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## Tai Ahom Students' Union Rallies for ST Status, Indigenous Land Rights, and Immigration Control in Assam

July 31, 2025

– Categories: Human Rights



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Thousands of members of the All Tai Ahom Students' Union (ATASU) staged coordinated protests in Guwahati and Sivasagar on Wednesday, pressing for the granting of Scheduled Tribe (ST) status to the Tai Ahom community, stronger land rights for indigenous people, and the eviction of suspected illegal immigrants from Assam.

In Guwahati, more than 1,500 ATASU members and supporters from across the state marched with community flags and slogans, converging on the streets leading to Dispur, the state's administrative hub. The demonstrators submitted a memorandum to Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, reiterating their core demands.

ATASU leaders emphasized that the Tai Ahom people, though culturally connected with other Tai groups such as the Khamti, Phake, Khamyang, Aiton, and Turung, have maintained their distinct language, culture, and traditions. They stressed that constitutional recognition through ST status is essential to preserve this identity and ensure socio-economic safeguards for the community.

Chow Milan Buragohain, President of ATASU, criticized both the central and state governments for failing to act despite repeated assurances. "The central government introduced the ST Bill in the Rajya Sabha, but our demand remains unfulfilled," he said, noting that the lack of progress has fueled frustration among community members.

The protest also called attention to indigenous land rights, with ATASU demanding that land be secured for native populations to prevent demographic changes linked to the settlement of undocumented migrants, which they argue affects indigenous communities. The union urged the government to expedite the eviction of suspected illegal settlers from tribal belts and other protected areas in Assam, citing the need to safeguard the socio-cultural fabric of the state.

The Tai Ahom community, with roots dating back over 600 years in Assam's history, played a pivotal role in shaping the state's heritage and governance. Before British colonization, despite their contributions, ATASU argues that without ST recognition, the community is excluded from certain constitutional protections and benefits available to other recognized tribal groups.

While the Assam government has previously acknowledged the demand, concrete steps have yet to be taken. The central government's proposed ST Bill remains pending, and ATASU leaders have warned of intensified agitation if their concerns are not addressed shortly.