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INSTITUTE OF  
**ASIAN STUDIES**

# Halal Certification in Brunei

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Universiti Brunei Darussalam

Working Paper No. 50

Institute of Asian Studies, Universiti Brunei Darussalam

Gadong 2019

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# *Halal Certification in Brunei*

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*Hajah Siti Norfadzilah Binti Haji Kifli*

## **Abstract:**

This research explores how halal is regulated and practised in Brunei by highlighting the process of Halal Certification in Brunei. In the recent enforcement of the Halal Certificate and Halal Logo (Amendment) Order of 2017, this research discusses the effects it has towards the local food and beverage (F&B) businesses, particularly the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). By comparing halal certification in Brunei with Singapore and Malaysia, the paper highlights the concept being used in regulating halal in Brunei, which is Halalan Thayyiban.

**Keywords:** *Halal Certification, Brunei, Halalan Thayyiban, MSMEs.*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The increasing significance of food prohibitions in Muslim societies or halal since the 1990s is the result of the interplay of Islam, politics and market (Fischer, 2011, p.4). In recent years, Brunei has taken serious measures toward the certification of food products as halal with the latest enforcement of the Halal Certificate and Halal Logo (Amendment) Order of 2017 though halal standardization has been introduced through phases since the *titah* of His Majesty, the Sultan of Brunei on highlighting the importance of halal in 1998. The latest implementation of the Halal Certificate and Halal Logo (Amendment) Order of 2017 brings the subject of halal to attention since it emphasizes more on the compulsory participation of the micro and small businesses to apply for the Halal Certificates and Halal Logo. This paper explores how halal is regulated and practised in Brunei, using Malaysia and Singapore as comparative reference points.

### **Halal Certificate and Halal Label (Amendment) Order, 2017**

The implementation of compulsory halal standardization on all food and beverages businesses was instituted in 2011 as part of a development strategy towards attaining Brunei Vision 2035 (Izni Azalie, 2016). However, it was only in 2017 that the Halal Certificate and Halal Label provisions have targeted Micro, Small, Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). The Halal Certificate and Halal Label (Amendment) Order of 2017 was announced in May 2017 and the amendments require all Food and Beverages (F&B) business operators, specifically those who produce, supply and serve food to apply for a Halal Certification, given a grace period until November 2017 (Azaraimy HH, 2017).

The Halal Certificate and Halal Label (Amendment) Order of 2017 covers any businesses dealing with consumption products, from restaurants to home-based food businesses for Muslim customers (Azaraimy HH, 2017). Halal certification is separated into two categories; Halal Permit

(Label), which applies to businesses who manufacture and produce food for supply and the second is Halal Certificate, for those who prepare and serve food in establishments or premises, hawker stalls and restaurants (Azli Azney, 2017).

The present Halal Amendment Order of 2017 also imposes a penalty. Failure to comply within the grace period will incur a fine of \$8,000 or two years imprisonment (Azli Aney, 2017). The Halal Certificate and Halal Logo Order of 2005 was introduced on a voluntary basis, meanwhile the 2017 Order makes it compulsory for businesses related to the preparation, production and distribution of food to apply for a halal certificate or halal permit. A \$90 fee is charged for the Halal Certificate valid for three years, whereas to apply the Halal Permit Label, business enterprises were initially informed that they would be charged at \$50 per product that lasts a lifetime unless preparations and ingredients of the products are altered (Azli Azney, 2017).

Nonetheless, in December 2017, there was an official announcement regarding the revised price charges for Halal Certification and Halal Logo by the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MORA), to accommodate the size and scale of businesses which manufacture and produce food for supply. The price charged for Halal Certification remains at \$90, whereas for Halal Logo, the revised fee structure is as follows:

NO.	CLASSIFICATION/ INDUSTRY	NEW RATE
1	Micro	BND\$5 for each product
2	Small	BND\$150 for every 20 products
3	Medium	BND\$300 for every 20 products
4	Macro	BND\$700 for every 20 products
5	Multinational	BND\$1,000 for every 20 products

*Courtesy of Ministry of Religious Affairs*

*Figure 1: New rate for Halal Logo/Permit charged accordingly to business scale classification  
(Image taken from thecoop.com)*

## **Research Questions**

The questions included in this research are in regards to the enforcement of the Halal Certificate and Halal Logo (Amendment) Order of 2017. The question tackled on “why now?” is appropriate due to the process of standardizing halal in Brunei taking over two decades to implement since its initiation back in 1998 in response to His Majesty’s *titah*. The second question addresses “how is the Halal Order being implemented?”

## **Data Collection**

This research is qualitative, most of the data gathered were based on multi-sited approaches, ranging from several interviews conducted with the authorities involved and the professional experts on halal in Brunei, attendance at several halal seminars and roadshows, and information from local e-newspaper and government websites regarding the Halal Certification and Halal Label (Amendment) Order of 2017.

An interview with officers of the Halal Food Control Division (*Bahagian Kawalan Makanan Halal or BKMH*) of the Ministry of Religious Affairs was conducted. The representative from *BKMH* mentioned that any practical procedure of applying for the Halal Certification and Halal Label is performed solely by the officers of the *BKMH* Department starting from application to site auditing to certification and follow-up audit.

Interviews with the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) were also conducted. Predominantly based on semi-structured interviews, the questions provided for the six MSME respondents focused on their views on the recent enforcement of the Halal Certification and Halal Logo (Amendment) Order of 2017 and the difficulties they encountered with the procedures involved in applying for the Halal Certificates and Halal Logo.

Having been active in the food and beverages business field for a few years, the first respondent, Diana, stated that her company was among the first ten companies being officially recognised as halal-certified in 2008. Diana also mentioned that her food production includes both packaged products, specialized in traditional crackers and also establishments of six restaurants in total. Diana applied for both Halal Permit and Halal Label which allowed her to make comparisons between the two applications.

The second informant is Anita, who is one of the employees of Bruneihalalfood brand from Ghanim International Corporation, a semi-government company identified as a forerunner of the halal food industry in Brunei. Anita stated that Bruneihalalfood brand was set up in 2009 to become the platform for the development of local SMEs and provide market access support internationally. However, as Anita mentioned it, the local Small, Medium Enterprises (SMEs) were not ready to expand overseas and Brunei food industries were still import-based. Nonetheless, presently, the company's strategy directs back to their initial aims envisioned in late 2015, to develop local SMEs but also, to have commercial goals as 'halal' itself appear to be a profitable business.

Kevin is a local Chinese business operator selling ice-cream in Brunei-Muara district. Presently, Kevin has one showroom at one of the local hypermarkets, meanwhile their ice-cream products are manufactured and produced at their kitchen, situated somewhere nearby to their showroom in Gadong. Kevin mentioned that their plan to apply for halal certification was right after they started in 2015, before the amendment of the 2017 was announced.

The next informant is Rose, a home-based online seller who supplies desserts and cakes to shops. Applying for both Halal Logo and Halal Certification last year in 2017, Rose is now waiting to be called for an interview by the BKMH.

The last informant is Alique, who still serving at the government agencies during weekdays and only operating their business stall on weekends in search for side income. Alique mentioned that he has not yet applied the Halal Certification and Halal Logo since he maintained that he is doing business part-time only.

All the respondents are named after pseudonyms and interviews conducted for each informant were held at different times and dates.

## **Literature Review**

The certification process involved in halal food and food products requires the implementation of new standards for halal production, preparation, storage and also enforcement, which are demanded in a globalized market (Bergeaud-Blackler, Fischer & Lever 2016, p.1). The terms standards and standardization are herewith defined to include production, preparation, handling, storage of halal and as well as states or authorities involved (ibid.). Moreover, standards may also refer to “persons with certain qualifications, knowledge or skills” (Bergeaud-Blackler, Fischer & Lever 2016, p.9) and such process of standardization is required in halal certification and is market driven. Thus, the discussion on halal extends between Islam, state certification and markets (Bergeaud-Blackler, Fischer & Lever 2016, p.8-9).

The discussion on standardization and the involvement of state authorities are drawn from Malaysia and Singapore, two countries leading the rest Southeast Asian in the global expansion of the halal market (ibid., p.8). The state in each of these countries is in charge of being the halal-certifying authorities, meaning that they have largely “certified, standardized and bureaucratized halal production, trade and as well as consumption” (ibid., p.8). To do so, many countries including Singapore and Malaysia have passed and established certain laws and guidelines for halal food production applicable not only to imported products but also food products manufactured for domestic sale (Riaz & Chaudry, 2004, p.51).

### **Halal Certification System: Malaysia**

In the 1970s, global food establishments such as franchised outlets and imported food products started to develop in Malaysia, exposing Muslim consumers to more options. This led to consumer demand for halal assurance on all products they consume. As a result, the Malaysian government enacted laws and established certain procedures and guidelines with regard to halal food, and this applies to both domestic and imported items. Under the Trade Description Order of 1975, it is an offense for any companies, small and big business corporations, to incorrectly put up any signs and other labels claiming the food sold are halal. Such enactments were gradually instituted over the next few years, until a general agreement to gazette a proper halal certification was established. The Islamic Affairs Division in the Prime Minister’s Department was set up in 1982 as the only halal-certifying authority monitoring halal related products

comprising the food producers, distributors and also, importers. The Islamic Affairs Division was later given recognition through its separation from the Prime Minister's Department in becoming the sole department known as the Islamic Development Department of Malaysia or *Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia (JAKIM)* presently. Under this authority, all halal certificates for meat and poultry must be issued and signed by any Islamic organisation approved by JAKIM. Moreover, prior to any importation of processed food products to Malaysia, the halal certificates for products must be recognized by JAKIM first (Riaz & Chaudry, 2004, p.52).

According to Fischer (2011, p.2), JAKIM regulates halal in the interfaces between Islamic revivalism, the state and consumer culture. The rapid increase of halal certification in Malaysia was the result of a steady economic growth over the past thirty years and the growing number of Malay Muslim middle-class consumers. Moreover, Malaysia by having its own certifying bodies has unequivocally elevated halal production, trade and consumption (Fischer, 2011, p.41).

The transformation of halal in Malaysia can also be traced back to Islamic resurgence in the late 1970s. The rise of divergent *dakwah* groups (literally invitation to salvation), together with the Islamic opposition party *Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS)* had contested the secular foundation of the Malaysian state and were critical of government policies led by United Malays Nationalist Organization (UMNO) for leaning toward secularism (Fischer, 2011, p.35). The emergence of *Darul Arqam* which was later labelled as “deviationism” in Malaysia was also seen as a threat to the establishment. *Darul Arqam* followers engaged in ascetic lifestyle and denied the western luxuries and modern amenities, thus practising self-sufficiency. They cultivated a various range of halal food products in several parts of Malaysia. However, since *Arqam* was regarded as a sectarian organization, the movement was barred in 1994 by the Malaysian National Fatwa Council. The UMNO government then took an alternative way to “aggressively engage in a reconceptualization of consumption that envisioned the amalgamation of Malay ethnicity, consumption practices and Islam” in order to pre-empt these Islamic revivalists (Fischer, 2011, p.35). In other words, the activities of Islamic revivalists provoked the state to “nationalize” Islam. Malaysia has strategically employed halal as a material sign to control the critiques of excessive secularism and in fact, “halal is promoted as bridging the religious and the

secular, as an example of compatibility of an ethnicized state, modern Islam, business and proper Islamic consumption” (Fischer, 2011, p.36).

In establishing its own halal-certifying authority and standardized practices, Malaysia aspired to become the world leader in the expanding global halal market. In accordance with Malaysia’s halal vision, the then Prime Minister, Abdullah Badawi had claimed that Malaysia aims to become a global halal hub and so the standard MS 1500:2004 was introduced as “an international benchmark for the certification of halal products” (Fischer, 2011, p.37). Moreover, Malaysia is portrayed as a model country to have drafted procedures in food processing and the export-import trade, represented in its systemization and standardization of halal certification (Fischer, 2011, p.38). Presently there is political will to promote Malaysia as a producer of halal food internationally, and this indicates a major shift towards a global market.

### **Halal Certification System: Singapore**

Singapore is also one of the Southeast Asian countries that has successfully penetrated the global halal market for several decades. Like Malaysia, Singapore has also passed laws and established halal guidelines. Halal services are usually organized by the Islamic Council of Singapore (*Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura MUIS*) which was established in 1972 (Riaz & Chaudry, 2004, p.53). Similar to Malaysia, Singapore holds a unique position where agencies of the state certify halal products.

Similar to JAKIM, MUIS is also the sole authoritative body in Singapore in monitoring imported meat (including poultry) and meat products whose halal certification must be approved by MUIS. Other than ensuring that imported products are halal-certified, MUIS is involved in facilitating halal food trade through other activities such as certifying local exporters prior to exportation of their products to the global halal market. MUIS is also entitled to certify local establishments as well as participating in forums on standardization of halal certification (Fischer, 2016, p.175). MUIS moved to further recognition and was granted accreditation in 1999 when the Singapore Parliament passed the amendment of the Administration of Muslim Act (AMLA). Through this amendment, MUIS is given sole authority to regulate, promote, and enhance the halal business. Riaz and Chaudry (2004) also noted that there are three government agencies liaising with MUIS in halal enforcement which are; the Food Control Department in the

Ministry of Environment, the Agro-Veterinary Authority in the Ministry of National Development, and the Commercial Crime Department of the Ministry of Home Affairs. On December 2009, a further amendment of AMLA was passed with specific reference to halal certificates in which any establishment that falsely display halal logos or fake MUIS logos are considered as law violations (Fischer, 2016, p.180).

According to Fischer (2016), Singapore is a multiracial country with a Muslim minority, therefore the domestic market for halal products and services is not large, unlike in Malaysia (2016, p.176). The main drive for venturing into the halal market for Singapore is centered on the country's vision to lead the global halal market. Thus, the marketing and regulation of halal in Singapore is to a large extent driven by transformations in the global market for halal products since the 1990s (Fischer, 2016, p.176). A thriving economy and increasing standard of living have led to the emergence of a large middle class including Muslim consumers. Such consumers now rely on the authorities to inspect and monitor commodities, and provide logos or accompanying certificates.

Under Section 88A (1) of AMLA, any person who misuse the halal certificate or falsely display halal certification without being approved by MUIS, shall be guilty of an offense which comes with a fine up to \$10,000 and/or one-year imprisonment (Kamaludeen Mohamed Nasir, Pereira & Turner, 2010). Retrieved from the MUIS official website page, the certification process involves four mandatory stages; application, certification, certification audit and post-certification. During the first stage of applying for the halal certificate, the applicants must provide the relevant documents specifying all the products and ingredients used in the preparation of food and drinks, including declaration letters from food suppliers and/or laboratory analysis reports. At the certification stage, MUIS also demands applicants to declare that any items associated with food production such as kitchen utensils and equipment, cooking area must be ritually cleansed by MUIS appointed personnel if they had been previously used for pork preparation and pork-related items. Not only that, MUIS also requires all halal food or raw items be stored and prepared separately from the non-halal items and there must be clear indication to distinguish them. Cross contamination between equipment or utensils for halal and non-halal must be avoided. Moreover, the applicant must ensure that the 'halal team' or the representatives of the Muslim staff undergo the MUIS halal training programme. Lastly, auditing

will take place once the certification process has been completed. The applicant of the food premise or food stall will then receive the MUIS halal certificate and the halal procedures however do not stop there, as there will be some post-certification stages including spot checks conducted by MUIS to ensure that halal practices are maintained at the premise.

Other than inspecting the imported products for halal certification, MUIS is also involved in certifying local eateries. This includes the mandatory requirement to set up a Muslim halal team and participation in the training to ensure not only the 'halalness' of products, but also learning how to tackle issues on non-halal contamination, thus ensuring a standardised Muslim risk management adhering to the required standards aforementioned (Fischer, 2016, p.177). The course in halal training is mandatory for one Muslim member of staff or one representative in the halal team. In Singapore, only MUIS is accredited as the sole halal certifying body and other types of halal certification must be approved by MUIS. In multiethnic Singapore, the efficiency of state-regulated certification by MUIS helps to ensure the halalness of any particular foods and by far, halal certification is seen as the most reliable indicator of halal assurance (Fischer, 2016, p.183). Halal training plays a crucial role in both Malaysia and Singapore and it is through this training that awareness, understanding, and knowledge on standards and standardization in halal practices are developed in Singapore (Fischer, 2016, p.190).

## **Halal in Brunei**

### **Halal Food Control Division/ Bahagian Kawalan Makanan Halal (BKMH)**

The Halal Food Control Division or *Bahagian Kawalan Makanan Halal (BKMH)* is one of the units under the Departments of Syariah Affairs of the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MORA) entrusted to control and handle all of the halal food products in the country including restaurants, food and beverage industry, food stalls and premises and other similar establishments, intended for both locally made, imported and also exported sales that want to use the official halal logo of the Religious Council or *Majlis Ugama Islam Brunei (MUIB)*.

BKMH was set up in response to His Majesty Sultan's *titah* in 1998, stressing the importance of halal to be taken seriously, and instructing the relevant bodies in the government to be involved in this matter. BKMH during that time was still in its infancy as halal was merely

concerned about meat regulation hence the enactment of the Halal Meat Act (Chapter 183). Halal in Brunei began to be promoted widely after His Majesty's *titah*. As a result, the Halal Certificate and Halal Label Order was gazetted in 2005, taking almost three years to complete the standard guidelines. It was not until 2008, the first audit operation was enforced.

Over the past few years, anything that is related to halal in terms of preparation, food handling, site auditing and so forth are carried out solely by BKMH except if officers from other departments are needed to participate in the audit. For instance, members from the Agricultural Department would be called to join the auditing if it involves inspecting premises involved in food production as they are seen as having the expertise, if the audit is on pharmaceutical products or cosmetics, both the BKMH and the pharmacy section from the Ministry of Health will be involved.

#### **PBD 24:2007**

Brunei Darussalam Standard (*Piawai Brunei Darussalam*) is a national standards document which aims to provide a comprehensive national guidelines in areas such as performance, service, systems, processes and products (<http://www.energy.gov.bn/PBD/Home.aspx>). The national standard on halal food, namely PBD 24:2007 acts as a general guideline for halal food in accordance to what is permitted under the authority of the Religious Council Negara Brunei Darussalam or *Majlis Ugama Islam Brunei (MUIB)*. The standards comprehensively cover the general guidelines on the production, preparation, handling, distribution and storage of halal food in Brunei. Several references were also made to familiar institutions, standards and publications such as Halal Certificate and Halal Label Order of 2005, Malaysian Standard MS 1500:2004 Halal Food General Guidelines, State Mufti Fatwa of Brunei Darussalam, Halal Meat Act and Rules of Brunei Darussalam and regional national guidelines on halal such as ASEAN General Guidelines on The Preparation and The Handling of Halal Food, Guidelines on The Control of Muslim Consumption Goods and Foods – Negara Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore (MABIMS) and interestingly, PBD 24:2007 also referring to Malaysian Standard MS 1500:2004 Halal Food for its procedures.

The PBD 24:2007 manual mostly describes the practical guidelines for the food industry on the preparation and handling of halal food and also some essential definitions that should be

comprehended fully in order to understand the purpose of the standard. It also mentions that the standards should be used together with the laws of Brunei Darussalam and any other relevant standards and guidelines recognized and passed by the Government of Brunei Darussalam. The Technical Committee for the Brunei Standard Halal Food was entrusted to the Energy and Industry Department of the Prime Minister's Office (EIDPMO) which comprised of members of government entities such as Department of Syariah Affairs and Department of Religious Council of the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MORA), Halal Food Control Division (BKMH) under the Department of Syariah Affairs of MORA, including other departments such as Department of Health Services of the Ministry of Health, Department of Agriculture of the Ministry of Industry and Primary Resources and also, the State Mufti's Office of the Prime Minister's Office.

In the PBD 24:2007 manual, Brunei Darussalam has standardized the meaning of halal to be posited alongside with *Hukum Syara'* or Laws of Islam in accordance to *Mazhab Syafie* (jurisprudence) or any other *mazhabs* that are approved by His Majesty the Sultan of Brunei Darussalam. Therefore, halal food in terms of PBD 24:2007 is defined as food that is fit for human consumption and permitted by *Hukum Syara'* and other conditions being mentioned that are necessary to follow such as

- The food or its ingredients must not contain any parts or products of animals that are non-halal to Muslims based on what is characterized by *Hukum Syara'* or products of animals which are not slaughtered according to *Hukum Syara'*
- Halal food in Brunei is also explained in terms of how food is free from any contamination, herewith labelled *najis* according to *Hukum Syara'*
- The food is safe for consumers and not harmful,
- The food is not prepared, processed or manufactured using equipment that is contaminated with thing that are *najis* according to *Hukum Syara'*, and as described in the manual.

On the other hand, the manual also emphasized the importance of hygiene, sanitation, sanitization and food safety in preparing halal food. Other than that, inspectors are any Muslim

appointed by the Minister of Religious Affairs Brunei Darussalam tasked in carrying out inspections for the purpose of the standard of PBD 24:2007.

This is to say that, similar to the Malaysian Standard of MS 1500:2004, Brunei also has its own published national standard guidelines to meet the current needs of the local halal food industry and the standard also describes the typical requirements for food products involved in the food trade and business in Brunei Darussalam. However, when asked how halal is defined by the *Bahagian Kawalan Makanan Halal (BKMH)* during the interview, they concurred that PBD 24:2007 may be the national standard for Brunei, but BCG 1 (Guideline for Halal Certification) and BCG 2 (Guideline for Halal Compliance Audit) are the most accurate that BKMH follow, as they specify precise guidelines on the proper procedure, how the audits would be conducted and the preparation required of all applicants. Meaning to say, PBD 24:2007 is more applicable to food factories and industrial units, whereas food establishments such as food premises and restaurants are largely based on both BCG 1 and BCG 2.

### **Halal Certification and Halal Label (Amendment) Order of 2017**

There are few empirical studies on the effects of application of halal food standards in food and beverage (F&B) businesses (Izni Azalie, 2016). In this section I examine the consequences of the recent Halal Certification and Halal Label (Amendment) Order of 2017 to F&B business operators in Brunei. The discussion is drawn from my interviews with the F&B informants.

### **Halal Certification and Halal Logo in Brunei**

According to Diana, Halal Certification in Brunei is nothing new and it has been long implemented a decade ago. However, Diana stated, Halal Certification and Halal Logo might be new and unfamiliar to those who just recently ventured into business and she expressed support for enforcement introduced by the recent amendment of Halal Certification and Halal Logo in Brunei for several reasons, one of which is the prioritization of cleanliness and hygiene regulation for food handling and preparation. Diana further maintained her view based from her observation that presently, food related businesses in Brunei are growing, raising concerns over hygiene and cleanliness and the responsibilities of vendors. If Halal Certification application is mandated for all F&B business operators in Brunei, it will help to reduce doubts amongst

consumers. She explained that the function of ‘certification’ is the same as the barcode, in which the products from overseas can be traced to the manufacturer.

Anita, from Bruneihalalfood brand under the Ghanim International Corporation (a semi-government company identified as a forerunner of the halal food industry in Brunei) agreed that the production of food at the moment is pretty open in which there are no rules regulating food vendors. The Halal Certification and Halal Logo (Amendment) Order of 2017 is the first phase in regulating the food industry and to facilitate its development, and is not intended to burden people. Anita believed that this is necessary because the value of Bruneihalalfood brand is also reliant on the ability of the government to manage the process and ensure the trustworthiness of the process. Nonetheless, Anita is aware that the enforcement made is going in the right direction but there are also other challenges, as she claimed,

*“I do think it is a good idea, however of course as usual the government has limited resources. So sometimes when it is implemented, it is not implemented in phases, they just directly announce and expect people to comply immediately. But so far I heard, people were initially unclear about what this means to their business. But I think now in the past few months that MORA (Ministry of Religious Affairs) has done a little bit more of communication in terms of what this means to their businesses I think. It has gotten a lot clearer. For us, as food manufacturers, we always have to follow the standards, the process of having our products certified within 45 days and the fact that we have to follow. So it’s not been a problem but it’s not also a problem for our SMEs, because we work with a lot of SMEs where we take a lot of their products.”*

### **What is Halal: Between Practice and Certification**

Having mentioned about cleanliness or hygiene in food preparation previously, during the interview with the *Bahagian Kawalan Makanan Halal (BKMH)* officers, they also agreed that halal in Brunei can be defined as a general concept of “*Halalan Thayyiban*” which concerns two aspects of not only halal, but also the cleanliness or the hygiene of the particular product.

Halal accordingly to Alique, involves ritual slaughter of poultry products like chicken and meat and he asserted halal is easily identified from the label and logo and this is commonly sighted

at local stores. Since Alique and his wife are selling delicacies on traditional food cuisine, he believed that everything he sells is entirely halal starting from the raw ingredients and meat he uses in cooking and preparing the food, as he is convinced that he only purchases all the necessary items for food and consumption in local stores and not smuggled from the state border (e.g. Limbang or Miri Sarawak), which may be practised by other vendors. Though Alique is aware of the significant price differences in local supermarkets compared to food items sold at Brunei-Malaysia border, he however insists that it is his responsibility to provide the customers the same halal food he is consuming, hence he prefers to purchase things only from local markets as he trusts the control of halal in Brunei,

*“Since our business is entirely based on halal, we do not buy things from outside. Besides, the question on the halalness of the things we buy from outside is doubted. We buy things locally, and we keep the receipts of our purchase in case there is a sudden inspection, if so, we can justify to the inspectors where do we get our things from, they are from the local stores. But there are some among the same vendors like us too who would just go for easy option. I don’t want to be nosy and it’s their business, but some would actually just sneak them here. Yes, I do acknowledge the price is cheaper there compared to the local markets. Well you’re lucky if you don’t get caught, otherwise you’ll be fined. So rather than risking fines, the efficient way is just to buy things here where the halalness and its cleanliness are guaranteed.”*

Similar to Alique, Kevin shared the same opinion that other than the practical consideration that comes with halal, the authorities examine the ingredients and the method of preparation. Moreover, Kevin stated that applying for Halal Certification is not only focused on “ritual slaughter and safe to consume” of one’s product, but also about the hygiene and cleanliness of the premise hence, the concept of “Halalan Thayyiban”.

On the other hand, Rose believes that halal not only focuses on hygiene but halal food must be processed and produced entirely by Muslims as she has sighted occasions where some cafes in Brunei displaying Halal Certification but the cook is not a Muslim. She maintained that this actually cause people to start questioning whether halalness is determined just based on certification or ethical practice. She believes that anything is considered halal when it is produced

by Muslims even though it is not even approved and certified officially halal by the authorities. Nonetheless, Rose thinks that the subject of halal is regulated well in Brunei because it encourages people to sell food that is halal, but also maintains the quality of hygiene of the products.

### **Halal Certification and Halal Logo in Brunei: Inadequacy in Practice and System**

Diana explained that prior to announcement of the new price structure for Halal Certification, she had only paid \$50 per product and she thinks the new prices are costly because food sellers still need to renew the certificate once every three years. Diana asserted that,

*“This is what I face at the moment, the ingredients we had had applied previously had already been approved, and imagine after three years they inform you that “we have to reject this ingredient because it’s not approved” and it’s a bit hassle for us because we have to find the ingredient to replace the declined one, and of course it’s a bit tedious work and time-consuming. Why I said so? Because for us business operators, we have to entertain the government agencies, but yet some of the procedures need to be improved because we have to go to the stores again and do several investigations on our own.”*

Diana also stated that she supports the introduction of more stringent requirements in halal certification in Brunei. She had some reservations regarding the government’s aim of encouraging business start-ups, using the phrase “ease of doing business”,

*“‘Ease of doing business’ meaning not really too much of a leniency but you can give-and-take. Don’t be like “die die you must do it, die die you have to change”. Same goes to Halal Certification, well for me it’s good, but supposed to be, to make it more friendly and easy-user, we can apply it online that we don’t have to go here and there to apply, we can just check in the system, and the payment procedure too. Payment procedure for me is very ridiculous, once you got call to receive letter that your application is approved, you are told to come to the old building to get the letter and go upstairs, and make payment and... for me it’s just not convenient for the senior citizens, they would complain. Why don’t they just make it easy to just do payment via online. Moreover, if they are planning to upgrade the system, just make sure the server is not slow.”*

Kevin on the other hand also expressed his concerns about how the new certification requirements will pose considerable difficulties to those involved in micro businesses such as hawkers,

*“My opinion is, I mean it’s good for the people so we don’t have to worry and it’s just that I thought the process could have been done a little more efficient and helpful. For our products, I’m not worried, because we go and do it and we apply for it. We adhere to what is advised and required and even did the amendments that are necessitated. But other thing on my mind, although it is none of my business, but I worry about those hawkers in Brunei, how are they going to survive? Just look at the Pasar Malam. You can’t possibly ask them to list down all the ingredients. To ask them to apply, yes they can when someone is doing it for them and that means, money, right? So I mean, to us it’s not inconvenient, because we want our products to be halal certified so we went to do it, but for them they might have this mindset “I’m already a Muslim, I know I buy is definitely halal so what we prepare is indeed halal, so why do you want me to apply for the halal-cert?”*”

### **Brunei Halal Logo**



*Figure 2: Brunei Halal Logo - Image taken from Google*

The use of Halal Certification Logo which identifies the country of origin of the product is welcome throughout the ASEAN region. However, having been in the business both locally and

internationally, Diana mentioned that the Brunei Halal Logo has not yet achieved international recognition. She commented that it would be an achievement if Brunei were able to penetrate other markets outside but recognition of the Halal Logo is limited,

*“Our Brunei Halal Logo is not well-known unfortunately, if you bring our Bruneian Halal logo to European market, they won’t be able to recognize it but if you bring our Brunei Halal Logo to Indonesia and Malaysia, they would definitely know that the marking indicates Brunei belonging. So for me, Halal Logo in Brunei is still lacking in comprehensive awareness. The government authority should develop awareness to the global, not only Asia or throughout the region of BIMP-EAGA because I could say, Brunei is already strong in the archipelago region area. We should cater the Muslims outside and let the taste of Asia being known outside our region when in fact, Brunei is among the first countries to regulate Halal in ASEAN region.”*

Diana was nonetheless very positive that Brunei actually has a lot to gain if the Halal Logo and products were to be brought to the international market. Diana highlighted that the problem was lack of awareness. Moreover, she also stated that the international markets emphasize more on the products being certified GMP (Good-Manufacturing Practice) and HCCCP (Halal Compliance Critical Control Point).

Ghanim International Corporation, a semi-government company is considered the precursor for the halal food industry in Brunei, with its signature of “BruneiHalal” brand. Anita, in Ghanim International Corporation, asserted that the halal standard of Brunei is pretty strong. Anita gave an example of how Ghanim tried to penetrate the Middle East where they initially thought the Brunei Halal Logo is well known. When it attempted to promote the Bruneihalalfood brand, problems arose in dealing with the rules and regulations of particular countries. She mentioned that,

*“Some countries do not accept our company’s brand because it has not been registered for example, so those are the impediments that we find in terms of market access. For example, in Dubai, it took us one year to penetrate into Middle East because of all the regulations because the recognition of Bruneihalalfood brands officially, into their system, is not there yet. So like what Malaysia did, or JAKIM, they are very aggressive in*

*terms of registration of their logo's recognition across. So we haven't done that yet, so we feedback this to the government agencies because we are backed by government, and we are government company anyway, and now they taking note on where are the target market for Brunei, not just Ghanim itself, but the whole Brunei. So they are looking at the registration process into these countries for recognition so that companies who wanted to go and trade, makes it easy for them to trade – it's all about money. Our halal is accepted, it's just the recognition is not there yet, the official recognition. Our halal brand, the Korean and Chinese are interested with our halal brand because they know our halal is trustworthy, and it gives them peace of mind so they don't mind paying million for it. That is the value of our halal actually.”*

Anita also thought that previously Halal Certification in Brunei seemed to be not profit-oriented. She believes only recently Brunei paid more attention to the halal market as a lucrative investment.

*“Comparing our Halal Certification in Brunei and the process to other countries, I would love to say our country don't take ours seriously. Because for us we don't have commercial interest to it. So in a way it gives you as a Muslim a peace of mind, that what I eat is safe for my consumption. Whereas for other countries, it has urgency to grow so in a way leniency is there. Malaysia has a different way of approaching, they understand business. But in Brunei, our government to be honest has just begun learning on how to understand business. How to understand the difficulties that businesses faced, and only now are we having dialogues on business. Formerly we didn't.”*

## **Discussion**

### **Halalan Thayyiban: A Question of Quality and Hygiene**

*“And eat of what Allah has provided for you [which is] lawful and good. And fear Allah, in whom you are believers.” [Al-Maidah 5:88]*

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*“O mankind, eat from whatever is on earth [that is] lawful and good. [Al-Baqarah 2:168]”*

Halal means “permissible” and “lawful” in Arabic and halal is commonly understood as ritual slaughter and prohibition in the consumption of pork (Fischer, 2011, p.1). According to Baker Ahmad Alserhan (2011), “halal” indicates a product that is prepared according to the Shariah principles, simultaneously utilizing Shariah-compliant ingredients and processes, whilst the term “Tayyibat” refers to “purity, wholesomeness and lawfulness” (p.54). Baker Ahmad Alserhan added that, based on Islamic religious practices, Tayyibat can also be defined as the goods and services that are Shariah-compliant in which the consumption of these commodities will lead to ethical and spiritual well-being of consumers (2011, p.57).

During the International Seminar on Halalan Thayyiban Products and Services (SAPPCHAT II) held in 2017, which was co-organized by the Energy and Industry Department at the Prime Minister’s Office (EIDPMO) and concurrently held with the yearly Brunei Halal Show (BruHAS) by the Universiti Islam Sultan Sharif Ali (UNISSA), one of the invited key speakers asserted that halal must go hand in hand with “Tayyib” and he defined “Halalan Thayyiban” as respectively pure and good. The key speaker also explained that “Halalan Thayyiban” are two unseparated elements to make products considered as pure and good and to achieve a comprehensive basis of the concept “Halalan Thayyiban”, a general standard, benchmark or system are required. This is therefore complying to what is explained by Bergeaud-Blackler, Fischer and Lever (2016) on the definition of “standards and standardization” in which, the terms are associated with several meanings including the qualities of products comprising of production, preparation, handling, storage of halal as well as states or authorities involved. Hence, Halalan Thayyiban also includes guidelines and standards in ensuring high-quality products.

When asked on how halal is defined in Brunei, representatives from BKMh mentioned that the concept of “Halalan Thayyiban” is generally relevant and applicable to Brunei. This is further elaborated by the officers themselves on how BKMh’s initiatives to exclude certain items that are passed and certified as halal by JAKIM, but not by BKMh as some commodities are considered as halal but unhygienic. Ahmad Robin Wahab (2004) asserted that hygiene and cleanliness are strongly emphasized in Islam and it comprehensively involves every aspect of personal hygiene, dress, equipment and premise where the food is manufactured and processed. Ahmad Robin Wahab further highlighted that in fact, halal is based on the practice of good

hygiene and health, and herewith Halal and Thayyiban (ibid.). Hygiene and health are also clearly explained in PBD 24:2007, which emphasizes hygiene, sanitation and food safety.

Additionally, when asked what halal means, one of the F&B informants, Rose replied that Halalan Thayyiban is relevant to vendors. Rose further argued that “halal is more to hygiene terms”, especially in handling food. She believes that cleanliness comes first in terms of food preparation whereas the halal logo is not really an issue for her, while maintaining her view that as long as the food producer and those who handle food are a Muslim who is aware of food safety, meaning the food is safe for consumption.

In terms of how Halalan Thayyiban actually relates to the Halal Certification and Halal Logo Order (Amendment) of 2017, the whole debate centered mostly on compliance with the audit flow, beginning with application for halal and submission of the halal application form and followed by oral and written test for the halal applicants to site audit. Once the Halal Certificate and Halal Logo is approved, a continuance of surveillance audit of the applicants’ premises will also be carried out. In brief, I argue that the Halal Certificate and Halal Logo is part of what is defined as “standards and standardizations” according to Bergeaud-Blackler, Fischer and Lever (2016), meanwhile the Halalan Thayyiban acts as a medium for “halal quality” required in the halal market (Bergeaud-Blackler, 2016, p.105).

### **Brunei’s venture towards halal: Why now?**

According to Riaz and Chaudry (2004), Southeast Asia has more than 250 million Muslim consumers. They argue that Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia are in the forefront, with government support, in ensuring that the importation of food products are halal-certified and other countries like Thailand and the Philippines accept their certification (p.169). Although halal is not seen as new in the local context, the appearance of halal industry in Brunei is nonetheless observable and is supported by the government, hence the application of Halal Certification and Halal Logo is made compulsory to further develop the halal industry.

According to Bergeaud-Blackler, Fischer and Lever (2016, p.9), Brunei’s neighbours, Malaysia and Singapore are examples of model countries that are leading in the halal market globally and their governments have “become increasingly committed to indirect supervisory

role in halal and audit is both a solution to a technical problem as well as a way of redesigning the practice of government.” Based from what was mentioned in the earlier section of “Brunei Halal Logo” by my informant, I argue that Brunei has just begun to follow Malaysia and Singapore in stepping into the global halal market. It is only recently that Brunei sees halal as a profitable investment. At the same time, these countries are developing auditing procedures in regulating halal and despite differences in comprehending halal practices, it is however acceptable to say that halal certification reflects the interlink between Islam, state and markets. (Bergeaud-Blackler, Fischer & Lever, 2016, p.9).

Moreover, Bergeaud-Blackler (2016) argued that during the second half of the 1990s, halal certification of food and related products and services developed as a result of the global market for Muslim consumers and competition for this market (p.108). Bergeaud-Blackler also stressed that the emerging halal phenomenon was more noticeable in those countries in Southeast Asia where the Muslims are minorities and where “halal quality” is demanded. Bergeaud-Blackler added that countries with an Islamic majority are mostly driven by state institutions in charge of religious affairs (p.107). Halal Certification now serves as a tool for economic development in Muslim countries, particularly in Southeast Asian Muslim majority countries including Brunei, where the Halal Certification and Halal Logo (Amendment) Order of 2017 is a signal to promote Brunei in the global halal market. Also, halal certification policy in countries like Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines, Brunei and Singapore was introduced to provide a systematic way of strengthening food security and safety whilst encouraging international companies to penetrate the global halal market.

I argue that Brunei only began to take part in developing the halal industry by enforcing the policy of Halal Certification and Halal Logo in order to compete with other Muslim countries and even non-Muslim countries in the lucrative halal industry. Moreover, the concept of “Halalan Thayyiban” is incorporated simultaneously in order to achieve the standard of producing high-end quality products. Brunei set out to venture into halal by securing and practising Halalan Thayyiban. To sum up, the three elements of Islam, state involvement and markets are closely interlinked to one another in understanding halal certification.

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