

Converts can retain surname

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■ **By Alina Simon**
news@nst.com

KANGAR: “Ali bin Lim” and “Ali bin Raju” — such names may raise eyebrows at the moment, but expect them to become common soon, at least in Perlis.

Those who convert to Islam are no longer required to

change their names following a *fatwa* (religious edict) issued by the Perlis Fatwa Council yesterday.

The *fatwa* states that converts must retain their family or father’s name to avoid confusion in their family history or lineage.

The 13-member council, which met yesterday, also is-

sued a *fatwa* banning Muslims from participating in local or foreign online investment offering fixed profits or get-rich-quick schemes.

State Mufti Dr Mohd Asri Zainul Abidin said changing the family or father’s name to “Abdullah” was commonly practised here under the misguided notion that it was re-

quired by Islam.

He said the practice was actually contrary to the teachings of Islam, which had always stressed on fairness, equality and respect for one’s parents.

Asri pointed out that Prophet Muhammad had never forced his friends to change their fathers’ names when

they converted to Islam.

He said it was time for the practice to stop as it was unfair on the converts and their families as it denied the fathers’ paternity rights.

“It’s time that we correct the society’s misconception that converts must assign the *bin* or *binti*, which stood for ‘son of’ or ‘daughter of’, to ‘Abdullah’.”

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"From now on, the council has decided that it is *haram*, or forbidden, for them to do so.

"They can change their own names if they want, but they must retain the names of their fathers or their families.

"For example, Ali bin Raju or Ali bin Lim. Even if the father's name may be taken from the names of their Gods, it must be retained as it is his name," he said when met after the council meeting.

Asri said the *fatwa* was not only to protect the rights of the father, but it was also to avoid confusion in the family lineage.

"In the past, the practice had caused people to have reservations about converting to Islam, as they felt they had to abandon their families.

"Their families also felt that they had lost a son or a daughter, as he or she no longer carries the name of the family or the father."

He said converts who had already changed their names (for instance to Ali bin Abdullah), should change it back to reflect their father's name.

In case of legal ramifications or while waiting for their applications to be approved, the converts should revert to their father's name when identifying or introducing themselves.

On the decision to declare online investment schemes with fixed profits as *haram*, Asri said the council deliberated over it after hearing a paper presented by local Syariah expert Zaharuddin Abdul Rahman.

He said schemes such as ABB Fund, Eaindex and Arabic Fund were against the Islamic concept of investment or *Mudharabah*, as it offered high returns in fixed amount within a certain period.

By offering fixed profit, he said, the scheme was no longer focused on investing but more on moneylending with *riba*, or interest.

"When the returns are fixed in advance, the investment contract is no longer valid and the profit is considered *haram*."

He said there were others who tried to promote the schemes among Muslims here by saying that it was *halal*.

"They used the name of my office and said that my staff are also taking part.

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Dr Mohd Asri Zainul Abidin
Perlis Mufti

"I have never given my okay and if my staff are involved, then they are doing it on their own."

Asri advised those who have already deposited their money to wait until they can get back the total amount before pulling out while those who had already taken the profit, should donate it to charity.

"There are many Islamic investment schemes which are more secure and allowed in Islam," he said, adding that the World Federation of Fiqh Muslim Scholars had issued a similar edict on such schemes in 1992.

Meanwhile, the council also issued a third *fatwa* for the mosques here to perform two *azan* for the *subuh* (dawn) prayers with a 15-minute lapse in between to allow the congregation to get ready and be at the mosque.

The three *fatwa* would be brought up at the Perlis Religious Council for them to be endorsed.

Asri said the council would also propose for the three *fatwa* to be discussed at the National Fatwa Council.