

# THE BHUTAN SOCIETY

## NEWSLETTER



NUMBER 44

PRESIDENT: SIR SIMON BOWES LYON

SPRING 2011

Next Society Meeting is on Thursday 23 June 2011

Time: 6.30pm for 7pm

### A wander through the Buddhist kingdoms of the Himalayas

From Everest's summit you can view the two highest mountains in the world: Thyangboche to the south and Rhongbuk to the north. Approach the mountain from north, south or east - through Tibet or Nepal - and you walk through Buddhist lands. So too, in Bhutan and Ladakh. Our speaker will be Rebecca Stephens who, in May 1993 as part of the 40th Mount Everest Anniversary Expedition, became the first British woman to reach the summit of Mount Everest.

Meeting will be held at the National Liberal Club, Whitehall Place, London SW1A 2HE (off Whitehall)

### MEETING REPORT

*On February 17th 2011 many members and friends of the Society were pleased to be able to attend a London meeting where the speaker, Dr Dibyesh Anand, spoke of the role of Bhutan in the shifting dynamics of China-India relations. This is his summary of the lecture.*

The emerging powers of China and India are transforming the politics and international relations of Asia in general and the Himalayan region in particular. The often testy relations between the two countries should be understood as resulting from conflicting strategic interests, competing nationalist narratives and evolving geopolitics. China-India relations have witnessed major swings since the heyday of close cooperation in the early 1950s and the nadir of the 1962 border war. Though both countries profess a desire to work closely to resolve disagreements, some of the factors that contribute to the testy China-India relations are: mutual suspicion of each other's intentions, the bitter memories of the 1962 war (especially in India), the presence in India of Tibetan exiles led by the Dalai Lama, Indian discomfort at China's close relations with Pakistan, China's increasing clout in other South Asian states and Chinese mistrust of warmer Indo-US relations. Bhutan plays an important role in the security architecture of India and Bhutan's primary diplomatic relations is with its southern neighbour.



While maintaining a close friendship with India, Bhutan needs to grasp the rapidly shifting geopolitics in the region vis-a-vis China and evolve its foreign policy proactively. The Bhutanese, with their serious commitment to the experiment with Gross National Happiness, are in a good position to inspire a new political discourse that is people-centric and not state-centric. They should work along with neighbouring provinces in China and India to foster development in the region and make lives better for everyone living there. One way in which Bhutan can play a meaningful role is by helping the younger generation get education in subjects that are crucial for grasping international relations and diplomacy. Today's young Bhutanese are tomorrow's leaders and it is they who have to steer their country through the shifting dynamics of regional geopolitics.

*Dr Dibyesh Anand is an Associate Professor of International Relations at the University of Westminster, London.*

# NEWS AND UPDATES

## Advance notice for your diary from the Secretary

*"Members are asked to note that 14 October is the likely date for this year's dinner. Further details will follow in the summer"*

## SOCIETY VISIT TO KEW

Planning a visit to the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew for mid February might be thought brave but the weather on the 8th – warm sunshine and light airs – proved perfect for a visit by fourteen members and friends of the Society.



We were greeted by Andre Schuiteman from the Kew Herbarium and taken to the orchid glasshouses behind the signs saying 'private'. Kew's orchids are nurtured and propagated here; rooms at different temperatures and humidity levels simulate a variety of environments and altitudes. Andre Schuiteman, and his colleague Christopher Ryan, responded to our many and varied questions and showed us some of the 25,000 known orchid species. This number is growing by about 200 a year as new areas are explored or opened up by new roads. The UK has 52 species, some of which are to be seen in Kew's main gardens. We were impressed by the constant attention devoted to the orchids. Sun levels and humidity have some automatic

controls but many plants are sprayed twice daily by staff and all get regular feeds; there are even programmes to ensure that those growing epiphytically on bark (Kew tends to use a Mediterranean source) are moved on to new pieces when necessary.

Many thanks to Dorothea Friesen, who organised the whole trip magnificently and also arranged for the party to eat lunch in the Orangery Restaurant. All were able to visit the "Tropical Extravaganza" Orchid Exhibition in the Princess of Wales Conservatory – a regular February event which certainly lived up to its name this year. The day was a most stimulating and satisfying experience.

**Andrew Sutton**

## NEW BOTTLE CRUSHING MACHINE

Thimphu's PET bottle crushing plant is now ready to shred the numerous bottles that litter the city streets, drains and sometimes even end up in the landfill.

Inaugurated in late April, the plant, built jointly by the Thimphu City Corporation (TCC) and Royal Society for Protection of Nature (RSPN), can process about 7,000 bottles an hour which will be collected from schools, landfill areas and from around the city. TCC's chief environmental officer Gyeltshen Dukpa said Changzamtog middle secondary school students earned about Nu 1,400 by collecting about 129kg of pet bottles (approx. 6450 bottles!) At the plant, the bottles will be washed, dried and crushed. The crushed particles are sold to Indian dealers for about Nu 20 a kg which are then used to make fabric for goods like clothes, gloves and socks.

Thimphu Thrompon Kinley Dorjee said that the municipality had high expectations from the plant. "We can't recycle the bottle here, but we can make it semi-processed and have some value added to it for financial viability," he said. "We should have a practical solution to manage PET bottle waste." The Thrompon said recycling in Bhutan would be a possibility, if the PET bottle waste generation increased in future.

# NEWS FROM THE KINGDOM OF BHUTAN

## Wake up to a local coffee brew

Bhutan may not have to import coffee for much longer. It may soon be able to grow and produce its own supply. It is possible. In fact, it is already being done. A few years ago in Hangey village in Samtse, a few farmers started cultivating coffee on a trial basis. The area, they found, was favourable for coffee cultivation and the trial was a success. Deo Dikshit the consultant said, "we grew different varieties of Arabica coffee which is considered the best coffee in the world."

Now a business firm is already planning a plantation. The firm will grow coffee in Hangay Kalamati and Sasboty in Sibsu on 300 acres of land leased from the government. It will soon sign a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of Agriculture to start commercial production on a public-private partnership basis.



"We are hoping to start by May or June, as soon as we complete all the formalities." It takes about four years for the coffee plants to start bearing fruit. The firm also plans to set up a production factory and export the coffee initially to Europe, North America, Japan and Singapore. "We hope to create a brand name for coffee from Bhutan," said Deo Dikshit.

The firm has employed 16 farmers to work on the nursery and will be able to employ more once work on the plantation develops.

---

## Second highest tourist entry on record

A total of 27,020 dollar paying tourists flew into Bhutan last year. Tourist arrivals of 2010 appears to be the second highest in the last decade following a peak during the Coronation year, 2008. Last year this earned the Kingdom a royalty of USD 11.5M, with revenue from visa fees alone amounting to USD 540,900.

The country, however, saw 40,873 "high-end tourists" visiting the country, including regional tourists and those coming for conferences and business. Tourism Council of Bhutan officials said numbers far exceeded the target of 35,000 tourists for the year.

It defines tourists as people who "travel to and stay in places outside their usual environment for more than 24 hours and not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes." The inclusion of regional tourists comes after the government committed to bring in 100,000 tourists by the end of the 10th plan as part of the Accelerating Bhutan's Socio-Economic Development initiative.

This figure, however, left many tour operators confused as they felt the picture was "distorted", as regional tourists from India, Bangladesh and Maldives do not pay the tourism royalty. This was clarified when the prime minister explained that a tourist is anyone who uses tourism services in the country.

Regional tourist arrivals saw a growth of 56 per cent over 2009. The increased arrivals, tourism council officials said was an impact of the tourism initiatives, including marketing, promotion and enhancement of service quality.

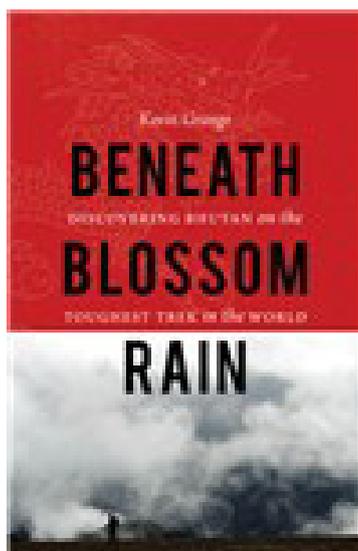
## Book Review

### **Beneath Blossom Rain: Discovering Bhutan on the Toughest Trek in the World by Kevin Grange**

By Tim Gebhart

Imagine two descriptions of an adventure travel journey. One is billed as the toughest trek in the world. The other has a staff of seven, a kitchen tent, toilet tents, hot tea served as you arise each morning and hot evening meals with silverware at a large table. As incongruous as it may sound, both are the Snowman Trek, a 24-day horseshoe-shaped journey of 216 miles on foot through the Himalayas in Bhutan.

Why is the Snowman considered so tough? Not only are trekkers hiking nearly 10 miles a day, they traverse 11 high-mountain passes, seven of them over 16,000 feet. In addition to the risks inherent on at times precarious trails and from unpredictable weather, the height of the mountain passes makes altitude sickness a very real - and potentially fatal - danger. More people have climbed Mount Everest than have completed the Snowman Trek. Fewer than 120 people a year attempt the trek; less than 50 percent finish. Or, as one of author Kevin Grange's fellow trekkers put it, "Everybody cries at some point on the Snowman Trek."



Were *Beneath Blossom Rain: Discovering Bhutan on the Toughest Trek in the World*, Grange's account of his journey, limited to its hazards, trials, and tribulations, one could easily categorize it as an adventure travel tale for those who enjoy such reads. Fortunately Grange's scope and journey were far broader. For the armchair traveller, Grange does a fine job of showing readers the nature, history, and landscape of Bhutan, as

well as taking us to remote villages and monasteries. He is equally open about what is essentially a personal search for meaning.

Two concepts help drive Grange on the trek. One is the western idea of Shangri-La. The other is a Tibetan and Bhutanese concept that inspired the book's title. In local folklore, an auspicious superstition surrounds blossom rain, the moment of rainbow light when it is raining and sunny at the same time. Those Bhutanese he asks about blossom rain provide no better than enigmatic answers about its significance, and his desire to grasp the concept also animates his efforts. *Beneath Blossom Rain* becomes as much a journal of an internal trek as a Himalayan one, a tale in which we are even privy to Grange's ongoing debate with his "inner critic."

Available from University of Nebraska Press  
Paperback 2011. 352 pp. 978-0-8032-3433-8  
Price: \$19.95

## Contact List

Chairman	Michael Rutland OBE (Bhutan) PO Box 1044 Thimphu 00975 1761 8553 (UK) 2 Windacres, Warren Rd, Guildford Surrey. <a href="mailto:rutland.michael@gmail.com">rutland.michael@gmail.com</a>
Secretary	Andrew Sutton 020 7481 1872 <a href="mailto:andrewsutton001@aol.com">andrewsutton001@aol.com</a>
Treasurer	Robin Lee 01483 455764 <a href="mailto:lee.robin@btopenworld.com">lee.robin@btopenworld.com</a>
Membership	Elizabeth Lee 01483 455764 <a href="mailto:lee.elizabeth@btopenworld.com">lee.elizabeth@btopenworld.com</a>
Newsletter Editor	Sylvia Robert-Sargeant <a href="mailto:editor@bhutansociety.org">editor@bhutansociety.org</a>
Programme Secretary	John Davey <a href="mailto:jhhdavey@yahoo.co.uk">jhhdavey@yahoo.co.uk</a>
Events	Dorothea von Friesen <a href="mailto:dorrfriesen@yahoo.co.uk">dorrfriesen@yahoo.co.uk</a>
Web Master	Chris Watt <a href="mailto:website@bhutansociety.org">website@bhutansociety.org</a>
General Enquiries	<a href="mailto:info@bhutansociety.org">info@bhutansociety.org</a> 82 New Crane Wharf 11 New Crane Place London E1W 3TU
Website	<a href="http://www.bhutansociety.org">www.bhutansociety.org</a>

### **NOTE**

If you have not already done so, we would appreciate you sending your latest e-mail address to the Membership Secretary at:

**[lee.elizabeth@btopenworld.com](mailto:lee.elizabeth@btopenworld.com)**

who will then add it to the database. There is no plan for the Society to go 'paperless' but there are times when it could be very convenient to communicate information electronically at short notice.

**Published by The Bhutan Society  
of the United Kingdom**