

# Halal cert a passport to success

Getting halal certification from Jakim is good for business but there are some who are wondering if the effort is worth it.

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**H**AKIMAH Mohd Yusoff chuckles when asked about the oddest thing that Jakim has been asked to certify as halal.

"Furniture! One manufacturer wanted to have its furniture certified 'halal' but we said 'sorry, we don't have a standard for that'.

"Another asked for knee replacement implants to be halal-certified but these are metal and we can't process that.

"One wanted Jakim to certify his live goats 'halal' but the goats are still alive. How can we do that? It is only when it is slaughtered that we can certify if it is halal or not."

Malaysians can be a bit peculiar sometimes, adds Hakimah, director of the Halal Hub Division of Jakim (Malaysia Department of Islamic Development).

One entrepreneur selling dates from Saudi Arabia was stumped at the recent Mihal global halal trade fair in KL when Malaysian buyers wanted to know if the Saudi dates were certified halal.

"I don't know if it's a joke or if they are playing with halal. Dates are fruits. Who gives halal certificates to fruits?" asks Mustafa Iqbal, whose head office is in Jeddah.

He says the dates are not processed or stuffed but merely cleaned and packed yet Malaysians still ask if they are halal.

Concerning Jakim's Hakimah says dates are fruits so it is fine for Muslims and there is no need for them to be halal-certified.

But, she notes, manufacturers see halal certification as a "marketing tool".

Just take chicken eggs.

These are naturally halal but Hakimah says some local industries selling eggs want Jakim to give them a halal certificate because they believe it will give them an edge over their competitors.

Jakim's halal certification does not depend purely on whether a product complies with the syariah requirements alone as it also takes into account other aspects such as if the process, hygiene, equipment, storage and safety standards are quite stringent.

"So some industries feel having a halal logo and label would add value compared to a product that has not been certified halal. And I don't want to dampen their aspiration," Hakimah says.

Wasil Ibrahim, managing director of Pawada Food Industries Sdn Bhd, received halal certification for the ground pepper his factory produces. Why?

"People are emphasising halal these days. Between a halal and non-halal certified product, buyers would prefer the halal one, so for me it's a marketing strategy," he admits.

"In recent years, there has been a lot of interest in the halal industry.



**Slow process:** It took Chung's factory in Hong Kong eight months to get its halal certification for its Three Crabs Fish sauce.



**No secrets:** Yi and Research and development senior executive Siti Norazlan Ramli have no problem in giving Jakim a list of all 23 ingredients in the phytonutrient drink their company manufactures. — NORAFIFI EHSAM / The Star

try not just in Malaysia but also in other parts of the world with a Muslim population. Both local and foreign manufacturers are tapping into this market.

## Four categories

In Malaysia, halal certification is divided into four main categories — food and non-food products like cosmetics, soaps, shampoo, toothpastes; restaurants and food premises; slaughter houses and logistics.

Most applications for halal certification, of course, are not as frivolous as for black pepper and eggs but are in fact warranted and legitimate.

Jakim is the sole body in the country authorised to issue halal

Jakim.

Like most things, there is a process to get the certification. It starts with filling up an online application (on the Jakim website) listing out every raw material (including water) used to make the product and stating if these are halal.

Next, the manufacturer would need to submit documentation with the halal certification for each of these raw materials.

If Jakim finds everything in order, it will ask for the fee to be paid, after which it will carry out an unannounced audit on the factory. An inspection will be done on the raw materials to determine if they are indeed from the sources stated, the processes and whether the factory complies with the requirements as well as hygiene and safety standards.

If there are things lacking, Jakim will advise the manufacturer concerned to rectify the problem.

Last year, Jakim received 4,237 applications for halal certification and it certified 1,874.

Mohamed Zulfikar Ibin Mohamed Hazri, manager of DMG Food Industries Sdn Bhd, finds that if a manufacturer has all the necessary documentation, it is easy enough to get the halal certification.

But some say that despite all the proper documentation, they end up waiting for up to six months for their halal certification because Jakim is short-handed.

"The government is doing a good job promoting the halal industry and we are riding on the hype. Our selling tool is halal and my own oil-rich Muslim countries like Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan prefer to buy from us rather than Europe because we are halal."

"But what we want is efficiency. After we have met Jakim's halal requirements, why do we have to wait six months for the halal certification? We are doing business. That's lost opportunity for us."

Jakim needs to speed things up and get more manpower. Some of our products have up to 30 ingredients. Does Jakim have the manpower and expertise to go through the documentation for the 50 ingredients," asks the general manager of a

## JAKIM'S halal logo



huge Malaysian food manufacturer who declined to be named.

It took Chung An-Hing's factory in Hong Kong, which produces premium Three Crabs fish sauce, eight months to get its halal certification from Jakim.

This included paying for the flight and hotel stay for two Jakim officers to audit the factory in Hong Kong. The factory also now employs two Muslim workers — a Jakim requirement for certification.

The fish sauce costs for RM18 and is relatively new in the Malaysian market but as it has already made a name for itself internationally, Chung can't tell if getting the halal certification has boosted sales.

But he maintains that the effort was worth it.

"Yes, I would do it all over again. I learnt a little bit about the Muslim community because of the halal issue. And if the Malays accept it here, we can use the halal certification to penetrate other Muslim markets," he says.

## A long slog

Hakimah says Jakim has 454 people in the halal hub section involved in the certification process but they cater to three different major jobs — processing the application, auditing the factory and monitoring.

And the same team handles both local and overseas manufacturers seeking halal certification.

"I won't deny there are times when we are short-handed and applications can get stuck for a bit. That is one of the challenges we face. But the delay can also be due to us finding non-conformance during the audit process, so we have to go back to the client and ask them to make the changes," she says.

DMG's Mohamed Zulfikar says applications for certification can get held up when a supplier cannot produce the halal certification (for the raw materials). He finds it odd too that Jakim demands halal certification for raw ingredients like salt and sugar.

Other eateries use an animal fat and are suitable for vegans. We use 15 raw materials and Jakim wants halal certificates for each of