

*Wishing our readers and well-wishers
a Happy Rongali Bihu*



Rongali Bihu in the Twin Cities..

Table of Contents:

- Rongali Bihu in the Twin Cities	2
- Southern California Rongali Bihu	2
- Rongali Bihu 2006 in Colorado	3
- Rongali Bihu at Delhi	4
- Celebration of Rangali Bihu – Cultural Evening at Chandigarh	4
- Patricia Rashbrook: to be a mother at the age of 63 : a controversial modern medical research	5
- The Assam-Oxom-Asom Debate	6
- GNU/Linux Users Group - Assam	7

Rongali Bihu in the Twin Cities

If we had no winter, spring would not be so pleasant..." goes a famous saying. This cannot be more apt for us living in the north star state of Minnesota, home of the Mississippi river. It is that time of the year when you feel like "whistling even when your shoes are in slush". But fortunately this time the slush and the snow was long gone and spring has sprung in its most sweetest way. With this the Assamese community of Minneapolis and St. Paul have celebrated the soul of our springtime festival with traditional exuberance and festivity.

It is heartening to see the Assamese community growing with every passing year and this time too we had a few new families adding to the fun to the bihu celebrations. It was held on the 15th April 2006 at the 'Pointe'

downtown St. Paul (residence of Geeti and Prantor Bora). The renditioning of Sree Moi Oxomee by the ladies started our day long bihu celebrations. This was followed by a dazzling cultural fare which included bihugeets, lokageets, modern assamese songs and dances. - thanks Meghna, Devika, Minti, Nilanjona, Namita, Parvez, Pranab for your wonderful contributions. The husori and the mukoli bihu saw the participation from all our enthusiastic souls. Our young talents also enthralled us with their keyboard and flute recitals. Meghna, Devika, Ashmita and Sabriyah- way to go!! The delightful and traditional bihu treats like pitha, laru, doi, sira and of course the sumptuous lunch made us indulge to our hearts content. Thanks to the ladies for pre-

paring all the appetizing assamese dishes.

The outdoor games were the crowning glory in terms of fun and joy. The marble in a spoon race, the tug of war and three legged race brought peals of laughter and was enjoyed by all. The kids (needless to say the adults too!) played the marble in the spoon race again and again as everybody wanted to be the winner and most importantly wanted the marble too (which was replaced by chocolate malt balls!)

With all the games, fun, food and music the day came to an end. As we were heading home after the fun filled day our five year old daughter said "I want Bihu to come again soon". Yes indeed, we too anticipate with fondness for the next year's bihu and that it comes soon for us to indulge in the revelry.

By Sabina Zeenat, MN

Southern California Rongali Bihu

Southern California Assamese people gathered to celebrate their dear festival Rongali Bihu on 15th April. It was real fun that day. The get-together started at 4p.m with a potluck snacks. But it was really a good collection of snacks. We had starting from Pitha, Laru to Chat as snacks. Til Pitha was prepared by Deepa baidev. Not less than 15 kinds of snacks were there. After that Drawing competition for kids started. For toddlers, we had fancy dress competition. It was really awesome, seeing little kids in different attires like pandit

Nehru, Texas-cowboy etc. Easter egg hunting was another game for kids. We adults had Koni-Juj.

Then came main attraction, the cultural show. Southern California Kids performed Bihu dance, Oddesey dance, Kuchipudi dance, Gujrati dance and Hindi song medley dance. In a word they were just awesome. Then ladies performed chorus. Kuxal Bordoloi and Chandan Goswami performed solo

Husori followed by Mukoli Bihu.

And then came dinner. Another potluck with more than 20 dishes starting from masor tenga to sandesh as sweet dish, all prepared by ladies of Southern California.



Assamese songs. Deepankar Sonowal was the host of the whole cultural show and he assisted in Guitar for all the songs. Last but not least we had

At around 11pm the get-together was over. More than 100 people enjoyed Bihu that day across the seas.

By Sudipta Khound, CA

Rongali Bihu 2006 in Colorado

The Assamese people in Colorado had the opportunity to celebrate Rongali Bihu on April 15, 2006 at the beautiful home of Jugal and Bonmayuri Kalita in Colorado Springs amidst a lot of fanfare and gaiety. The daylong program started with traditional snacks like doi chira with gur, various kinds of pitha, narikolor barfi, kata nimki etc., courtesy Anima Goswami and Subalita Baruah of Fort Collins. Mukoli Bihu, in which everyone joined in with great enthusiasm, followed. Paban Sarma, Bharat Baruah and Rinku Dewri kept the Mukoli Bihu going in full swing, with their spirited participation in both the dancing and rendering of the dhol. The next item on the agenda was the delicious lunch, some of the favorites at which were Sagarika's mutton biryani, Bonmayuri's mutton curry, Reeta Kastner's chicken curry, Nandini's maasor tenga, Bhaskar Das's coconut chicken and Ranjan's special fish preparation, for which we failed to come up with a name, but was sumptuous.

Lunch was followed by games. Jishu Das and Subalita Baruah won the first and second prize in tekeli bhanga. The winners of the koni juj were Reeta Kastner and Bharat Baruah. Finally Subalita Baruah, followed by Chandan Das in second place, won the musical chair, which was enjoyed by everybody. Ranjan Saikia who was also the coordinator of the games gave away the

prizes. There were also special prizes for all the children for participating, which left Abhishek, Jishu and Anoushka all smiles. Jukti Kalita, who was visiting from New Jersey with his son Abhishek, gave away the prizes.



Next was the gift exchange program, which was a simple and inexpensive way to recapture the spirit of giving and receiving gifts in Assam on the day of Rongali Bihu.

The evening ended in a relaxed mood with a cup of tea, more snacks and a lot of laughter and jokes.

This Rongali Bihu witnessed several new additions to the Assamese community of Colorado. Chandan Das and his family who have recently relocated from South Dakota, Rajib Das who has arrived from Guwahati to pursue an MBA Degree at the University of Denver and last but not the least, little Anannya Kalita, the four-month-old daughter of Jugal and Bonmayuri Kalita who seemed to have enjoyed the Bihu festivi-

ties as much as anyone else, capturing everyone's hearts with her cherubic smile.

By Nandini Borah Das, Colorado



Jishu Das, age 9, of Centennial, Colorado, is a budding entrepreneur; he made money selling lemonade on a hot May day to pedestrians and motorists, outside his home on 5-5-2006.

Rongali Bihu at Delhi

Assam Association, Delhi celebrated Rongali Bihu Festival on 21st April, at Samaj Sadan, Laxmibai Nagar, New Delhi 110023 in the presence of a huge audience of about 900 in traditional fervour. The attendance was large by Delhi standard, despite being celebrated on a working day. The function started with the felicitation of the Chief Guest Shri Tarun Chandra Gogoi, Hon'ble Chief Minister of Assam, Dr. B B Bhattacharjee, Vice Chancellor of Jawaharlal Nehru Unibvrsity and Shri Ajit Kumar Hazarika, Director (Onshore), ONGC and lighting of the ceremonial lamp by the Hon'ble guests.

The function succeeded with the release of the "Samayik"- the magazine of the association by Dr. Hemeswar Dihingia, the septuagenarian writer. The magazine is edited by Smt. Protima Thakuria and cover design was tastefully done in Bihu motif by Ms. Priyanka Das. The magazine has a mix of writings, experience sharing, poems, news, and other variety articles by established and amateur writers.

The Choir of the association presented a "quorus"- "Xurore Deulore Rupore Xhiloki Bhangi Chingidi dili Pujari O.." By Kalaguru Bishnu Rabha as a tribute to Bhupenda, who is recuperating. Therafter a huchori was presented by the 'Kirtan Sangha'. Youngest girls of the association rendered a bihu to show the continuum of the great cultural heritage. Among others artists Dwipen Lahkar, Robin Kalita, Doli Das, Murchana Borkakti, Devina

Saikia, rendered solo Bihu songs. Ms. Ayushika Barman presented a creative dance on the song by Pulak Banerjee- 'Phulore Melate.. Ms. Rimjhim and Jhilmil Pathak performed a bihu dance to treat the crowd.

The main attraction was an assemblage of an orchestra by artists Hemanta Saikia, Dr. Jeet Patwari, Pranab Sangam, Nabin. They accompanied all the artists and provided the required musical mix.

Finally main bihu was performed by the youth team of the association, who came from different parts of Delhi and NCR. After the bihu "mukoli bihu" – the free for all bihu went on by another one hour, where everyone tried their vocal chords and gyratic skills. A simple yet decent dinner was served at the end of the function. Rongali Bihu celebrated by the association has at-



The central bihu "Notun Dilli Rongali Bihu Sanmiloni" is held about a week after the bihu day.

By Manoj Kumar Das, New delhi

Celebration of Rangali Bihu – Cultural Evening at Chandigarh

The Assam foundation, Chandigarh, a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) providing a cultural platform to the people from Assam residing in the tri-city and the other Assam lovers, organized a Cultural Evening at the Rock Garden on 23rd April, 2006 as part of celebration of Rangali Bihu (also called Bohag Bihu), the spring festival of Assam. An enthusiastic audience of about 300 persons comprising people belonging to the Assamese community living in Chandigarh and those having some form of previous links with the state and its colourful culture by way of service, trade and business, enjoyed the cultural program. The major attraction of the program included Bihu dance by a troop from Delhi, Bhangra by a group of local school children and other individual performance by the local artists. Among individual performances receiving applause from the audience, mention may be made of songs by Dr. Biman Saikia from the PGIMER and Smt. Ranjita Borah and violin recital by Smt. Sarah Mazid.

The inaugural lamp symbolizing the opening of the cultural program was lit by Padam Shri Nek Chand, the creator of the Rock Garden. Smt. Shanti Das, mother of Late Dr. P.M.Das, Ex. ADGP, Govt. of Punjab who died a premature death while leading an expedition to a Hima-

layan peak last year attended the function as a Guest of Honour. Earlier, homage was paid to the memory of late Das on behalf of the Assam Foundation. Smt Chandana Das, wife of late Dr. Das, led those paying homages.

It may be added that the Rangali Bihu is the most colourful event of Assam celebrated with reverberative enthusiasm. This Bihu festival is observed in mid spring from Maha Bisuv Sankranti day amidst heart catching fragrance of the blooming flowers like Jasmine, Togar, Kapou, Chompa etc. and echoing melody presented by guest birds like Kuli and Keteki. It is a great atmosphere of heart giving and heart capturing for the youngsters. The juveniles from both sexes dressed in traditional garments-Pat, Muga Mekhela Chaddar,



Phulam Gamocha, rejoice to express one's love and grief. The choral thunder of the traditional musical instruments of Bihudhol, Khol, Tal, Toka, Gogona, Pepa make the entire Assam unique platform of paramount amusement.

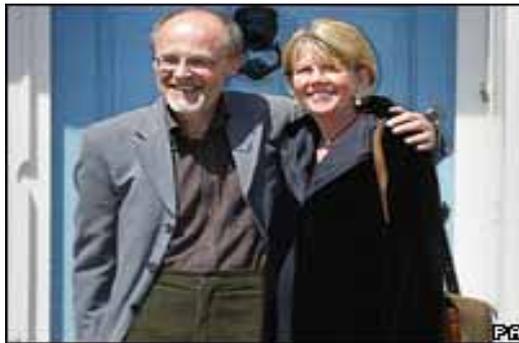
By Mayur Bora, Chandigarh

Patricia Rashbrook: to be a mother at the age of 63 : a controversial modern medical research

A consultant **child psychiatrist** by profession is to become **Britain's oldest mum** at 63 by having an IVF treatment abroad. She is **Patricia Rashbrook** from **Lewes, East Sussex** who has two grown up children by her first marriage. Now she wanted a baby with second husband academic: **John Farrant**, 61.

Doctor: **Severino Antinori** who has caused outrage with his policy of helping O.A.P mother, agreed to secretly put her on his controversial IVF course. It is thought she and Mr. Farrant paid maverick fertility doctor: **Severino Antinori** up to **£50,000** to make her **Britain's oldest mum**. Now she is seven months pregnant and is due to have a son in two months time.

While watching "Question Time" in **BBC ONE**, this Thursday, it amazed me how **David Dimbleby** had to deal with an interesting debate about this **baby** business. Because those comments from audience were really amusing such as - "this woman is obviously working through some deep seated



issues: most likely about the way she brought up her older children but if she has regrets she would be better of concentrating on being a good **grandmother** than on being a **mother** again".

There will always be those who criticise but the only person who should be able to decide on a woman's right to a **baby** is the woman herself. Is it worth it? Of course it is

not. After all child is not a product. Although it is none of our business but her, as she will be pushing baby's pram to collect her **old age pension!**

I have seen one of our family friend: a young desperate childless woman and her frustration when she sees Rashbrook and some other sixtysomethings using cash and a cynical doctor to buy a baby.

I admire her courage! This is a really egotistical move. The pregnancy is all about the mother's needs and certainly not about the welfare of the baby - which should always come first. There are thousands of kids in UK desperate for a home, abandoned kids at the **Social Services** department doomed to spend their life in "care" which I can see cases every-

day in and out. May be, their lives could have been turned round if adopted or fostered by this wonderful mum to be - **Patricia Rashbrook**.

I must conclude and respect her decision. I think "good on her" 'Cause when celebrity like **Des O' Connor** who became a father later in life, nobody says a word.

By Rini Kakati , London

Rongali Bihu at El Paso, Texas



Rongali Bihu was celebrated for the first time in El Paso, TX on April 15 last in Tunna Baruah's residence. All the assamese families living in El Paso, TX and Las Cruces, NM joined the festivities. It was a nice informal gathering of nine assamese staying away from Assam in this border city of United States. As it was the first gathering of all the assamese people staying in this part, it was a nice chit-chat followed by traditional Jalpan and Bihu-bhat. Overall, it was a pleasant gathering and we were very happy to celebrate the Bihu in El Paso.

By SantanuGoswami, Texas

The Assam-Oxom-Asom Debate

So, the debate is on for the correct phonetic spelling for a new name of the state whether it should be Asom or Oxom. In this debate, however, it is important to understand the essence so that we are not too much caught in some non-issues and fail to see the forest because of the trees. There are basically three main issues to the debate.

FIRST Issue: Assam Sahitya Sabha ex President Mr. Chandra Prasad Saikia proposed, as recorded in the February 2006 issue of Assamese magazine, 'Gariyoshi', that the name 'ASSAM' is a word coined by the British during the colonial rule for their convenience, and therefore the name ASSAM should be changed.

SECOND Issue: Mr. Chandra Prasad Saikia also proposed that the name should be changed to the spelling ASOM suggesting that is the proper Roman spelling of the Assamese pronunciation of the word OXOM (O+Dontiyō-XO+ MO).

THIRD Issue: Based on the above suggestion from Mr. Chandra Prasad Saikia, Assam Government hastily adopted a resolution to change the name of the state to ASOM without discussing the merits of the suggestion in any democratic manner with any official literary organization or any other entity.

In the following analysis, we will try to see rational of these three issues. .

The FIRST issue brings us directly to the question how the English spelling of the name of ASSAM actually came to be. Records show that the British first used the spelling ASHAM in 1590 which was later on changed to ASAM and finally to ASSAM. Now the question is, did the British coined this phonetic spelling ASSAM for their own convenience because they could not pronounce the Assamese spelling OXOM (O+Dontiyō-XO+ MO) or this ASSAM pronunciation was already in vogue outside Assam in India before the arrival of the British? From the following analysis, it is clearly seen that the later is the correct situation. The pronunciation ASAM or ASHAYM was there in

vogue outside Assam with the Mughols during the Ahom days. This is evident from the various treaties of the Mughols and the Ahoms. Also, this 'Assam' pronunciation was popular among the Indians outside of Assam during that time. In order to understand why that was so, we will have to know a little of Assamese vowels sounds in comparison to the Hindi-Urdu-Sanskrit vowel sounds. There is a basic difference how we Assamese pronounce the letter Hosro-O in words and how the Hindi-Urdu non Assamese belt pronounce the same letter Hosro-O sound. In Assamese the basic Hosro-O sound is invariably pronounced as O as in the English word 'hot'. Now, in Hindi as well as in Sanskrit, the Hosro-O has the sound as the U as in the English word 'but'. (Please note that in Sanskrit this Hosro-O is called Hosro-Ah for this reason) This is evident from any Sanskrit or Hindi dictionaries. It is also evident from the Roman script spelling of the Hindi words such as 'Pundit', 'Punjab', 'Suttee' etc adopted by the British for these Hindi words with Hosro-O-kar sound. The letter U sounding as in 'but' is being used for the Hindi Hosro-O sounds. The British listened carefully to the local speakers and found that is how they pronounce the Hosro-O sound. (Please note the spelling of the word Dalda in Hindi which is actually spelled with the first vowel as Hosro-O but pronounced as U as 'Dulda'). So the British also heard the pronunciation of the name of the state clearly as ASAM or ASHAM from outsiders in Assam, although the local Assamese spelling was OXOM. The British simply used that Indian pronunciation and finally used the English phoneme SS as used in the English words 'issue' or 'tissue' for the S sound in ASSAM. This makes perfect sense with the phonetic sound of the name of the state as used by outsiders during that time. So to answer our basic question, the word ASSAM is not a word suddenly coined by the British overnight for their convenience, but they simply used the proper English phonetic spelling of ASSAM for the existing Indian pronunciation for the word OXOM. By claiming that the word ASSAM is a British colonial invention, both Mr. C.P Saikia and the Government of Assam have simply shown that they do not have proper knowledge of the development

of the spelling ASSAM, and the proposal to change the existing name does not have any justification at all.

Now let us see the claim made by Mr. C.P.Saikia, that the spelling ASOM actually represents the proper Assamese pronunciation of the words OXOM (O+Dontiyō-XO+ MO). For reasons stated above, the first vowel A in ASOM simply does not represent the Assamese vowel sound of Hosro-O. It represents the sound of U as in the word 'but'. So with the word spelling ASOM, people will pronounce it either as USOM or as ESOM. In all Romance languages, the letter S stands for the sound S as in 'sun'. It is well known now that S does not represent the Assamese velar fricative XO sound which is a guttural kh sound. So the claim made by Mr. Saikia that the S letter would represent the Assamese ethnic XO sound is simply not correct. So we see that Mr. C.P.Saikia as well as the Assam government is wrong in selecting the spelling ASOM for the Assamese word OXOM (O+XO+MO). They have simply shown that either they are not familiar with the Assamese phonetics or they do not care.

Now let us come to the THRID issue of the action of Assam Government in hastily adopting the wrong suggestion made by Mr. C.P. Saikia. In a democratic country like India, one simply cannot think that such an important issue of changing the name of the state will be taken so lightly without a discussion or debate with any official literary organizations such as the Sahitya Sabhas or any other entity. This simply shows a mockery of Indian democracy, and concerned citizens should strongly voice against such dilution of democratic values in the biggest democracy in the world.

By Rajen Barua, Houston, Texas

GNU/Linux Users Group - Assam

Some of us must have heard about the GNU/Linux operating system. The GNU Project was launched in 1984 to develop a complete UNIX like operating system. The word GNU (pronounced guh-noo, like canoe) is a recursive acronym for 'GNU's Not UNIX'.

The GNU/Linux Users Groups, as you would have assumed, consists mostly of people using the GNU/Linux operating system. They in turn preserve, protect and promote the freedom of using free software as a whole. "Free software" is a matter of liberty, not price. To understand the concept, you should think of "free" as in "free speech," not as in "free beer." It is a matter of the users' freedom to run, copy, distribute, study, change and improve the software. The freedom to use a program means the freedom for any kind of person or organization to use it on any kind of computer system, for any kind of overall job, and without being required to communicate subsequently with the developer or any other specific entity.

The GNU/Linux operating system or Linux as a whole is not command line based as was used to be in bygone days. People are still unaware of this fact and as such they are reluctant to use GNU/Linux as the operating systems in their desktops. Times have changed and so has the GNU/Linux operating system. Cute user friendly GUI's have been developed in the recent times to cater the needs of the users.

Now the question arises how do we keep in touch with the recent developments in the field of Linux, share your experiences with it and also how to find solutions to the problems while you are still in the learning phase. Search engines are always there for help but the best way of getting answers to specific questions and discuss them, is through the help of the mailing list wherein you interact with the group members who may have already faced the same problem and so can offer you a detailed solution. A mailing list is a collection of names and addresses used

by an individual or an organization to send material to multiple recipients. It's a place where you can post your queries irrespective of how simple it is. And for a novice user that's quiet handy. The very usefulness of the mailing list is that when the query gets replied all the members of the group are also benefited by the answer. As a result you not only educate yourself but also educate the group. You can share knowledge with the help of the mailing list. That's the power of it.

friends and so on. Thus more and more people will get to know about the free software and will be curious to try it out. Hence if a mailing list exists wherein they can get their queries cleared they will be comfortable using it with long term benefits as they will start realizing the power of free software e.g. you can customize your system to work to suite your needs and interest.

User's interested in free software and the GNU/Linux are most welcome to join our



GNU/Linux Users Group - Assam
Guwahati, India

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GLUG-Assam

The GNU/Linux User's Group, Assam welcomes you to it's community of GNU/Linux user's. We are a group of people trying to spread GNU/Linux in Assam and free software in its spirit.

It is an attempt to bring all GNU/Linux user of Assam within one group so that we can share our thoughts with each other. This is just a beginning which we hope will take off in making a great impact on the people using GNU/Linux. We welcome all user's interested in free software and the GNU/Linux to join our group.

There exists many mailing list so why create another, to add one to the ever growing mess? Requirement differs from place to place and so are the problems.

The bigger the number of people in the group the better would be the service that would be rendered by it's fellow mates. But the very important of all this is that the group members should be active rather than being passive to the recent activities.

The GNU/Linux Users Group -Assam (<http://assam-glug.org>) first came into being on 13th March 2006. The site has been started with a mission to ultimately expose the people of Assam to free software especially GNU/Linux so that they can reap the benefits of free software.

It is possible that quiet a few people of Assam are using free software but they may not have an opportunity to be in touch with each other. If through this site all this people can come together then we can use this free software more effectively and with our increasing passion the word will spread to our

group and share their knowledge. To participate in the discussions, to post relevant queries and solutions one needs to be a member of the mailing list. You can easily join the mailing list by going on the following url,

<http://mm.assam-glug.org/mailman/listinfo/assam>

To sum up, the purpose of the site being into existence, is to bring all GNU/Linux users of Assam within one group so that we can share our thoughts with each other. This is just a beginning which we hope will take off in making a great impact on the people using GNU/Linux.

By *Prasanta Baruah.*

(Mr Barua is working at HBCSE, TIFR, Mumbai. He is working in the field of knowledge management, developing free software using Python and Zope.)

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