



ACROSS THE SOUTH



Tea house, Leh. Above, the image of Dalai Lama, the Ladakhis most important leader.



LADAKH

Challenge of Development

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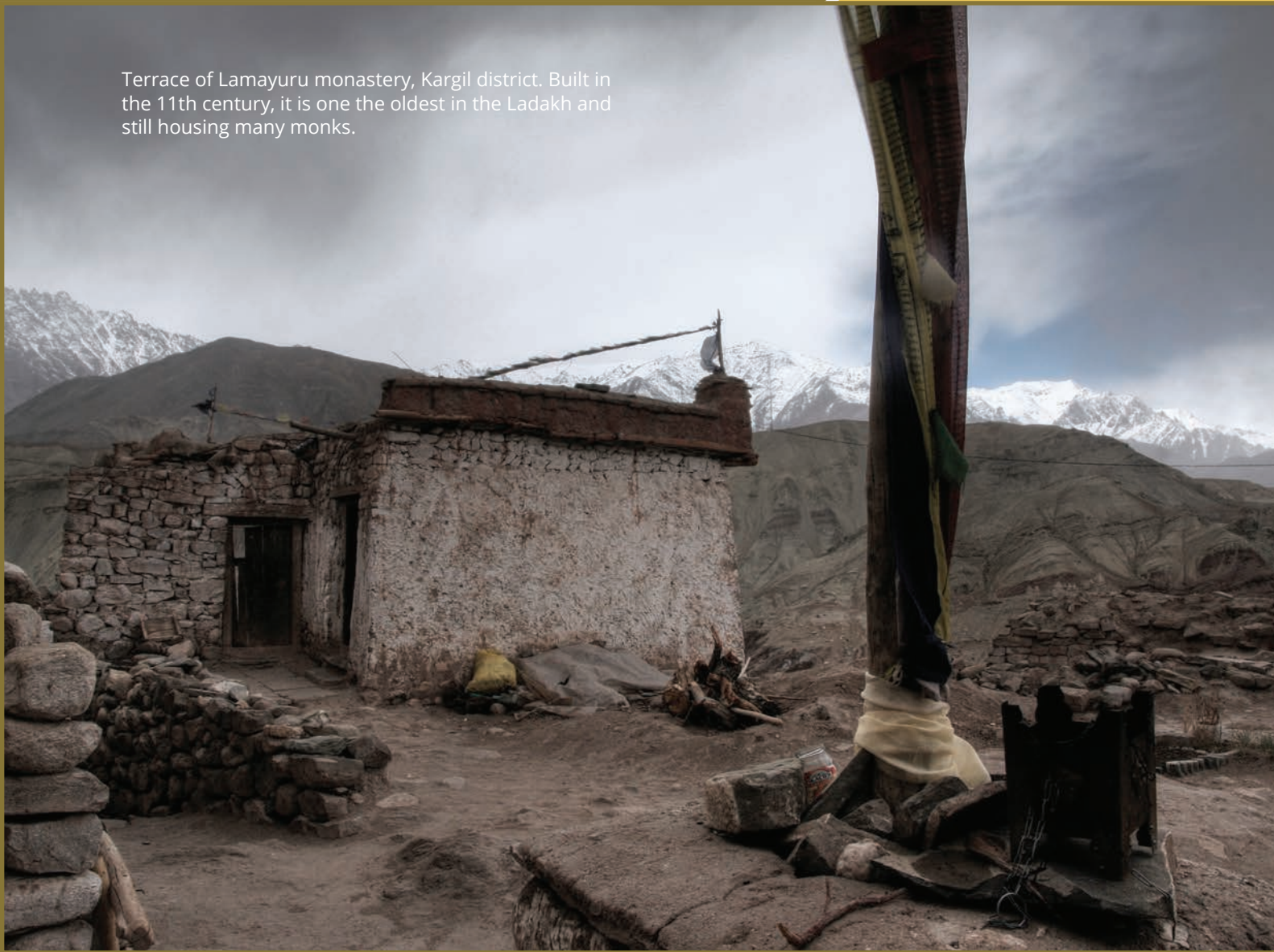
Ladakh is a tri-border area (India, China and Pakistan) located on the inside of the Himalayan ridge, one of the most inhospitable places on earth. The only two roads that connect the region to the rest of India remain blocked by snow during 8 months a year. The isolation, the lack of resources and the adverse conditions contributed to the creation of a unique culture molded by the Buddhist philosophy and based on self-sustainability. In the 1950's, when military tension across the border between India, China and Pakistan started to rise rapidly, things began to change. Two roads were built, one connecting the Ladakh to the southern state of Himachal Pradesh, and the other heading east, towards the state of Jammu and Kashmir. In Leh, infrastructure was built in order to attend the large contingent of troops that arrived every day, and the Capital saw the construction of gas stations, workshops and markets. In 1974, civilians were allowed inside the city, although with limited access. The intensified urbanization after the 1970's has brought to the Ladakh not only infrastructure and industrial goods but also the idealized imagery of a western culture shaped around consumption. Leh is going through a process that has been experienced by many other cultures were isolated and eventually started to receive outside influence. Nowadays, Ladakhis are been submitted to the greatest challenge they have ever faced, a challenge much more severe than isolation or harsh weather.

Young Ladakhi playing cricket in downtown Leh. The recent urbanization process has brought western culture to the regions day to day life. Differently from the adults, youngsters, especially in the capital, have embraced the novelties. Sports clothing and other manufactured goods were inexistent in the Ladakh a couple of decades ago.



A child looking curious to the camera during the celebrations of Buda's Birth Celebration, Leh. In the last three decades the region has been going through significant structural and social changes caused by the occupation by the Indian Army and the advent of tourist activities. The new generation will be submitted to the greatest challenge they have ever faced, a challenge much more severe than isolation or harsh weather.

Terrace of Lamayuru monastery, Kargil district. Built in the 11th century, it is one the oldest in the Ladakh and still housing many monks.



Ladakhi women during celebration.



Ladakhi worker in one of the many stone-quarries of the Indo valley. In this barren environment, almost everything is made out of stone.

Leh, capital of the Ladakh. Three decades ago this was a forgotten city located in the heart of the Himalayas. It was once an outpost of the important Silk Route and a pathway for many caravans heading to Central Asia. Nowadays, due to its geopolitical importance, the city undergoes a treacherous urbanization process.



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