

To

Mr. Tarun Gogoi

Honorable Chief Minister of Assam,

Sachibalaya, Dispur, Assam 781006

Dated Houston 1<sup>st</sup> January, 2007

**Sub: State Assembly's Resolution to Change the name of Assam to Asom.**

Dear Sir:

On 15<sup>th</sup> December, 2006, the State Assembly of Assam adopted a resolution by voice vote to write the name of the State of Assam as 'Asom'. No argument or reasoning was given for the name change, nor any debate was allowed in spite of requests from the opposition.

We are a number of friends and well wishers of Assam living in and outside the state, who are shocked to see the above news report. We hereby register our strong opposition to this entirely unwarranted and undemocratic move on the part of the State Legislature for the following reasons:

1. The State's name is not something for changing in as casual a fashion as it has been done, without a thorough and informed public discussion and debate. It was never a mandate of the people. Even the Opposition parties' demand for a debate was summarily cut off in a highly undemocratic fashion.
2. The Legislature did not give a credible set of reasons for the change from the internationally well-recognized name 'Assam' to 'Asom'. In these days of 'globalization', to dilute and muddy Assam's international name recognition is entirely counterproductive.
3. There is clear historical evidence that the British did not introduce the name 'Assam' but which was in use long before the British signed the Treaty of Yandaboo on 24<sup>th</sup> February 1826 and used the word Assam in the treaty. Even from the Ahom Buronjis, we find that the Moghols used the name 'Ashyam' for the state. The same is also evident from the various historical documents from the Moghol period and Dutch chronicles of pre-British period. In Persian publications of Moghol period, like Akbarnama (1542-1605), Padshah-Namah (1627-1647), Alamgir-Namah (1657-1667) and *Tarikh-I Mulk-I Áshám*, the name *Asham* is mentioned. On the otherhand, we donot find the name 'Asom' anywhere in the pre British days.
4. We attach herewith a copy of a map of the *Kingdom of Bengale* (Kingdom of Bengal) which was published around 1662. The map was drawn by a Dutchman named John van Leenen, who was in "Bengale" in 1661. The document is presently in the Maritime Museum, Rotterdam. As can be seen, the map also records the name *Assam*. In a letter sent by Joan Maertsuyker, Governor-General of Dutch Batavia on 29-08-1663, he addressed Mirjumala as "....Generaal veldheer van den Grooten Mogol in *Assam*, Bengale etc." There is also a diary of a Dutchman published in 1675 which mentions the name of *Assam* and the people of Assam as *Assamer*. The Dutchman fought alongside the army of Mirjumla 1662. These are some written historical records of the existence of the spelling 'Assam' for the name of our state long before the advent of the British to Assam
5. According to many historians, the phonetic name 'Assam' was derived from the Sanskrit name 'Shyam' (as in Shyam-dex, the name of Thailand), the name of the Shan people who invaded and conquered Kamrup in the 13th century. According to historian Baden Powel, on the other hand, the word 'Assam' might have been derived from even older original Boro word 'Ha-som', meaning low land. Thus we find that the phonetic name of Assam had been with us for at least the last 800 years and has a strong connection with the coming of the Tai-Ahoms to our land, even if we ignore the possibility of an earlier Boro origin.



6. At present, non-Assamese speaking people the world over pronounce the name of our state as 'Asam' (where both the initial and the middle 'a' pronounced as 'a' in the word 'father', and 's' as in the word 'sun'). Changing the name to 'Asom' will merely encourage the non-Assamese speakers to pronounce the name of our state as something like 'Osom' or even "Esom" ( with the 's' being pronounced as in 'sun') as a simple survey will clearly illustrate and thereby defeating any intent of asserting our unique language heritage embedded in the name "Oxom" (the 'x' here being an IPA recognized representation of the guttural 'kh' sound ).
7. The 'xo' or 'kho' guttural sound is unique to the Assamese language in India, among many other languages of the world, like German, Scottish, Russian, Greek etc where also this 'xo' or 'kho' sound is there. We should protect and promote this unique linguistic heritage, instead of diluting it to destruction by equating it to the 'so' sound of other languages, as this imposition of 'Asom' by an act of legislative fiat will surely do.
8. Today our state has two names: 'Assam' internationally and 'Oxom' in Assamese. This is similar to 'India' internationally and 'Bharat' in Indian languages; or 'West Bengal' internationally and 'Poschim Bongo' in Bengali. Such duality does not rob or dilute the states' unique cultural, language or ethnic heritage.
9. Today Assam faces numerous problems which are crying out for the Government's attention and action. But changing the state's ancient name of Assam to a misguided attempt at Roman transliteration of the Assamese name 'Oxom' to 'Asom', with all the associated costs: monetary, cultural and historical, is certainly not one of them.

Based on the above considerations, we urge you to exercise your leadership in rescinding forthwith this un-deliberated and unwise act of the Assam legislature that will destroy an unique heritage of the Assamese language. At the very least, we hope you will set up an Advisory Commission consisting of eminent citizens, academics, historians, linguists, literary figures and the like and including members of the Assamese Diaspora; who will deliberate on the issue, with transparent and broad-based public participation and advise the government on:

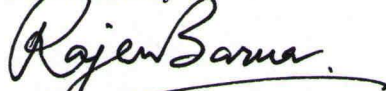
- A: Whether it is a priority for the people of Assam to change their state's name.  
B: If it is, then what it should be changed to.

As a mover of the petition, we will be pleased to furnish additional historical documentation, should that be required.

If we may be of further assistance, kindly contact Rajen Barua of USA  
(e-mail: [barua25@hotmail.com](mailto:barua25@hotmail.com) or Wahid Saleh of The Netherlands (e-mail: [w.saleh@indiawijzer.nl](mailto:w.saleh@indiawijzer.nl) ).

We will be much obliged for the courtesy of a reply.

Your Sincerely



**Rajen Barua, Katy, Texas, USA**

**On Behalf of Well Wishers and Friends of Assam who signed this petition**

Attachment: List of Well Wishers and Friends of Assam who signed this petition.

Copy:

His Excellency the President of India

Honorable Prime Minister of India

**References:**

- The Map of Bengale published in 1662.  
[http://www.indiawijzer.nl/links/assam/map of bengale.jpg](http://www.indiawijzer.nl/links/assam/map%20of%20bengale.jpg)
- Letter of Joan Maetsuyker, Governor General of Dutch Batavia, 29-08-1663  
[http://indiawijzer.nl/links/assam/letter to mirzumala 1.jpg](http://indiawijzer.nl/links/assam/letter%20to%20mirzumala%201.jpg)
- Treaty of Yandaboo, 24-02-1826  
<http://projectsouthasia.sdstate.edu/Docs/history/primarydocs/Treaties/Burma/002.htm>
- Website link with more articles on this issue:  
[http://www.indiawijzer.nl/links/assam/assam or asom.htm](http://www.indiawijzer.nl/links/assam/assam%20or%20asom.htm)