



# Relief Efforts for LADAKH'S GRIEF



Prepared on 8th August 2010 by

**PEL DRUKPA CHARITABLE TRUST**

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## Ladakh, A Shangrila...

Ladakh, the highest plateau of the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir with much of it being over 3,000 m (9,800 ft), spans the Himalayan and Karakoram mountain ranges and the upper Indus River valley. It was the connection point between Central Asia and South Asia when the Silk Road was in use. Contemporary Ladakh borders Tibet to the east, the Lahaul and Spiti to the south, the Vale of Kashmir, Jammu and Baltiyul regions to the west, and the trans-Kunlun territory of Xinjiang to the far north.

Sometimes called "Little Tibet", Ladakh is renowned for its remote mountain beauty and culture.

## Beauty of Its People



Ladakh remains one of the few surviving nomadic civilizations in the world and it is gradually transforming due to modernization and the economic pressure to conform. However, Ladakhis are basically very down to earth and full of contentment and happiness despite the harsh living conditions and the economic pressure to conform. About 70 percent of the 130,000 who live in Ladakh still live in traditional villages, but the capital city of Leh has been transformed. Once a small town with two paved streets and cow jams downtown, Leh survived on the natural wealth of nearby farms. But now most films show fresh asphalt highways and diesel trucks groaning over

## ...Under Threat



After Yogi Taktsang Repa came to Ladakh in 17th century at his gurus' instructions and at the patronage of Ladakh's Namgyal Dynasty, the Drukpa Order flourished. Hemis Monastery, the largest and most important monastery in Ladakh has since been the headquarters for the Drukpa Order. The two-day Hemis Festival that takes place in June/July annually is one of the most important events in Ladakh and has been designated a local public holiday. Hemis Monastery has more than 267 branches in this area of the Himalayas.



the Himalayan passes polluting the thin air to deliver cheap government-subsidized grain. Leh has become an outpost in the global economy, complete with rubbish dumps, bazaars full of sneakers and watches, and food shortage when the passes close with snow. The self-sufficiency so important to Ladakhi culture has been undercut by economic powers beyond their control.

Although most nomadic Ladakhis live with almost no money, their devotion in Buddhism which is much like the laws of ecology with emphasis on the holistic nature of reality has given them the foundation of sound livelihood. But even more appealing than the ecological balance in the villages is the emotional balance in the people.





## An Unexpected Disaster

A series of cloudbursts occurring between 12:30am and 1:00am on 6th August rocked the peace of Ladakh and brought all Ladakhis to a devastated situation never before experienced by anyone. The unexpected cloudbursts triggered torrential rain, mudslides and flash floods, and brought massive physical destruction and emotional distress to the beautiful Himalayan region and its people.

As of today, more than 160 people were killed and over 600 are still missing, with very slim chance of survival.

## Global Warming Is Taking A Toll



Ladakh is a high altitude desert as the Himalayas create a rain shadow, denying entry to monsoon clouds. The main source of water is the winter snowfall on the mountains. Recent flooding of the Indus River and rapid changes in weather conditions in the region have been attributed either to abnormal rain patterns or the retreating of glaciers, both of which might be linked to global warming.

## The Unprepared Helpless People



As Ladakh was not prepared for a natural calamity of this sort, rescue operations have not been easy. Besides, the reconstruction process will also take a long time, due to the massive damage done to the physical structure of the buildings as well as the emotional state of the people. Most people are unwilling to move back to their homes even though some were not affected. They were so emotionally distraught that they have moved to makeshift tents, their own cars and some even prefer to sleep in the open in high grounds, fearing another calamity of such scale may take place anytime.

## Emergency Help Is Needed



The actual damage, number of victims and affected survivors of this calamity are still unknown, however we have been informed by our local volunteers and friends on the ground that many of the much needed items are not available or in shortage, and they have called for an immediate help to procure: medicine, blankets, sleeping bags, stretches, small water purifiers, makeshift housing material, compressed food, chlorine disinfection tablets, folding drinking water containers, disposable protective clothing, activated carbon protective masks, splints, clothes, footwear, toiletries and flashlights with extra batteries.



## Reconstruction Has To Begin

Besides providing relief and aid on the ground zero, so that the survivors and the victims' families will have sufficient materials to live on, reconstruction also has to begin soon. Its winter starts in mid October and lasts till early March.

At the end of the relief program, there may be more than 8,000 people who will be left homeless. They will have no shelter to protect from the harsh winter that sometimes sees temperatures drop to as low as -37 degree celcius. Old folks and children will be most vulnerable to this situation.

Roads will be blocked and it will be too costly to transport materials up to Ladakh by air.



## Harsh Winter Just Around The Corner

Winter will start to set in by mid-October. If unprepared, many more people will suffer and die, especially old folks and children who are more vulnerable will suffer most in harsh weather conditions. This leaves only less than 10 weeks to get the victims and survivors prepared for the difficult conditions ahead. We therefore need immediate assistance from everyone, from everywhere, to help us achieve this near-impossible mission, so that these beautiful people will carry on living a legacy of love, harmony and peace.



# SELECTED PHOTO IMAGES OF A LADAKH IN GRIEF



## “Rancho’s School” Suffers Damage

We are also looking at helping the Druk White Lotus School, now popularly known as “Rancho’s School”, which has to resume its normal schedule soon. The mudslide flowed over the eastern half of the Druk White Lotus School campus in the early hours of 6th August morning and deposited 1.0-1.5m of mud. The mud entered some of the residential buildings and classrooms to a level about half way up the walls. Approximately 600 children are affected as the school needs to be cleaned up and many walls, floors, and equipments have to be replaced and repaired immediately.





## ESTIMATION OF FINANCIAL NEEDS FOR RELIEF & AID

We are looking at raising around US\$3,000,000 among the international communities to provide for an immediate relief and solution to the pressing needs of the people in Ladakh. This will go in to the areas for procurement of different items as mentioned earlier as well as for preparation needed for a harsh winter ahead. Ladakh, very much unprepared for a natural calamity of this scale, needs our urgent attention and action. We are committed to help Ladakh restore its beauty and values.





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