

# Make no bones about it, the chinaware is halal

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EVER heard of halal chinaware? Well, a Singapore company has had their china certified halal and the products are now in the market.

International sales manager of Landex Jimmy Chia explains that to achieve the translucent effect and lightness in fine bone china, manufacturers add ground animal bones.

"You need about 40% bones to make good quality chinaware. It's mainly cow bones but it could come from a pig too. You wouldn't know," he says.

So what Landex has done is to employ a new Japanese technology that does not use bone or bone ash at all.

"We call ourselves 'new bone' chinaware. A lot of people especially from the religious bodies were sceptical and said our china is 'new bone' so it must have bones.

"So we went to the religious authorities and got it certified halal to prove that there are no bones in it

and people can use it without hesitation," Chia says in an interview.

"The quality is also there. It is translucent, light and durable," he adds.

Landex was one of the exhibitors at the recently concluded Mihas exhibition in Kuala Lumpur, touted as the world's largest halal trade fair.

The Singapore company, which has been in business for 60 years, set up a factory in China 20 years ago and has been doing "new bone" china for almost 18 years.

But it was only recently that it sought the halal certification.

Chia says they got the idea from a Muslim customer who knew that chinaware contained bones.

"He wanted to know if our new boneware had bones, and we said no. In that case, he said, he could buy it. So we saw something there that we could tap into."

Landex subsequently applied for the halal certification in Singapore and also in Malaysia.

"We had these religious bodies



**Halal china anyone?:** Chia with Landex's halal-certified chinaware which doesn't have any animal bone in it. He says Muslims, vegetarians and animal lovers are the target market for the halal 'new bone' China. — NORAFI HESAN / The Star

come to audit our factory in China. They went through all our raw materials and equipment. Even the paint brush had to be halal certified to make sure it is not made from pig hair," says Chia.

"They audited the factory from top to bottom and front to back before certifying it."

Since Landex received its halal

certification, its business has been growing fast, Chia says.

"The Malay population is more affluent now and a number of restaurants and cafes are converting to halal to tap into that market," he adds.

Landex is targeting not just the Muslim market but also vegetarians and animal rights groups.

"We want them to be aware that we are on their side," Chia says.

Other than Malaysia, Landex has started selling its china to Europe, the Middle East and Russia.

"We are getting a good stronghold in Europe and the Middle East. I believe other chinaware manufacturers too might follow us and have their products certified halal."

# No fear of giving away trade secrets to Jakim

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the 15 ingredients including sugar and salt. Sugar and salt should not need to be certified halal but Jakim insists on it. Says Mohamed Zulfikar who studied food science and technology at university and is well versed with how raw ingredients are processed.

"Butter is made from milk. You don't need to slaughter a cow to get the milk. There are no enzymes from pigs or from any animal in butter yet Jakim wants a halal certificate for it. Flour is from wheat and when you put wheat into a grinder it becomes flour, so why does it need to be halal-certified?" he asks.

He also points out that while suppliers are allowed to produce halal certificates from the countries they import the raw materials from. "There are some halal certificates that Jakim recognises and some that it doesn't."

"If the supplier can't produce a (Jakim-recognised) halal certificate, we would have to change suppliers even though it may cost us more. Some manufacturers cheat. They submit documentation of the raw material from a halal-certified supplier but later, without Jakim's knowledge, they switch to another supplier because it is cheaper. That is a silent policy going on in the industry," he says.

Currently, Jakim only recognises 57 halal certification bodies from a total of 31 countries — which is a limited number of countries. At this time, none are Middle Eastern countries.

Hakimah explains: "When Jakim first started halal certification, it was mainly for meat so the certification was primarily for imports from non-Muslim countries like



**Amir Salleh:** "I thought getting halal certification from Jakim would be easy but it's been nine months. It's not worth it, so I think I'll give up"

Australia and New Zealand. With time, the list expanded."

She says that before Jakim recognised the 57, it checked their systems, standards, capacity, expertise in syariah, technical knowledge, food technology and even went over to witness how they carry out their audit to make sure that it is up to Malaysian standards and procedures.

## Suspect ingredients

People in Middle Eastern countries are asking why they need to have their products halal-certified because they feel that as they are Muslim, naturally all their products are halal, Hakimah says.

"But we ask them about their gelatin, additives and emulsifiers,

Are they made locally or imported? If they are imported, are they sure these are halal? That has made them think again. Now these countries are aware and are interested in setting up their own halal certification body and have asked for our assistance."

As for sugar and salt needing to be halal-certified, Hakimah refuses to say. She says that while Jakim does ask for the source and supplier of all ingredients, it does not demand halal certification for sugar and salt.

"Sometimes the industry doesn't check with us and just passes things on hearsay. They should ask us," she says.

But when it comes to water, she says, there is a possibility of it being not halal.

"Water from the pipe is not a problem but when it comes to distilling water, some parts of the equipment can be made up of bones and if the animal is not slaughtered then the water is not halal," she explains.

But what about concerns that listing out ingredients to Jakim is as good as giving away one's trade secrets or recipes?

Phyto Herbal Industries' factory manager YI Chee Hwa does not have a problem with this.

It manufactures a phytonutrient drink formulated with 23 ingredients and gives Jakim a list of all 23 ingredients complete with halal certification for each.

Hakimah says all Jakim wants to know is what the ingredients are and not the formulation.

"We just want to know what you use. Otherwise, how can we tell if it's halal or not? We don't ask how much sugar or how much salt you put in. That's your secret. A company will never reveal its formulation and we don't ask for it either," she says, adding that even huge companies like Pepsi and Coca Cola have no problems listing out their ingredients. The Pepsi and Coke made in Malaysia have been certified halal.

Jakim charges small industries RM200, middle-sized industries RM500 and multi-national industries RM1,400 for the two-year halal certification. Hakimah describes this as only a "token".

"Our expenses are more than that especially if they had to correct some things and we have to return to do a re-audit. When we do audits in Malaysia, we pay for the flight, transport and hotel stay ourselves. We are doing it as a government service so we are not profit-based. And I think our fee is

probably the lowest in the world. Singapore and Indonesia charge more," she says.

She stresses that manufacturers are not obliged to apply for halal certification.

But Mohamed Zulfikar says that without the halal certification, sales will definitely be affected.

"We don't use animal fat at all but there is a thing called customer stigma. So we have to get halal certification to give customers the confidence."

The food manufacturer who declined to be named, adds that 70% of his customers are Malays and without the Jakim halal sticker, many would stop buying his products because they would be wary.

As for imported goods, Jakim approved halal certification for 35 products last year.

Uses Iranian Amir Salleh, who imports Clipper's organic tea and coffee from Britain into Malaysia, applied for halal certification from Jakim. He found the requirements were more than he bargained for.

Jakim wanted to visit the factory in the UK to do an audit — for this he would have to bear the cost of the flight and hotel stay — and there was the specification that there must be two Muslim staff working in the UK factory.

"It's just tea and coffee and it's organic and imported in places like the UAE. The principal company doesn't need the halal certification because its product is organic, and they told me I have to pay the cost. I thought getting halal certification from Jakim would be easy but it's been nine months. It's not worth it, so I think I'll give up. I can put the tea and coffee on the shelves in supermarkets here without the halal sticker."