

Editorial

This edition of *The Bhutan Journal* is solemnly dedicated to the memory of the late Dr. Govinda Rizal—scholar, activist, and co-founding editor of this publication. Since the journal's inception in 2019, Dr. Rizal remained a steadfast pillar of its editorial vision, intellectual integrity, and unwavering commitment to truth.

Life of Dr. Govinda Rizal, born into a modest farmer family in the serene southern regions of Bhutan, was marked by exile and adversity, was defined by a relentless pursuit of knowledge and a deep commitment to the betterment of his community. Born to a poor farmer family, his natural inclination towards learning was unmistakable, his thirst for knowledge was not to be quenched.

In exile, Dr. Rizal's commitment to education became even more pronounced - playing a pioneering role in the establishment of the Bhutanese Community Development Centre (BCDC) and Disability Education – outside the formal school education setting. This innovative approach to non-formal education provided a haven for youngsters and adults alike.

His advocacy extended to the political realm through his engagement in Appeal Movement Coordination Council (AMCC), lobbying in both Delhi and Kathmandu during the height of our repatriation activism.

His thirst for knowledge led him further afield to Japan post-doctoral research at the International Rice Research Institute in Manila contributing to rice cultivation and genetic modification. Dr. Rizal continued his agricultural research through teaching at Tribhuvan University, enriching the academic landscape with his insights into rice cultivation.

Beyond his scientific and academic contributions, Dr. Rizal was a prolific writer. His literary works, written in Nepali and English, spanned a variety of genres including educational and satirical stories. These writings were more than mere literatures; they were tools for enlightenment and social commentary.

Dr. Rizal's dedication to education found another outlet in his role as the founding editor of *The Bhutan Journal*. This publication played a groundbreaking role in educating the resettled Bhutanese community about the importance of research and writing in journals. Through *The Bhutan Journal*, Dr. Rizal aimed to not only preserve Bhutanese cultural identity but also to empower the community through knowledge dissemination.

His untimely demise in 2024 sent shockwaves through the Bhutanese diaspora. It was a profound loss, felt deeply by those who had known him well. This issue of *The Bhutan Journal*, therefore, stands as a tribute to Dr. Rizal, reflecting on his life and his concerns regarding the proposed Gelephu Mindfulness City (GMC). The project, to be established on land historically occupied by evicted

Bhutanese, including Dr. Rizal's family, raised ethical and legal issues that he had vehemently contested. His voice continues to resonate, urging for justice and respect for the rights of displaced communities.

Dr. Rizal's legacy is one of inspiration. His story is a beacon of hope and inspiration. Even in death, Dr. Rizal's voice compels us to reflect on the ethical implications of development projects like the GMC and to honour the rights of those who have been displaced.

Dr. Rizal took a particular interest in the GMC project. Dr. Rizal had been closely monitoring the early signs of this development, concerned not with its urban aspirations but with the complex historical and ethical grounds on which it was being planned.

For Dr. Rizal, Gelephu¹ was a land embedded with memory and pain still alive within the hearts of many evicted citizens. He was concerned GMC project may be an economic progress but more that is a strategic attempt to erase the history and identity of the region. In his final months, Dr. Rizal discussed the implications of the GMC project with the Bhutanese diaspora. He convened conversations and drafted an appeal directed at potential investors, stakeholders, and international observers. The document laid out a moral and legal argument against the project—calling it a disruption of historical justice and a barrier to the rightful repatriation of evicted citizens.

The proposed establishment of a Mega City on these lands raises significant ethical and legal concerns. It not only disrupts the rights of the evicted people but also complicates and obstructs their potential repatriation. Our intention is not to perpetuate victimhood

¹ We have used Gelephu and Sarpang interchangeably in this edition when referring to GMC – name originates with Gelephu but includes whole of the Sarpang district.

but to protect our rights, honor the historical significance of these lands, and seek a just and equitable resolution to this longstanding issue.

Dr. Rizal was hopeful to open a broader, transnational scholarly discussion on the GMC. He believed that only through rigorous intellectual engagement could the silenced histories and contested narratives of the region be fully understood and responsibly addressed.

He had planned for several public talk on the subject and was preparing to join the expert panel for The Bhutan Watch Discussion Forum, a dedicated event designed to explore the ethical, historical, and political dimensions of the GMC. This forum was slated for 5 May 2024. Tragically, his shocking accident on that very day left that dream unfulfilled forever. He died in a road accident.

Now, with the untimely demise of Dr. Rizal, the responsibility to carry forward his mission—to raise awareness within the international community about the historical injustices tied to the GMC—remains more crucial than ever. It falls upon all of us—scholars, activists, and concerned global citizens—to ensure that his work does not end with him. The struggle to protect the truth, to honor the dispossessed, and to advocate for justice must continue with renewed vigor and unwavering commitment.

As a mark of respect to his legacy and a tribute to his contribution, this edition of *The Bhutan Journal* is devoted entirely to exploring the GMC. We do so not just to inform, but to critically engage with its implications, both historical and contemporary.

I would like to extend my deep appreciation and gratefulness to *The Bhutan Journal* editor I P Adhikari for working singlehandedly to bring this edition to completion. I would also like to thank Alexia Adhikari (Simpson) for her valuation contribution, dedication, and behind-the-scenes efforts in making this episode of the journal possible. Also thanks to all other reviewers of the content presented on this edition of the journal.

Ram Karki
Hague, The Netherlands