

Marked by strange but true names

Baby names are getting more colourful these days as Hollywood celebrities try to outdo each other by giving their children outrageous names. In Malaysia, names mean something and can change one's destiny, even if they aren't always flattering.

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PRIOR to GE13, the Election Commission (EC) came under heavy fire for allowing names of animals, vegetables and famous people in its roll of 12.8 million voters.

But according to EC chief Tan Sri Abdul Aziz Mohd Yusof, Timun (cucumber), Kangkung (water convolvulus), Harimau (tiger), Kuda (horse), Atas Jalan (on the road), Tepi Jalan (roadside), Machine Gun, Boeing, Elvis Presley, Reagan and A. Ramlie bin Jefridin (Ramlie and Jefridin are both top Malay pop singers in the 1960s) are real people and "very much Malaysian".

Defending the commission against allegations that it had made up names for non-existent voters in the electoral roll, Abdul Aziz referred to National Registration Department (NRD) records to prove that they are real voters with unusual names mainly from the interior areas of Sabah and Sarawak.

Among the more peculiar names reported in our midst are Ubat anak Nyamuk (insecticide), Betik bin Kobis, Hairan binti Duakali, Samalia Cuba (countries Somalia and Cuba), Mogumbirak, Tigabelas (thirteen), Ponyrace, Rothmans and Benson (cigarette brands) and Jamban (a colleague actually met a man whose name was inspired by the loo).

Though funny, such names would seldom turn heads in East Malaysia, former Penampang MP Philip Lasimbang, of Kadazan descent, points out.

In his constituency comprising mainly Kadazans, baby names reflect character or physical attributes in the native language, Kadazandusun.

It's also a norm for the Kadazans to give their children nicknames which end up on the birth certificate.

— PHILIP LASIMBANG



"Most older Kadazan parents don't speak English and Malay so their kids had names like Bugiad (always crying) and Gamato (big eyes).

"There was a person who ended up with 'No Name' as his name because his parents did not know how to fill in the birth certificate document.

"It's also a norm for the Kadazan community to give their children nicknames which sometimes end up on the birth certificate.

"These days, the Kadazan community here are predominantly Christians so most have English names which are suggested by priests," he shares.

He says younger parents are now trying to preserve the native language by giving their children Kadazandusun names.

"The names may sound peculiar to other communities but means something good in our language.

"Malaysia should celebrate her diverse communities and names are a way of doing that," he notes.

Kadazandusun lecturer Evelyn Annol, 39, loves her nickname Botut even though most of us would

cringe at being called 'chubby'.

Before the 1960s when Christianity was widespread in her community, Kadazan folks would spend days trying to identify the physical and character traits of the baby before making the all-important decision to name them.

Although her sisters all have conventional English names, they still go by their nicknames Gutuk (scabs) and Biak (frog).

Gutuk got her nickname because she had skin problems as a child and Biak was always jumping around the house.

"These are terms of endearment common to the Kadazan community. People may ask out of curiosity but no one makes fun or bullies us because of our names.

She insists names like Kambing (goat), Kerbau (buffalo), Sapi (ox), Bonging (bee) and even Toto (female private parts), refer to real people.

"My eldest son's name is Linibid. I named him after a local folklore character.

"In the story, Linibid was a stubborn boy who refused to clean up after himself.

"He soon learned the error of his ways and by the end of the story, was a smart and healthy lad.

"The name may sound peculiar to those unfamiliar to Kadazan culture but my son is proud and loves that it's unique," the mother-of-four shares.

For the superstitious Chinese, third generation Taoist priest Gan Huat Beng advises parents to consult fortune tellers or Bazi experts before naming their child.

Consider the date and time of birth and whether elements like

Names that are a no-no!

Objectionable names

Titles awarded by the Government

Tun, Tan Sri, Dato', Dato' Seri, Dato' Patinggi

Rank & position

Haji, Mufti, Kadhi, Ketua Menteri, Kapten

Lineage or ancestry titles

Syarifah, Syed, Tunku, Tengku, Raja

Professional titles

Dr, Ir, Professor, Diplomat

Warrior names

Mahaguru, Pahlawan, Pendikar, Panglima

Vulgar/ obscene-sounding names

Nonok, Bontot, Faraj, Zina, Coli

Bad names

Buruk, Malang, Sial, Pungut, Hapak, Haram

Aliases

Only one name is allowed

Initials

M. Krishnan, T.M.S Mohammed Ganey, T.M George

Abbreviations

Mohd (Muhammad), Ab (Abdul), P (Puteri), R (Raja)

Surnames

Only allowed if one parent inherits the surname and legally married

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Source: National Registration Department



Undesirable names

Animal/ insect names

Babi, Monyet, Keldai, Belalang

Fruits, vegetables, plants & food

Ciku, Pisang, Keladi, Serai

Funny names

Kecut, Pendek, Apek, Kerepot

Natural disasters

Gunung, Salji, Pelangi, Gelombang, Angkasa, Laut

Equipment/ items

Senduk, Piring, Cawan, Katil, Garfu, Berus

Colours

Hitam, Putih, Jingga, Merah, Coklat, Kuning

Alphabets/ numbers/ a combination of both

D, K, P, Z, 007, K.4, Zero – Zero Seven

Jewellery/ clothing

Cincin, Mutiara, Benang, Kain, Baju, Kasut

Arabic words with bad connotations

Narul (neraka), Zaniah (penzina perempuan)

Unsuitable Chinese names

(according to the Buddhist Missionary Society Malaysia)

Ah Pooi, Bung Sart, Chow Tow, Heoy Kay, Hor Kianh

Unsuitable Indian names

(as listed by the Malaysian Hindu Sangam and Persatuan Bahasa Tamil, Universiti Malaya)

Kundumani, Pichandi, Sappani, Pusari

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Parents turn to cyberspace for inspiration

SOCIAL media has taken the world by storm and it's not surprising that parents intent on grooming the next Mark Zuckerberg are drawing inspiration from the Net.

An Egyptian boy was named Facebook because his father was so happy with the social media tool's role in spurring the revolution that toppled President Hosni Mubarak, *The Week* news magazine reported.

In Israel, a couple named their daughter Like after the Facebook 'like button' because it was a unique name.

There's more.

In tribute to the search engine, a Swedish family named their child Google and across the sea, a girl named Hashtag was born. No doubt her American parents will be posting Hashtag's first words on Twitter, the online article claims.

But perhaps when it comes to bizarre names, Hollywood babies take the cake.

With celebrities, anything goes – from wind directions (North West) and fruits (Apple) to superheroes (Kal-El) – nothing is too strange.

Legally, there are no specific regulations in naming a child, National Registration Department (NRD) public relations officer Jainisah Mohd Noor says.

The decision is entirely up to the parents or



Jainisah: 'The NRD can decline undesirable names'



Low: Advises parents not to give their children weird names.

informer (of the birth) unless the name falls under the two prohibited categories – objectionable and undesirable.

"The NRD can decline to register objectionable and undesirable names (see graphics above)," she explains.

If parents are adamant on using a particular name despite the NRD's objection, both mother and father must make a statutory declaration stating that they agree that the child be given that name.

Among the names that have been accepted are Cempaka Nan Anggun and Yang Chantique Manees.

Home Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi feels existing NRD naming guidelines

are good enough.

"There are so many names you can give your child, why look for something weird or controversial?"

"Generally, there is no problem when it comes to registering names," he says. In Australia, courts routinely rule that parents must change the names given to their offspring if they "cause offence to a reasonable person".

Names like Sex Fruit and Fish and Chips have been tossed out. But the name Violence somehow managed to make the cut, *The Japan News* reported.

Meanwhile, according to the article, the US Supreme Court has not considered the constitutionality of a law imposing any restriction on child-naming rights.

A Tennessee judge did, however, order a mother to change her son's name from Messiah to Martin, citing concerns that the child would face bullying for sharing a name that has such a strong religious connotation.

The pitfalls to watch for when naming your baby are plentiful, according to parenting and pregnancy digital resource, BabyCentre.

Its experts advise parents to beware of the nickname trap, embarrassing initials and problematic name pairings.

While we may laugh and joke about another's moniker, it should be remembered that just because a name sounds peculiar to us does not make it ridiculous.

After all, the beauty of language and culture is diversity.

However, if your name has been a bane rather than a boon, fret not.

Family law practitioner Andy Low Hann Yong, who admits to having "lots of clients with weird names", says regulations 14 (1) & (2), National Registration Regulations 1990 (Amendment 2001) allows Malaysians to change their names.

The applicant needs to submit to a statutory declaration which certifies that he has "absolutely renounced and abandoned" the use of his former name and in lieu thereof, has assumed a new name.

The reasons for the change must be specified. If the applicant is below the age of 18, the declaration shall be made by the parents or guardian.

He advises parents to refrain from giving their children weird and offensive names because the kids are to carry the names their entire life.

"Consider if it is in the child's best interests.

"Imagine the teasing and bullying he or she will be subjected to and the embarrassment once worklife starts," he adds.