

Renaming Kerala to Keralam

Mains: GS Paper II | Indian Polity & Governance

Why in News?

The Union Cabinet approved the proposal to change the name of the state of Kerala to “Keralam” in February 2026.

What is the background behind renaming Kerala as Keralam?

- The move followed a unanimous resolution of the Kerala Legislative Assembly passed on 24 June 2024, which sought modification of the First Schedule of the Constitution.
- In July 2026, the Kerala Assembly unanimously endorsed the President’s reference on the proposed renaming, clearing the way for the Bill to proceed to Parliament.
- This was the first Presidential reference of this kind received by the Kerala Assembly.
- **Linguistic identity** - Keralam is the name used for the state in Malayalam.
- **Historical and cultural identity** - The Assembly linked the demand to the historical movement for a unified Malayalam-speaking State.
- **Linguistic reorganisation**- Kerala was formed on linguistic lines on 1 November 1956, which is celebrated as Kerala Piravi.
- The proposal seeks to bring the constitutional name in line with the name traditionally used in Malayalam.

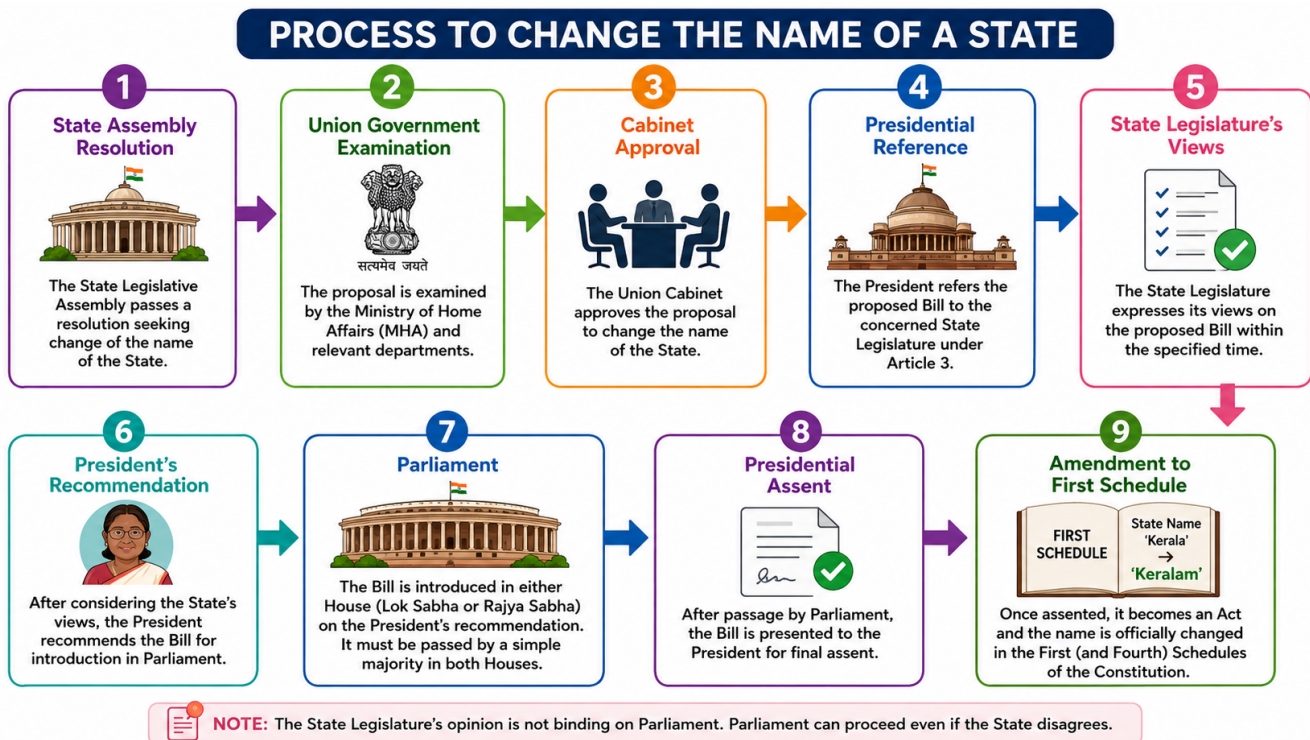
What is the constitutional basis for renaming a state?

- **Article 3** - Article 3 empowers Parliament to:
 - Form a new State;
 - Increase or diminish the area of a State;
 - Alter the boundaries of a State; and
 - Alter the name of a State.
- Therefore, a State does not have the unilateral constitutional power to

change its official name.

- The final authority rests with Parliament.

What is the procedure for changing the name of a state?



- **State-level initiative** - The process may originate with a resolution of the State Legislature requesting the Union Government to change the State's name.
- In Kerala's case, the Assembly passed a unanimous resolution on 24 June 2024.
- **Examination by the Union Government** - The proposal is examined by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) and relevant government departments.
- The Kerala proposal was examined by the MHA, while the Department of Legal Affairs and Legislative Department also concurred with the proposal.
- **Presidential reference** - Under the proviso to Article 3, where a Bill affects the name, area or boundaries of a State, the President refers it to the concerned State Legislature for expressing its views.
- In Kerala's case, President Droupadi Murmu referred the proposed Bill to the State Assembly in June 2026.
- **Views of the State Legislature** - The Kerala Assembly unanimously endorsed all 10 clauses of the President's reference.

The State Legislature's views are not binding on Parliament. The

Constitution requires the State to be given an opportunity to express its views, but Parliament can proceed even if the State disagrees.

- **Parliamentary approval** - After the State Legislature's views are received, the Bill can be introduced in Parliament only on the President's recommendation.
- The Bill must be passed by both Houses of Parliament by a simple majority.
- **Presidential assent** - After Parliament passes the Bill, it is presented to the President for assent.
- Once the President gives assent and the law is notified, the State's official name is changed.
- **Amendment of the First Schedule** - The First Schedule of the Constitution, which lists the States and Union Territories, will be amended to replace “Kerala” with “Keralam.”

A State renaming under Article 3 is not a constitutional amendment under Article 368. It is done through an ordinary law passed by Parliament.

How is renaming a state different from renaming India?

Renaming a State	Renaming the country
• Governed by Article 3. • Requires an ordinary law of Parliament. • Passed by simple majority. • Requires amendment of the First Schedule.	• The Constitution's Article 1 states - “India, that is Bharat, shall be a Union of States.” • Replacing “India” with only “Bharat” would require amendment of Article 1 and therefore a Constitutional Amendment Bill under Article 368. • Such an amendment would require: - Majority of the total membership of each House, and - At least two-thirds of members present and voting in each House.

What has the Supreme Court said about “India” and “Bharat”?

- The Supreme Court dealt with pleas seeking to replace “India” with “Bharat” in 2016 and 2020.
- In 2016, the Court declined to entertain the plea. In 2020, it directed the

petition to be treated as a representation to the appropriate government rather than ordering a constitutional name change.

- The constitutional position remains that both “India” and “Bharat” are recognised in Article 1.

What is the significance of the Kerala case?

- **Federalism**- Demonstrates the interaction between State initiative and Parliament's constitutional authority.
- **Linguistic identity**- Reflects India's constitutional recognition of linguistic and cultural diversity.
- **Constitutional flexibility**- Article 3 allows territorial and nomenclatural changes without the more demanding Article 368 procedure.
- **Cooperative federalism** - The Kerala case involves participation of the State Legislature, Union Government and President.

What is the way forward?

- State renaming should be guided by constitutional procedure, historical evidence, administrative feasibility and broad democratic consensus, while avoiding unnecessary administrative disruption or politicisation of linguistic and cultural identities.
- The proposed change from Kerala to Keralam illustrates the Constitution's ability to accommodate India's evolving linguistic and cultural identities.
- At the same time, Article 3 maintains a clear balance: States can initiate demands, but Parliament retains the final constitutional authority to alter the name of a State.

Reference

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