

A 186-KM RALLY FOR PEACE IN THE RED HEARTLAND

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Around 150 people, from various States affected by Maoist insurgency will begin a 186-km long 'Peace Padyatra' (peace march) on Monday to appeal to "all sides to give peace a chance."

The Peace Padyatra, which will start from the Shabri Gandhi Ashram in East Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh on the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, will conclude in the Jagdalpur town of Bastar on October 12 with a conclave called the 'Bastar dialogue'.

"More than 12,000 people have died in the last 20 years in central India due to the ongoing conflict. Out of which, 2,700 were security forces and more than 9,300 were members of the Adivasi community. Most of these 150 people, who are going to walk from Andhra Pradesh to Bastar, include tribals from Telangana, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha and Jharkhand, and people like me," said Shubhranshu Choudhary, one of the organisers.

Led by tribals

"This effort is being led by tribals from Telangana. There was a meeting in June this year, in which it was decided to make sustained efforts for peace and involve the affected people in the peace process," added Mr. Choudhary, a former journalist who runs a community radio service in central India.

The 150 *padyatri*s will walk along the National Highway 30, which connects Telangana to Chhattisgarh and passes through the Maoist hotbed of the Sukma district of Chhattisgarh.

When asked about restricting the peace march to the highway, Mr. Choudhary said, "Two people have died in this area in last few months due to IED blasts, which is why we decided to refrain from going to interior villages." He said that the appeal for peace was not only to the Maoists but to the government and to everyone else who is collectively creating a situation that is harming tribals. "Now, tribals are saying that enough is enough. Please give peace a chance," Mr. Choudhary said.

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Shubhranshu Choudhary

An organiser

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