



To:

The Honourable President of India
The Honourable Prime Minister of India
The Honourable Speaker of Lok Sabha
The Honourable Chairman of Rajya Sabha
The Honourable Union Minister of Ministry of External Affairs
The Honourable Union Minister of Ministry of Defence
The Honourable Union Minister of Home Affairs

Date: August 22, 2024

Subject: Urgent Appeal for Intervention on Behalf of Hindu Communities in Myanmar

Dear Honourable Prime Minister and Respected Government Officials,

We write to you with a heavy heart and deep concern regarding the escalating difficulties faced by Hindu communities in Myanmar. As the government of a nation that upholds the principles of human rights, religious freedom, and social justice, it is imperative that India takes a strong stand in addressing the grave challenges that the Hindu population in Myanmar continues to endure. These challenges include severe restrictions on freedom of movement, freedom of religion, difficulties in obtaining planning permissions for temples, loss of agricultural lands, the lengthy waiting period for obtaining settlement status despite being born in Myanmar, and the role of military support in perpetuating these injustices.

1. Restrictions on Freedom of Movement

Hindus in Myanmar have long faced limitations on their freedom of movement, particularly in regions where ethnic and religious minorities are systematically marginalized. The situation has only worsened over the past decades, as communal tensions and conflict have led to heightened scrutiny and restrictions. Hindu families are often confined to specific areas, unable to travel freely for work, education, or religious purposes. This lack of mobility not only hampers their economic opportunities but also isolates them from essential services and broader social networks.

The fear of violence, harassment, and discrimination at checkpoints and in public spaces compounds these restrictions, forcing many to live in a state of constant insecurity. For a community that relies heavily on agricultural livelihoods, these movement restrictions have devastating effects on their ability to sustain themselves and their families.

2. Freedom of Religion Under Threat

The right to freely practice one's religion is a fundamental human right, yet Hindus in Myanmar face significant barriers in this regard. The rise of religious nationalism has fostered an environment where Hindu communities are increasingly viewed with suspicion and hostility.



Instances of religious discrimination, including the use of Buddha statues during Hindu religious festivals to prevent distractions, bribery of local authorities to permit religious gatherings, and the desecration of temples, have become alarmingly frequent.

Government policies, both explicit and tacit, have further exacerbated these issues. Hindu religious leaders often find themselves under surveillance, while devotees face intimidation and violence during festivals and other religious observances. The lack of government protection and accountability has emboldened perpetrators of these hate crimes, leaving Hindu communities vulnerable.

3. Challenges in Obtaining Planning Permissions for Temples

One of the most profound expressions of religious freedom is the ability to construct and maintain places of worship. However, Hindu communities in Myanmar face significant obstacles when seeking planning permission to build or renovate temples. Bureaucratic red tape, coupled with discriminatory practices, has made it nearly impossible for many Hindu communities to obtain the necessary approvals.

Even in cases where permission is granted, the process is often delayed for years, during which time Hindu communities are left without adequate places to practice their faith. In some regions, authorities have arbitrarily demolished existing temples, citing obscure regulations or falsely claiming that the structures were illegal. This systematic denial of the right to worship not only infringes on religious freedom but also undermines the cultural heritage of Hindu communities in Myanmar.

However, it is important to note that temples in Zeyawaddy and Kyauddadar townships are mostly safeguarded by the authorities, as these are areas where the Indian ambassador can access. This selective protection highlights the inconsistency in how religious sites are treated, depending on their visibility to international observers, which further underscores the systemic discrimination faced by Hindus in other regions.

4. Loss of Agricultural Lands

Agriculture is the backbone of many Hindu communities in Myanmar, yet this crucial source of livelihood is under threat. Over the past decade, there has been a significant increase in the confiscation of agricultural lands belonging to Hindu farmers. These land seizures are often carried out under the guise of development projects or military expansion, with little to no compensation provided to the displaced families.

The loss of agricultural land has catastrophic consequences, plunging Hindu communities into poverty and food insecurity. Many are forced to leave their ancestral lands and migrate to urban areas where they face further discrimination and economic hardship. The erosion of land rights is not just an economic issue but also a cultural one, as it severs the deep ties that Hindu communities have to their land and traditions.



5. Unreasonably Long Waiting Periods for Settlement Status

Another grave injustice faced by Hindu communities in Myanmar is the excessively long waiting period to obtain official settlement status—not even full citizenship, but statuses such as naturalized or associate citizenship—despite being born in Myanmar. Despite having deep roots in the country, many Hindus find themselves stateless, trapped in a bureaucratic limbo. It can take up to three years or more for Hindus to receive their settlement documents, during which time they are denied basic rights and services that are afforded to other citizens.

This protracted waiting time not only reflects systemic discrimination but also exacerbates the already precarious situation of these communities. Without settlement status, Hindus are unable to secure stable employment, access education, or participate fully in the social and economic life of the country. This delay in granting what should be a basic right further entrenches their marginalization and vulnerability, keeping them in a cycle of poverty and exclusion.

6. Restrictions on Studies and Careers in Key Sectors

A significant barrier faced by Hindus born in Myanmar is the restriction on accessing education and careers in key sectors such as medicine, engineering, law, finance, and other private sectors. Without citizenship, Hindus are systematically excluded from these professional opportunities, which limits their ability to contribute to society and improve their standard of living. These restrictions not only stifle individual potential but also perpetuate poverty and social inequality within the Hindu community, leaving them marginalized and disenfranchised.

7. Abolishing the Myanmar 1982 Citizenship Law

The Myanmar 1982 Citizenship Law is a tool of discrimination that has long been used to marginalize minorities, including Hindus. This law effectively strips many Hindus of their rightful citizenship, relegating them to a second-class status within their own country. The law severely restricts access to education, careers, and freedom of movement, creating insurmountable barriers to social and economic advancement. It is imperative that this law be abolished in any future democratic government of Myanmar to ensure that all citizens, regardless of their ethnic or religious background, are granted equal rights and opportunities.

8. The Role of Military Support in Perpetuating Injustice

One of the most concerning aspects of the current situation is the role of military support in perpetuating the oppression of Hindu communities. The Myanmar military, which has historically played a dominant role in the country's governance, has been implicated in numerous human rights violations against ethnic and religious minorities, including Hindus.

India practices a federal democratic system and is recognized as a champion of human rights in Asia. Supporting the Myanmar military government would deviate from the principles that India upholds regarding federal democracy and human rights. It is crucial that India, as a



regional power and a champion of these principles, reassesses its stance and engagement with the Myanmar military. Any military support, whether through direct aid, arms sales, or strategic partnerships, should be carefully considered to ensure that it does not inadvertently contribute to the empowerment of a regime that systematically marginalizes and oppresses its minority populations.

9. The Need for Immediate Action

The situation for Hindus in Myanmar is dire and requires immediate attention. We respectfully urge the Indian government to use its diplomatic influence and regional leadership to:

- **Press for the removal of restrictions on movement** for Hindu communities in Myanmar, allowing them to travel freely for work, education, and religious purposes.
- **Advocate for the protection of religious freedom** and the prevention of violence and discrimination against Hindu communities.
- **Facilitate the streamlining of planning permissions** for Hindu temples in Myanmar, ensuring that these communities can practice their faith without fear of reprisal.
- **Urge the protection of agricultural lands** and prevent unlawful land seizures, ensuring that Hindu farmers can sustain their livelihoods.
- **Work with the Myanmar government to reduce the settlement process timeline** to ensure that Hindus born in Myanmar can obtain citizenship and related rights without undue delay.
- **Reevaluate military cooperation with Myanmar** and make it contingent on significant improvements in human rights, particularly regarding the treatment of Hindu and other minority communities.
- **Acknowledge the historical and ongoing human rights abuses:** Since the 1962 military coup in Myanmar, Hindus, along with other minorities, have faced extensive human rights abuses. Despite token gestures, such as being granted a religious holiday per year, the Hindu community has been systematically discriminated against in all areas, including religion, education, employment, and social activities. After the 2021 military coup, these conditions have only worsened, with increased suppression of any democratic activities and further marginalization.
- **Tighten diplomatic relations with Myanmar's military government:** Stronger and friendlier diplomatic relations with the current Myanmar regime will likely have more negative than positive consequences for India. The Indian government should consider tightening diplomatic relations and reducing support for the military government until there are significant improvements in human rights and democratic practices in Myanmar.
- **Halt the use of Rupee and Myanmar Kyats in trade:** The Indian government should consider stopping the use of Rupees and Myanmar Kyats in border trade or any other transactions with the Myanmar military government. Such economic actions would send a strong message against the ongoing human rights violations.
- **Protect refugees and prevent wrongful repatriations:** The military coup in Myanmar has led to the displacement of many refugees, some of whom have sought safety in India. It is crucial that India continues to provide refuge to these individuals and ensures



that those wrongfully arrested by Indian authorities are not repatriated to Myanmar, where they face the risk of torture, forced labour, or being used as human shields.

- **Recognize the deep roots of Hindus in Myanmar:** As Hindus from Myanmar, we were born and bred in the country, but according to the Myanmar 1982 Citizenship Law, we are made to feel like aliens and second-class citizens. Furthermore, India's Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) policy does not allow Hindus from Myanmar to become OCI holders. We urge the Indian government to reassess the OCI policy and include Hindus from Myanmar as eligible for this status, recognizing our historical and cultural connections to India.

In conclusion, the Hindu communities in Myanmar are facing an existential threat that cannot be ignored. Their struggles are a stark reminder of the fragility of human rights in the face of intolerance, discrimination, and unchecked military power. As the largest democracy and a nation with deep cultural and religious ties to the Hindu communities, India has a unique role to play in advocating for their protection and well-being.

We strongly believe that the removal of the Myanmar military junta from political power and the establishment of a federal democratic system are the most effective solutions to protect minority groups, including the Hindu community, and to restore peace and stability in Myanmar. Moreover, a democratic and stable Myanmar would open up significant economic opportunities for both India and Myanmar, fostering stronger bilateral ties and mutual prosperity. We urge the Indian government to take a stand, raise its voice in solidarity with Hindus in Myanmar, and work towards a future where they can live in peace, dignity, and security.

On behalf of Hindu Myanmar Union and India for Myanmar,

Salai Dokhar

Founder of India for Myanmar

Contact information:

Aung Myo Win (+66943154240 Burmese/ Hindi)

Min Hein (+447818250432 Burmese/English)

Salai Dokhar (+916009334256 Burmese/ English)