

## Protestors on 'March to Tibet' close to India-China border

Tibetan activists in India are readying themselves for another showdown with China before the Beijing Olympics. They are now just 200 km from India's border with the Tibet Autonomous Region where they plan to 'sacrifice lives' in a desperate bid to get back to their 'homeland'.

However, the showdown may well be with Indian security forces, who are unlikely to allow the demonstrators to get anywhere near the international border.

Having traversed over 900 km, starting March 10 from the Himalayan abode-in-exile of Tibetan spiritual leader Dalai Lama at Dharamsala in Himachal Pradesh, the 'March to Tibet' is headed towards the Tibet border through arduous Himalayan terrain in Uttarakhand state.

'We are now starting the last leg of the march. From Almora to the (Tibet) border is now barely 200 km and it will now be cold as we ascend higher into the Himalayas. I know returning to a homeland that is still under foreign occupation is not easy,' firebrand Tibetan youth leader Tenzin Tsundue said.

'Chinese military will, of course, guard the border with machine-guns. Even Indian police will find an excuse to stop us. Confrontation is inevitable, but we are not stopping. We may even have to camp at the border for a long time, might have to call for international support and participation. We march into uncertainty.'

Having failed to disrupt the Olympic torch relay during its [New Delhi](#) leg April 17 due to unprecedented security, the Tibetan activists are now headed for a frontier protest at the Himalayan border to draw international attention to their cause.

'No one can stop me from going to my own homeland. I and others are determined to do it this time,' Tsundue told IANS. He has single-handedly held unique protests against visiting Chinese dignitaries in India in the past.

The march presently has over 300 participants, including monks and women. The number is likely to go up by the time they reach the Tibet border. The rallyists started on this latest leg of their journey Wednesday.

'The march to Tibet is a process for us to return to our homeland and reclaim our right to be in our native land in freedom. Whatever happens, we have deep commitment to non-violence. We will not retaliate. We may be beaten, jailed or even shot at, but we are not giving up. And for me there is no other plan in life other than this march. For all of us marchers, this is our life commitment,' declared Tsundue, a man who went to Tibet clandestinely in 1997.

The rallyists had been forced by the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan government-in-exile's newly constituted Tibetan Solidarity Committee (TSC) to give up the march in March-end. But they re-grouped in New Delhi after the torch protest and started their journey to the border again.

The government-in-exile, which is not recognised by nay country, and its leadership have since disassociated itself from the march.

The rallyists are now seeking support from other Tibetans, Indians and international pro-Tibet activists.

Donations of sleeping bags, shoes, mattresses, money, water, communication devices and any other equipment that can be of use in the high mountains are being sought from all over the world.

The rallyists say they have been getting support during their journey through Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Chandigarh, Haryana, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand.

They were were stopped, beaten up and jailed by the Himachal Pradesh police as they tried to come out Kangra district in that hill state March 13. The march has not been stopped by the police after that but the rallyists are likely to be stopped quite a distance from the international border.

Most of the rallyists are Buddhist monks from three monastic universities in south India, including some old people who escaped from Tibet along with the Dalai Lama in 1959. The eldest is 78 years old. The two youngest are 17, born and brought up in India. They have never seen Tibet.

'There are several young mothers among the marchers who left behind their families and children in the care of their husbands,' Tsundue said he signed out with 'Bod Gyalo' (victory to Tibet).

*Jaideep Sarin* ( © IANS / India eNews)