Guru Nanak Dev spent his last 18 years.

With the beginning of the corridor, the pilgrims would be able to visit the holy shrine throughout the year, he said, adding the corridor will have modern amenities and facilities.

"More than 80 per cent of the work on the Indian side has been completed."

Both India and Pakistan have already agreed on visa-free travel for 5,000 Indian pilgrims daily throughout the year, without restrictions, based on their faith. Persons of Indian origin holding Overseas Citizenship of India (OCI) cards too can visit Gurudwara Kartarpur Sahib using the corridor.

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