

MEDIA BACKGROUNDER

About Brunei...

Brunei Darussalam is on the north western shore of Borneo and shares a common border with the Malaysian state of Sarawak. Set like a crown slightly askew, 75 per cent of its 5,765 square kilometres land area is covered by equatorial rainforest. Its economy is dominated by the oil and gas industry.

Brunei is divided administratively into four districts: Brunei-Muara, Belait, Temburong, and Tutong. A district comprises several mukim and a mukim comprises several villages. Headman of a mukim is called Penghulu and headman of a village is called Ketua Kampung.

Brunei's official language is Malay but English is widely spoken. Its official religion follows the Sunni strand of Islam. His Majesty The Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan of Brunei Darussalam is the head of the Islamic faith. Other religions are also practised in Brunei including Christianity and Buddhism.

Short historical background

The Brunei civilisation has existed for more than 1,500 years pre-dating Islam. In the course of time the civilisation transformed into an empire. At its height the Brunei Empire covered vast areas of Borneo, the Sulu archipelago and parts of Mindanao.

Ancient Chinese texts contained some information on Brunei's imperial history: Brunei's old name was Puni and it traded with the Chinese Empire in AD 518, 523, 616, 669, 977 and from 1369 to 1643. Muslim influence was established in Brunei since AD 977 and Arabic characters were used before 1370. The ancient Chinese texts also said that the Brunei ruler, Awang Alak Betatar, embraced the Islamic faith in 1371 to coincide with his marriage to a princess from a neighbouring kingdom.

Brunei signed a series of treaties with Great Britain since the 1800s, the one signed in 1888 marked the beginning of its next stage of development as a British protectorate that lasted for 96 years. Whilst a British protectorate, Brunei was modernised where governing power was centralised, the monarchy was regenerated, the administration system was based on the public service model and state presence covered all areas within its territory. Brunei resumes its status as an independent and sovereign nation-state on January 1, 1984.

News snippets from January to December 2016

Brunei establishes new agencies to strengthen economic diversification

Effective January 1, 2016, the government has introduced the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and Downstream Industry Committee in an effort to make Brunei more competitive in attracting foreign investors.

At the same time, the government has approved the Brunei Vision 2035 Framework, which has been formulated by the Brunei Vision 2035 Executive Committee in implementing the objectives of the 2035 vision.

Brunei has also introduced the Small and Medium Enterprise Centre to handle the needs of small and medium local enterprises.

Brunei launches new inbred rice variety

The Department of Agriculture and Agrifood announced January 12, 2016 that it will launch a new type of inbred rice that is more drought tolerant to increase domestic paddy production.

The new inbred rice line, the Brunei Darussalam Rice 5 (BDR5), has been developed from cross-breeding between the Laila rice (a modern rice variety) and beras pusu (a popular traditional rice variety in Brunei).

The BDR5 could become a replacement for the traditional rice varieties because it has inherited the drought tolerant characteristics of traditional rice but has the higher yield of modern rice varieties.

The BDR5 has the potential to produce three to five metric tonnes per hectare.

The traditional rice varieties are drought tolerant but produce low yield with an average of one metric tonne per hectare. The traditional rice varieties could be planted in rain-fed areas that do not require irrigation and relies only on rain.

Modern varieties such as the Laila rice could not grow this way and could be planted only in areas with irrigation because they need plenty of water.

The BDR5 will create a positive impact on the domestic rice production because half of the rice production areas in Brunei still do not have access to proper irrigation infrastructure.

The BDR5 is also shorter in height compared with the traditional rice varieties, which reduces the risk of the plant dislodging from the soil—this is a common problem experienced by tall rice varieties.

The initial cross-breeding has been made around 2002 and 2003, and through years of selection process, the line is now being planted by 85 farmers in 70 hectares of paddy fields to assess its sustainability for large scale planting.

Prior to the trial, the department has also conducted sensory tests on BDR5 and found it to be acceptable in terms of taste by consumers in Brunei.

The Department of Agriculture and Agrifood is targeting to launch the BDR5 officially this year, depending on the success of the trial.

In previous report, Brunei fell short of meeting its rice sufficiency target of 60 per cent by 2015.

Domestic production of rice increased from 1,230 metric tonnes in 2013 to 1,380 metric tonnes in 2014.

Brunei announces new PSR and 'O' Level targets

The government announced January 14, 2016 the new national targets for primary education in Primary School Assessment (known locally by its initials, PSR) for 2016 and for secondary schools in 'O' Level credits by 2017.

It also introduced the National Literacy and Numeracy Standards to fulfil these objectives.

For 2016 the PSR has been set at 79 per cent achievements in grades 'A' to 'C'.

For secondary schools, the national target has been set at 60 per cent achievement of at least five 'O' Level credits by 2017.

Brunei initiates the Temburong bridge work

The foundation for the BND1.6 billion Temburong bridge has been laid on January 16, 2016.

The 30-kilometre bridge, which is expected to be completed in 2019, links Jalan Utama Mentiri in the Brunei-Muara District to Jalan Labu Estet in the Temburong District.

The bridge project is divided into five contract packages. The government has awarded three contracts to joint venture companies last year.

The first contract, CC2 has been awarded to a joint venture between the Daelim Industrial Company Limited (Republic of Korea) and Swee Sendirian Berhad. The BND600 million CC2 contract comprises a 13.4-kilometre low-level bridge or viaduct across the Brunei Bay.

The Brunei-Korean joint venture has also been awarded with the CC3 package to build two navigational bridges.

The Brunei-China joint venture between the China State Construction Engineering Corporation Limited and Ocean Quarry & Construction Sendirian Berhad has been awarded the CC4 contract, which involves the construction of the Temburong viaducts.

The 11.8-kilometre viaduct bridge will be built over the mangrove swamp area from Tanjong Kerasek to Labu in the Temburong District. This also includes a smaller bridge crossing Sungai Labu and a junction treatment at Jalan Puni-Labu in Temburong.

The CC5A (traffic control and surveillance system, supervisory control and data acquisition system and road lighting) and CC5B (power supply system) are still open for tender.

Brunei assesses public service

The Management Services Department (MSD) of the Prime Minister's Office announced January 16, 2016 that it will begin assessing the performance of 20 government departments in April under the Public Sector Performance Grading Programme (3PSA).

The 20 departments provide public services and including the Immigration and National Registration Department.

Five teams, each comprising seven evaluation officers will be assessing each department based on the standards and criteria set by the 3PSA guidelines.

Through the programme, introduced in March 2015, the performance of each department will be rated with stars based on their scores.

According to 3PSA guidelines, a score of 91 to 100 per cent will earn them five stars, 76 to 90 per cent four stars, 61 to 75 per cent three stars, 46 to 60 per cent two stars and below 45 per cent only one star.

Under the guidelines, the MSD also provides a breakdown of the percentages in which up to 40 per cent will be awarded based on 'enablers' or strategies to enhance the department's performance whilst up to 60 per cent will be awarded based on the results of their strategies.

Under both, departments will be assessed based on their strategic plans, policies and their implementation as well as the conduct of their human resources management and customer care.

Based on the guidelines, the evaluation process for a department can be completed in less than three months.

Vocational school introduces agrotechnology course in July 2016

The Institute of Brunei Technical Education Wasan Vocational School (known locally by its initials, IBTE SVW) campus announced January 16, 2016 that it will teach organic farming as part of its Higher National Certificate (HNTec) in Agrotechnology course.

The HNTec in Agrotechnology will be introduced in July 2016.

The course has four major streams: Aquatic Science, Crop Technology, Veterinary & Livestock and Food Technology.

The new course will take two years in which all first-year students will learn the same generic subjects such as agribusiness and laboratory sciences, and students will be able to choose their majors during the second year of the course.

Organic farming is a method of crop and livestock production using natural sources of nutrients and natural methods of crop and pest control, instead of using synthetic and inorganic agrochemicals.

Islamic Studies Department introduces new subject

The Department of Islamic Studies of the Ministry of Religious Affairs announced January 18, 2016 that it will be introducing a subject focused on understanding the contents of the Quran for the academic year 2017 at religious schools.

The objective of introducing the subject is to complement the Quran reading incentive scheme. It aims to enable a generation of future Brunei citizens who are literate and knowledgeable in the Quran.

A person who is literate and knowledgeable in the Quran is one who can read the scripture with tajweed (the knowledge and application of the rules of reading and articulation), understands its contents, and reads it as part of his religious obligations.

Brunei establishes Business Support Centre

The government announced January 19, 2016 that it has established the Business Support Centre that will begin operation in April this year.

The Business Support Centre facilitates the operations of local small and medium enterprises (SMES) and foreign investors. It is housed at the Design and Technology Building at the Anggerek Desa Technology Park.

The government also announced the launching of the website, business.gov.bn and the Central Payment System (CPS) on the same day.

The website is set to become operation by February 2016. It is a portal that provides a single source of information on business-related government services across various ministries and departments and agencies.

The CPS is a payment module under the E-Government Platform that enables customers pay via online for government e-services.

The Business Support Centre also houses the Business Help Desk, which opens on Wednesdays and Fridays.

Brunei launches youth-orientated JA Brunei

Brunei has launched the Junior Achievement (JA) Brunei on January 20, 2016 after three years of operations in the nation-state.

In 2013 the JA pilot programmes have been introduced in several schools. The programmes have been rolled out subsequently to 16 schools that have benefitted 800 students.

JA Brunei has introduced three programmes. First is called the 'JA More Than Money', which is a six-week basic financial literacy programme that teaches youths the concept of earning, spending, saving and donating money, and to start financial planning at young age.

Second, the 'JA Economics for Success' helps students to learn about spending money within a budget, saving and investing wisely and using credit card cautiously.

Third, the 'JA Company Programme' focuses on entrepreneurship and work readiness, and imparts knowledge on starting and managing a competitive business.

Industry Competency Framework ready by 2021

The Energy and Industry Department of the Prime Minister's Office (EIDPMO) announced January 21, 2016 that the industry sector comprising construction and hospitality will see the introduction of an Industry Competency Framework (ICF) within the next five years to create a structure for its activities and provide local employment opportunities.

The ICF establishes framework to harness the potentials of locals to work in the industry in order to ensure that Brunei SMES will have capable local employees that are industry-ready.

Over the last five years, the government rolled out the Energy Industry Competency Framework (EICF) to train locals to match requirements of the oil and gas industry and create local employment.

Brunei Shell launches the Local Business Development Online Portal

Brunei Shell Petroleum Company Sendirian Berhad (BSP) has launched a portal that provides for interaction among the Brunei Shell Joint Venture Companies (BSJV) and vendors on January 21, 2016.

The portal, Local Business Development Online Portal, is for the existing and prospective business partners to obtain information on how to do business with BSJV companies.

These include inquiring and applying for an Expression of Interest (EOI) as well as tendering opportunities via online.

The portal's online address is www.bsp-lbd.com.bn

BSJV Companies introduce new code of conduct

Brunei Shell Joint Venture Companies (BSJV) announced January 21, 2016 have introduced a new code of conduct for all its suppliers that focuses on maintaining business integrity and health, security, safety and environment standards (HSSE).

Failure by suppliers to adhere to the code will result in BSJV terminating its relationship with them.

Brunei establishes new statutory body to facilitate SMES growth

The Energy and Industry Department of the Prime Minister's Office (EIDPMO) announced January 21, 2016 the formation of a new statutory body, which will function as the central body responsible for the growth of local enterprises.

The new statutory body, Darussalam Enterprise (DARE), will monitor and nurture the growth and development of local enterprises in Brunei, including small and medium enterprises (SMES).

DARE features a board of directors of 14 to 15 people in which the majority will come from private enterprise such as logistics, construction, and consultancy and food.

DARE is in charge of industrial sites that had been previously under the now-defunct Brunei Industrial Development Authority (BINA) to facilitate opportunities for SMES.

Income from these industrial sites will be used to fund SME development, including programmes meant to promote entrepreneurship.

DARE will align and combine the various initiatives that are currently on-going in both the public and private sectors including programmes under BSP such as the Energy Business Academy and the long-standing LiveWire.

A Business Support Centre will also be launched in April 2016.

Brunei-Turkish JV sets up margarine plant

The Energy and Industry Department at the Prime Minister's Office (EIDPMO) announced January 21, 2016 that the Brunei-Turkish joint venture, Western Food and Packaging, is building a margarine manufacturing plant in Serasa.

The manufacturing plant is set to become completed in August 2016.

Darussalam Assets rolls out corporate governance practices

The government announced January 25, 2016 that Darussalam Assets Sendirian Berhad, an investment holding company for government-linked companies (GLCS) will begin rolling out its corporate governance practices and standards to its subsidiaries throughout 2016.

Corporate governance practices entail the adoption of corporate governance code and the production of manuals that set out specific policies on risk management and internal controls.

This has called for developing corporate governance, introducing the International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) as the accounting standard, establishing the Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) and developing human capital strategies.

Darussalam Assets Sendirian Berhad has subsidiaries comprising Royal Brunei Airlines Sendirian Berhad, Royal Brunei Technical Services Sendirian Berhad, Semaun Holdings Sendirian Berhad, Telekom Brunei Berhad and Progresif Cellular Sendirian Berhad.

Darussalam Assets Sendirian Berhad has been established on December 12, 2012.

Brunei launches new online portal to help private enterprise

Effective February 1, 2016, the government has launched a new online portal, <http://business.gov.bn/SitePages/Logging%20Issue.aspx>.

The portal enables companies to share any issue, enquiry or suggestion associated with business with the government.

All enquires received online will be followed up by a team who will resolve the registered issues directly, with inputs from various government sectors.

Brunei strengthens bilateral relations with India

Brunei and India have signed three Memoranda of Understanding (MOUS) on February 2, 2016.

The first MOU is on the cooperation on defence. Brunei and India have agreed for the exchange of visits at different levels; exchange of expertise, information, training and trainers; conduct of joint military exercises; and cooperation between the defence industries.

Cooperation on defence between Brunei and India already exists in the form of naval ship visits, training of senior military officers in staff colleges and exchange of experience. The new MOU sets the framework to institutionalise this cooperation.

A team from Brunei will visit India to follow up on the defence MOU to identify areas of defence cooperation in the medium and long term, after which concrete works could begin in those specific areas.

The MOU between the Ministry of Health of Brunei Darussalam and the Ministry of Health and Welfare of the Republic of India aims to establish cooperation by means of pooling technical, scientific, financial and human resources and to upgrade the healthcare, medical education, research between the two nation-states.

The areas identified for bilateral cooperation under this agreement are the exchange of doctors, other professionals and experts; exchange of information on health; medical and health research development; regulations of pharmaceuticals, medical

devices and cosmetics and to promote business development in these areas; and health promotion and disease prevention.

The MOU on health cooperation will entail India sending a delegation to Brunei to identify how to set up facilities in Brunei that can be linked to a satellite for diagnostic purposes as well as implement the exchange and training of doctors.

In the field of youth and sports affairs, the MOU provides a framework for the exchange of sports persons and sports teams, exchange of expertise in coaching, sports talent identification, sports management and administration as well as information in the field of youth affairs.

Brunei launches National ICT White Paper and National ICT Manpower Master Plan

Brunei has launched the National ICT White Paper and the National ICT Manpower Master Plan on February 4, 2016 to provide remedial and proactive intervention towards efforts in diversifying the economy.

The Ministry of Communications and the Authority for Info-communications Technology Industry of Brunei Darussalam (AITI) have commissioned the National ICT White Paper in order to set the strategic direction for ICT in Brunei for the period that covers from 2016 to 2020.

The National ICT White Paper calls for a National Digital Strategy with ICT playing the role as Brunei's second engine of growth.

The National ICT Manpower Master Plan addresses the existing challenges of skills gap and mismatch in the ICT talent pool.

Associated news snippet...

Brunei provides financial assistance for local ICT companies

Local ICT companies that plan to produce local content for online content and applications are now offered funding incentives after the government introduced four types of grant schemes on July 9, 2010.

Through a BND14,000,000 funding, the government has entrusted the Authority for Info-communications Technology Industry of Brunei Darussalam (AITI) to screen the application process.

The four types of grants:

- i. Product Development Grant for concept development and testing
- ii. Product Enhancement Grant for improving and upgrading existing items
- iii. Product Ownership Grant to enable ICT companies obtain certification and quality management systems
- iv. Product Packaging Grant to enable ICT companies to improve product

appearance in terms of design and labelling

The grant amount varies because it depends on the type of grant applied; maximum amount is BND250,000 per application.

The criteria include technological merits; commercial potentials; sound financial resources and project plans; and the capacity to deliver.

The objectives of the grant schemes:

- i. To encourage R&D activities by local businesses to produce innovative products with commercial potentials
- ii. To strengthen R&D capabilities of local ICT companies
- iii. To encourage competition among local content developers

AITI functions as Brunei's regulating body to monitor and incentivise the growth of local ICT businesses.

Central bank introduces utility data in credit report

The Autoriti Monetari Brunei Darussalam (AMBD), Brunei's central bank, announced February 5, 2016 that effective February 2016, its Credit Bureau will incorporate utility data in credit reports.

The utility data supplements existing banking data and enables financial institutions to enhance their credit risk assessments.

The Credit Bureau has launched its Self Inquiry and Dispute Resolution (SIDR) service to the public in September 2014 with the purpose of helping individuals verify the information reported on them.

The Self Inquiry Report provides detailed information of credit facilities such as overdrafts, credit cards and vehicle financing that members of the public may have taken from different financial institutions.

Associated news snippet...

Brunei establishes Credit Bureau

The government announced at the State Legislative Council on March 12, 2012 that Brunei will establish a Credit Bureau this year, which will help control the culture of excessive personal debt among the population.

The Credit Bureau will have a level of information on people's financial health, their credit worthiness based on their level of indebtedness, past repayment history and repayment ability across the entire banking/financial sector.

Brunei signs the TPP agreement

Brunei has signed the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) agreement on February 4, 2016.

Although the signing marks the end of the negotiating process, member states still have two years to get the deal approved at home before it takes effect.

Brunei establishes commercial courts

The government announced February 4, 2016 that Brunei has established commercial courts that will hear disputes on business-related cases.

The commercial courts will hear disputes associated with contracts, export and import of goods, insurance and re-insurance, banking and financial services, operation of markets and exchanges and commodities trading.

The commercial courts feature two new procedures to quicken the process: the case management conference and the option of mediation.

Brunei enforces law on building control

The government announced February 5, 2016 that the Building Control Order 2014 has been enforced since November 2015.

The law provides that only qualified persons appointed by the developer may submit plans, and qualified persons and builders are responsible for ensuring that the building works comply with the regulations and standards.

The authority responsible for this law is the Authority for Building Control and Construction Industry (ABCi).

The law strengthens the service quality of ABCi by improving the governance of qualified persons and builders, as well as by ensuring all applications are processed in compliance with provisions under this law and other laws associated with building control.

Brunei exempts seven business activities from business licence

The Ministry of Home Affairs announced February 11, 2016 that seven business activities scheduled under the Business Licence Act are now exempt from the rule requiring a business licence.

The business activities cover eateries, boarding and lodging houses or other places of public resort, street vendors and stalls, motor vehicle dealers, petrol stations including places for storing petrol and inflammable material, timber store and furniture factories and retail shops and workshops.

The new regulation means that businesses that fall under these activities can now start businesses once they have received approval for their business name or company incorporation at the Registry of Companies and Business Names.

Existing laws pertaining to safety such as food hygiene, fire and emergency, electrical system, building integrity and so on that are being enforced by multiple government agencies still apply to the seven business activities in question.

Associated news snippet...

Brunei streamlines online process of establishing business

The government announced January 5, 2012 that the Business Licensing System (BLS) is schedule to become fully operational by mid-2012.

In addition to providing faster way of setting up a business, it also improves Brunei's position in the Ease of Doing Business (EODB) ranking.

BLS provides integrated forms, information hubs, a consolidated payment and standardised processes, parallel processing, 24-7 access and greater transparency.

At the moment, without the BLS, an applicant who wish to start a business has to go to 13 different agencies (in case his business requires all the different licences), to obtain each individual licence.

BLS is a collaborative project organised by the Ministry of Industry and Primary Resources and the Ministry of Home Affairs and involves various government and non-government agencies.

Brunei revamps health ministry priorities

The Ministry of Health has carried out organisational restructuring and introduced three strategic priorities in order to enhance quality of the health service, the government announced February 12, 2016.

The restructuring has produced three clusters in which the first comprises strategic cluster.

The first cluster is now in charge of health promotion, legal affairs and a new unit called the 'Innovation Delivery Academy' (IDeA). The new unit, IDeA, is responsible for incubating new ideas, monitor and manage key strategic initiatives of the ministry whilst ensuring that the projects are aligned with both the ministry and national agendas.

The second cluster, which comprises service delivery and policy, highlights the importance of focussing on core businesses and the need for the ministry to be proactive by using health information and data.

The third cluster comprising services will track the ministry's performance through appropriate data management and ensures the quality delivery of services that is safe, timely, efficient, effective, equitable and patient-centric.

Brunei launches online land application system

The Ministry of Development has launched the new Land Application Registration Information System (LARIS) on February 16, 2016 on a trial period basis at the moment.

LARIS is a land management system developed collaboratively by the Land Department of the Ministry of Development and the Brunei Solutions Development Centre (BSDC) of the E-Government National Centre.

The system allows landowners online access to information about their land and obtain approval to transfer land. It also provides landowners the ability to make applications online to obtain approval for extension of leases, change of land use condition, registration of charges and registration of private leases.

The system, LARIS.gov.bn, is accessible through the e-Darussalam portal where, prior to accessing the system, users are required to register an e-Darussalam account. All applications require the relevant accompanying documents to be scanned and uploaded to be attached with the online submissions.

The trial period begins from today to February 28, 2016.

Associated news snippet...

Amended Stamp Act takes effect April 1, 2013

The government announced April 24, 2013 that the Stamp Act (Amendment) Order 2013 that exempts stamp duties to instruments involving the transfer of properties or shares between benefactors and their legal beneficiaries, effective April 1, 2013.

The amended law features changes such as all instruments listed in the First Schedule are duly stamped.

Instruments that are not duly stamped are not admissible as evidence. The Ministry of Finance has been tasked to administer the exemption from payment of stamp duty for any loan instrument through a financing facility for first house (including land) up to BND250,000, any tenancy instrument for the rental of a house with rental of up to BND2,000 and any instrument involving the transfer of property or shares between the owner and his dependent only, which is from husband to wife or wife to husband, and from father or mother to their children including adopted children that are registered (male and female).

The new regulation affects transfers of titled lands only, not for temporary owned lands (TOL).

The exemption of the stamp duty is aimed at facilitating the transfer of properties or shares during the lives of the benefactors.

US-ASEAN Connect initiative launched

The United States of America-ASEAN Connect initiative has been launched on February 17, 2016 in an effort to strengthen American economic engagement with all of ASEAN member states.

The initiative creates a network of hubs across the Southeast Asian region to better coordinate economic engagement and connect more entrepreneurs, investors and business with each other.

The US-ASEAN Connect is organised around four pillars that provide strategic focus to on-going and future American government activities in the region. American engagement under the initiative will build on existing efforts to support ASEAN's economic integration.

The 'Business Connect' pillar supports increased commercial engagement between American and ASEAN businesses in a variety of regionally important sectors including ICT and infrastructure.

It will also bring American and ASEAN businesses together to capitalise on opportunities created through the ASEAN Economic Community whilst assisting the implementation of measures to facilitate greater trade and economic integration under the ASEAN Economic Community.

The 'Energy Connect' pillar assists in the development of power sectors in ASEAN built around sustainable, efficient and innovative technologies.

It will support the connectivity, clean energy and energy security goals of the ASEAN Plan of Action for Energy Cooperation. American programmes continuing under this pillar include US Trade and Development Agency clean energy and grid modernisation/connectivity project preparation.

The 'Innovation Connect' pillar supports Southeast Asia's emerging entrepreneurial eco-system through policy support and direct engagement with entrepreneurs.

Technical assistance will include the Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative (YSEALI) Innovation Challenges and economic programmes, the Global Entrepreneurship Programme, Innovation Road shows and support for the ASEAN Science Prize for Women.

The 'Policy Connect' pillar focuses on supporting ASEAN member states in creating a policy environment conducive to trade and investment and digitally enabled innovation.

This pillar also covers sustainable and equitable economic growth, which includes providing capacity building and technical support to member states. Programmes will

focus on broader economic policy and engagement such as discussion on aviation issues.

It will also involve the US-ASEAN Trade and Investment Framework Agreement work plan initiatives such as the new series of US-ASEAN Trade Workshops.

To support the implementation of the US-ASEAN Connect, the American government is establishing a network of three 'Connect Centres' in Jakarta, Singapore and Bangkok responsible for focusing and coordinating American government resources on growing economic engagement.

This engagement will allow for faster and easier access to public information and American government resources such as capacity building and technical assistance.

The Jakarta centre will be part of the American mission to ASEAN and will lead in facilitating American engagement towards meeting their shared goals of strengthening ASEAN as an organisation and to support ASEAN's goal of centrality in the regional architecture.

Supported by the Department of Commerce's ASEAN regional office, the Singapore centre will serve to channel engagement in the financial hub of ASEAN, which is home to the World Bank Infrastructure and Urban Development Hub and 3,600 American companies.

The regional offices of OPIC, USTDA and USAID, as well as the local Commercial Service office, will constitute the Bangkok centre, which will focus on project preparation, development assistance, business advocacy and investment support in the region.

Strong economic ties are at the core of the American and ASEAN decades-long partnership with ASEAN member states collectively making up the fourth largest trading partner for the United States of America.

Two-way trade in goods and services has tripled since the 1990s, topping US\$254 billion in 2014.

American businesses have been the largest cumulative source of foreign direct investment in ASEAN and ASEAN member states are increasing their investment in the United States of America. American goods and services exports to ASEAN supported over 500,000 American jobs in 2014.

Brunei issues more sharia-compliant bond (sukuk)

The Autoriti Monetari Brunei Darussalam (AMBD) has issued a BND100 million sukuk (sharia-compliant bond) on February 18, 2016 at a rental rate of 0.99 per cent with maturity date on May 19th 2016(based on a 90-day tenor).

This is the 127th sukuk issuance.

With this issuance, the government has issued BND9.455 billion worth of short-term Sukuk Al-Ijarah securities since its maiden offering on April 6, 2006.

Total holdings of Brunei government sukuk outstanding until February 18, 2016 stands at BND625 million.

Brunei flag carrier signs code share agreement with Turkish Airlines

Royal Brunei Airlines Sendirian Berhad (RB) has signed a code share agreement with Turkish Airlines (TK), which allows passengers to connect from Bandar Seri Begawan to Istanbul via Dubai (and vice versa), the Borneo Bulletin reported February 19, 2016.

Under the code share agreement, Turkish Airlines will add its 'TK' code to RB operated flights from Bandar Seri Begawan to Dubai and vice versa.

On a reciprocal basis, Royal Brunei Airlines will add its 'BI' code to TK flights from Istanbul to Dubai and vice versa.

The agreement becomes effective starting February 22, 2016.

UNISSA offers diploma in sharia criminal justice system

The Brunei Times reported February 22, 2016 that the Universiti Islam Sultan Sharif Ali (UNISSA) will introduce a new Diploma in Sharia Criminal Justice System course for law enforcement officers and students in August 2016.

The diploma programme is run by the Faculty of Sharia and Law.

The faculty has produced 537 graduates from 2007 to 2015.

Associated background information

Brunei enforces first phase of sharia law

Brunei has enforced the first phase of the Sharia Penal Code Order 2013, which incorporates Islamic law into the existing criminal justice system on May 1, 2014.

Timelines:

March 18, 1984

At the official opening of the South East Asia and Pacific Muslim Youth Conference at the Maktab Perguruan Ugama Seri Begawan...

His Majesty The Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan of Brunei Darussalam said Brunei upholds continually the Islamic teachings based on the Ahli Sunnah Wal-Jamaah as

a way of life and the path followed by the government.

July 15, 1996

His Majesty The Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan of Brunei Darussalam has approved the establishment of the sharia courts at the highest level not only for the administration of the Islamic family laws but also for the Islamic Criminal Act in its entirety.

March 25, 2001

His Majesty The Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan of Brunei Darussalam said as a Muslim nation-state, Brunei was adjusting national laws with the sharia through the Council of Islamic Religion of Brunei Darussalam with the cooperation of multiple government organisations including the Attorney General's Chambers.

March 15, 2011

His Majesty The Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan of Brunei Darussalam has suggested the introduction of laws to deal with Islamic crimes whilst maintaining the implementation of the 85 existing civil and religious legislations. The sovereign made the proposal during a closed-door meeting with the Council of Islamic Religion of Brunei Darussalam.

May 17, 2011

Former Chief Sharia Judge, Pehin Datu Imam Dato Paduka Seri Setia Ustaz Haji Abdul Hamid Bakal, has said that Brunei is fine-tuning the Islamic criminal law after completing the draft. The former Chief Sharia Judge said 278 Acts and 27 Legal Orders have been examined and adjusted in accordance with the sharia.

October 10, 2011

His Majesty The Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan of Brunei Darussalam has urged government agencies not to delay the establishment of sharia law. He said that he first raised the call of introducing the Islamic criminal law during his 50th birthday anniversary in 1996.

October 12, 2011

His Majesty The Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan of Brunei Darussalam has reiterated the pressing need for Brunei to implement the sharia law at the launch of an international seminar on Islamic law.

July 15, 2012

His Majesty The Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan of Brunei Darussalam has given approval for the implementation of the Sharia Penal Code Order. During his 66th birthday anniversary speech the sovereign said the implementation of the Islamic law, civil or ta'zir (general) offences that are not punishable by hudud laws will

continue to be handled by civil law when required.

February 7, 2013

The Minister of Religious Affairs said that the Sharia Penal Code Order has been completed, and the Attorney general's Chambers has been reviewing it before it could be implemented. The minister also said that the Sharia Criminal Procedure Code (CPC) facilitates the implementation of the Islamic criminal law.

October 22, 2013

His Majesty The Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan of Brunei Darussalam announced that Brunei is enforcing the Sharia Penal Code Order 2013 in phases six months from the said date. The announcement was made during the Majlis Ilmu 2013.

November 2, 2013

His Majesty The Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan of Brunei Darussalam noted the responses from various quarters on the planned enforcement of the Sharia Penal Coder Order 2013.

March 6, 2014

During the opening of the 10th State Legislative Council, His Majesty The Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan of Brunei Darussalam has reminded Brunei citizens to unite in the context of implementing the sharia law.

March 22, 2014

The Minister of Religious Affairs has said that the first phase of the Sharia Penal Code Order 2013 is enforced on April 22, 2014. During the State Legislative Council session, the minister said the second phase of the Islamic criminal law will be enforced 12 months after the Sharia Courts Criminal Procedure Code is gazetted. The draft of the code is being finalised by the Brunei Islamic Religious Council, whilst the third phase becomes enforced 24 months after that.

April 30, 2014

In a declaration ceremony, His Majesty The Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan of Brunei Darussalam announced that the first phase of the Sharia Penal Code Order 2013 was enforced on May 1, 2014.

Islamic laws in Brunei Darussalam

Twice in the same year – March 13, 1993 and June 21, 1993 – His Majesty The Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan of Brunei Darussalam has called for the expansion of Islamic law.

In Brunei, the sharia is known locally as Hukum Syara' and the sharia judge is called Hakim Syar'ie.

Brunei's effort to expand Islamic law began in earnest in the 1980s. Since January 21, 1980 the Brunei sovereign has established the Committee on the Modification of Brunei Laws in Accordance with the Sharia. The purpose of this committee is to examine all of the laws in force in Brunei; identify which ones (including provisions) that are contrary to the sharia; and propose the necessary amendments so that they conform to the sharia. And where necessary, the committee is also tasked to draft new laws based on the sharia.

The Brunei sovereign next established the Drafting Committee on Islamic Family Law in 1995. The drafting committee's remits cover the drafting of comprehensive Islamic family laws; laws for the sharia courts; and laws under the jurisdiction of the existing sharia courts system.

These laws include civil and criminal procedures that are applicable under civil courts but are modified so that they are in accordance with sharia principles. Such laws have also amended the Kadi Court system hitherto administered under the Religious Council and Kadi Courts Act (Chapter 77). A kadi is a sharia-trained Muslim judge. Today, the new Sharia Courts Act has given the Brunei sharia courts system a more defined structure. Previously, the sharia courts system was governed by the Religious Council and Kadi Courts Act.

Codification of Islamic laws

The work of the Drafting Committee of Islamic Family Law has culminated with the introduction of a stack of new Islamic laws

- i. **Emergency (Islamic Family Law) Order, 1999 (S12/00)**: This Order makes certain provisions for the Islamic family law on marriage; divorce; maintenance; guardianship; and other matters connected to family law
- ii. **Sharia Courts Act, 2001 (Chapter 184)**: This Act makes specific provisions on the establishment of sharia courts; appointments and powers of sharia judges; and the civil and criminal jurisdictions of the sharia courts
- iii. **Sharia Courts Evidence Order, 2001 (S63/01)**: This Order concerns the law of evidence in the sharia courts
- iv. **Islamic Adoption of Children Order, 2001 (S14/01)**: This Order makes certain provisions on laws concerning the adoption of children according to Islam
- v. **Sharia Civil Procedure, 2005 (S26/05)**: This Order concerns the civil procedure for the sharia courts

Religious teaching college introduces 12 new undergraduate courses

The Kolej Universiti Perguruan Ugama Seri Begawan (translated loosely as the Seri Begawan Religious Teachers University College and known locally by its initials, KUPU SB) announced February 26, 2016 that it will introduce 12 new undergraduate courses later this year, pending approval from the Ministry of Education.

The programmes include entrepreneurship, multi-media Islamic history, childhood education, special education and Islamic civilisation studies.

KUPU SB's existing courses comprise nine undergraduate and master's courses, six PhD programmes, and two diploma programmes including Higher National Diploma in Dirasat Islamiyyah and Diploma in Islamic Law and Practice.

KUPU SB has four faculties: Faculty of Usuluddin, Faculty of Sharia, Faculty of Business and Management Sciences and Faculty of Arabic Language and Islamic Civilisation.

Islamic university establishes links with Malaysian counterpart

The Universiti Islam Sultan Sharif Ali (UNISSA) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on academic cooperation with the International Islamic University College of Selangor (KUIS) on February 27, 2016.

Under the MOU both universities have agreed to work together on a student/staff mobility programme.

KUIS is fully owned by the Council of Islamic Religion of Selangor (MAIS) that has been established under the IPTS 1996 Act. KUIS has been established to produce more professionals that could lead the community, build and expand the knowledge of Islam.

Brunei scouts establishes links with Malaysian counterparts

The Brunei Darussalam Scouts Association (PPNBD) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Sabah, Sarawak and Labuan Federal Territory branches of the Scouts Association of Malaysia on February 28, 2016.

The MOU fosters cooperation in programmes involving the exchange of students and leaders of the four Scouts Associations, training and human capital development programmes, information sharing and exposure in the field of scouting.

Local telco signs agreement with Politeknik Brunei

Telekom Brunei Berhad (TelBru) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Politeknik Brunei for an apprenticeship training scheme on February 29, 2016.

The MOU enables the systems engineering students of Politeknik Brunei to carry out a 12-month training at TelBru.

Local oil services company signs agreement with Indonesian counterpart

Local company, Nishio Sendirian Berhad has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Pertamina Drilling Services Indonesia (PDSI), the Borneo Bulletin reported February 29, 2016.

Local company exports food to Vietnam

Bruneian company, Sahamada Corporation Sendirian Berhad has signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the Halal Vietnam Trading Construction Import Export Company Limited (IMEX) on February 29, 2016.

Under the MOA, IMEX becomes the distributor for Sahamada's different chilli sauces and crackers under the brand, 'Cinta' in Vietnam for three years.

Sahamada Sendirian Berhad has also signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the Golden Corporation on the same day. Under this MOA, Golden Corporation will supply raw materials to Sahamada Sendirian Berhad such as blue shrimps and fish for the production of different flavours of crackers to be sold in Vietnam.

Brunei introduces insolvency law

The government has passed the Insolvency Order 2016, effective March 1, 2016.

The law incorporates the winding up provisions associated with corporate insolvency under the Companies Act (Chapter 39).

The Insolvency Order 2016 creates a shift in the insolvency culture, with a greater emphasis on company rescue and rehabilitation, and protection for all creditors and debtors.

Some of its features include provisions on company voluntary arrangements, which allow a company to propose a possible loan restructuring and/or corporate reorganisation to its creditors. To complement this new provision in winding up of a company, a new list of preferential payments will be paid in priority to all unsecured debts.

The new law also includes provisions for the introduction of insolvency practitioners.

Insolvency practitioner acts as a liquidator, provisional liquidator, judicial manager or receiver. The person in question can be a nominee or supervisor, where a voluntary arrangement in relation to the company is proposed or approved.

The Insolvency Order 2016 notes that important issues of suitable qualifications, technical knowledge and skills, standards of competence and other associated areas are central to the proper functioning of an insolvency regime and the finance minister may designate a recognised professional body to regulate the practice of insolvency practitioners.

UNISSA enhances links with Malaysian counterpart

The Universiti Islam Sultan Sharif Ali (UNISSA) announced March 1, 2016 that it plans to carry out a series of joint research and publication projects with the Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM).

Both institutions of higher learning have agreed to forge strategic cooperation in research and charitable projects.

UNISSA and USIM have already been carrying out activities such as student exchanges and joint seminars under the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed in 2011 and the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) of 2012.

Under these agreements USIM has been recognised for its work in establishing the Al-Abrar Endowment Fund, which has been registered by the Negeri Sembilan Islamic Religious Council (MAINS).

USIM plans to share its experience with UNISSA in research and publication in the area of waqaf (endowment) for the benefit of the local community.

The two institutions of higher learning will also try to obtain grant or funding for an international research project, which they plan to carry out together for the use of the regional and international communities.

Brunei renames ITB

The Institut Teknologi Brunei (ITB) has been renamed Universiti Teknologi Brunei (UTB), effective March 1, 2016.

ITB has been established in January 1986. It has been upgraded to university status since October 18, 2008.

Local telco launches national WIFI service

Telekom Brunei Berhad (TelBru) has launched its national WIFI service on March 4, 2016.

Brunei launches green accreditation for buildings

The Ministry of Development has launched the Brunei Accredited Green Unified Seal (BAGUS) on March 5, 2016.

Buildings that have reduced their electricity consumption by more than 15 per cent per annum and meet the government-mandated energy efficiency index (EEI) of 175 kWh/m² per year are awarded with the seal.

Brunei strengthens bilateral relations with Costa Rica

Brunei has signed two agreements with the Republic of Costa Rica on March 7, 2016.

The first document, the Framework Cooperation Agreement enables the two nation-states to promote technical, economic, scientific and cultural cooperation.

The second, the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) enables Brunei and Costa Rica to carry out the periodic High-Level Consultations.

Brunei and Costa Rica established diplomatic relations on April 14, 1994.

Flag carrier launches its Operation Control Centre

Brunei's national airline, Royal Brunei Airlines Sendirian Berhad (RB) has launched its refurbished Operation Control Centre (OCC) on March 18, 2016.

OCC ensures proper operations of RB's scheduled flights.

Associated news snippet...

New logistics company established in Brunei

Air Logistics Sendirian Berhad (ALSB) has officially opened office on September 24, 2013.

ALSB is a joint venture company between the Brunei International Air Cargo Centre Sendirian Berhad (BIACC) and the UK-based Air Logistics Networks Limited.

The joint venture company has secured the long-term contract for the management of Royal Brunei Airlines' (RB) entire global air cargo business and is accountable for all ground handling operations at destinations on the RB network.

Local venture capitalist leads DARE

Brunei has appointed Mr Loo Yau Soon, a local venture capitalist, to become managing director and chief executive officer of Darussalam Enterprise (DARE), effective March 22, 2016.

Brunei will implement weather hazard index system

The government announced March 23, 2016 that the Brunei Darussalam Meteorological Department (BDMD) will implement the Weather Hazard Index System (WHIS) this year.

WHIS is a computer system that can identify locations that are at high risk of catching fire.

WHIS has been installed in 2015.

Brunei issues more sharia-compliant bond (sukuk)

The Autoriti Monetari Brunei Darussalam (AMBD) has issued a BND100 million sukuk (sharia-compliant bond) on March 24, 2016 at a rental rate of 1 per cent with maturity date on September 22, 2016 (based on a 182-day tenor).

This is the 128th sukuk issuance.

With this issuance, the government has issued BND9.555 billion worth of short-term Sukuk Al-Ijarah securities since its maiden offering on April 6, 2006.

Total holdings of Brunei government sukuk outstanding until March 24, 2016 stands at BND625 million.

Brunei post enhances package deliveries

The Postal Services Department announced March 25, 2016 that it has introduced the Acknowledgment of Receipt (AR) Listing or 'AR Listing Service'.

The new AR Listing Service, which is accessible through the department's website (www.post.gov.bn) serves to inform recipients of the arrival of their mailed packages (below two kilogrammes) that are received from abroad and in a process of submission to the recipients.

The small packets listed are divided into two types: 'G' for Green Stamp and 'R' for Red Stamp.

'G' indicates that the item does not require customs inspection and will be directly delivered to the recipient's address. If there is no one at home during the delivery, a notification card will be left for the recipient to collect the item at the designated post office.

'R' indicates that the item will be detained by customs and will undergo inspection and an AR card will be sent to the recipient's address for him to collect the item at the designated post office within three working days as stated on the card.

The service has begun since March 22, 2016 and will run on a trial basis for a month.

The AR Listing Service is for small packets received at the post office without a tracking number. Members of the public can refer to the Postal Services Department's website in order to find out the status of their items.

The Postal Services Department has received 160,091 small packets in 2015, which is an increase of 399 per cent from 2010 with only 32,103 small packets.

The increase is seen as a consequence of the growing popularity of online shopping from abroad by locals.

ITB officially renamed UTB

The Institut Teknologi Brunei (ITB) has been officially renamed Universiti Teknologi Brunei (UTB) on March 26, 2016.

Brunei to set up public transportation system

The Brunei Times reported March 28, 2016 that the Ministry of Communications will develop jointly bus interchanges with the private sector through public-private partnership (PPP).

As part of the BND10 million overhaul of the public transport sector over the next three years, the ministry will re-draw bus routes and start using interchanges around the district instead of a central bus terminal.

The interchanges will be located where two or more bus routes overlap.

Brunei establishes domestic classification society for vessels

The Marine Department of the Ministry of Communications will be establishing a domestic classification society for boats and water vessels, The Brunei Times reported on March 29, 2016.

A classification society establishes and maintains technical standards for the construction and operation of marine vessels.

The primary role of the society is to classify ships and validate that their design and calculations are in accordance with the published standards.

At the moment, water vessels in Brunei adhere to the International Association of Classification Societies (IACS).

With the IACS, there are certain limitations on the types of water vessels that can be classified internationally in which only water vessels that have the gross tonnage of 100 tonnes and are made of steel are required to be classified.

Boats that are less than 100 tonnes and are traditionally built with wood or fibre glass are not recognised by the IACS.

As a consequence, the specifications of these vessels have to be monitored by the Marine Department.

The Marine Department is planning to start the groundwork for the domestic classification society in April 2016. Once the society has been established, it will be operated by the private sector.

The society's operators will be the ones in charge of establishing the rules and regulations for domestic classifications.

The department's role is to facilitate the society's operations and approve the rules and regulations and determine whether they comply with the minimum international standards.

The department will also require the society's operators to include in their rules and regulations to accept traditionally built boats that are made of wood or fibre glass.

With the domestic classification society, vessels that are not recognised by the IACS can also be recognised by members of the public as adhering to standardised rules and regulations outlined by the society.

This move is necessary as most water vessel operators in Brunei only operate on the domestic level therefore it is cumbersome for them to adhere and make payments based on international classifications.

The domestic classification society will also be able to create job opportunities for students of the Brunei Maritime Academy as vessel surveyors.

'One Village, One Product' to go online

A joint initiative of the Tutong District Tourism Coordinator and Promotion Body (known locally by its initials, BPPD) and the Corporate Division of the Tutong District Office will establish a portal that features an online shop for products made under the 'One Village, One Product' (1K1P) initiative, the Borneo Bulletin reported April 10, 2016.

The website is set for launching on April 16, 2016.

The website will also facilitate online bookings for tourism packages available in the Tutong District.

Brunei introduces fire safety rules for buildings

The government announced April 9, 2016 that owners of premises that has more than 200 occupants must apply for a fire certification in order to ensure that the buildings comply with the fire safety requirements.

The regulation is among the provisions stipulated by the Fire Safety Order 2016.

Brunei issues more sharia-compliant bond (sukuk)

The Autoriti Monetari Brunei Darussalam (AMBD) has issued a BND50 million sukuk (sharia-compliant bond) on April 14, 2016 at a rental rate of 1.03 per cent with maturity date on April 13, 2017 (based on a 364-day tenor).

This is the 129th sukuk issuance.

With this issuance, the government has issued BND9.605 billion worth of short-term Sukuk Al-Ijarah securities since its maiden offering on April 6, 2006.

Total holdings of Brunei government sukuk outstanding until April 14, 2016 stands at BND575 million.

UTB unveils new logo

The Borneo Bulletin reported April 19, 2016 that the Universiti Teknologi Brunei (UTB) has unveiled its new official logo.

KUPU SB signs MOU with AsTEN

The Borneo Bulletin reported April 21, 2016 that the Kolej Universiti Perguruan Ugama Seri Begawan (KUPU SB) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Association of Southeast Asian Teachers Education Network (AsTEN) at the University of Social Sciences and Humanities in Ho Chi Minh, Vietnam.

Membership with AsTEN gives KUPU SB the recognition as being one of the region's religious institutions of higher learning.

AsTEN is an association network to connect higher education institutions in ASEAN, and KUPU SB is one of the members of AsTEN that represents Brunei Darussalam.

Members of AsTEN will cooperate in related education issues, particularly teacher education and at the same time, strengthen cooperation in the field of teaching research among AsTEN members.

Brunei becomes signatory to UN convention on disabled persons

The Brunei Times reported April 21, 2016 that Brunei has ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities after becoming signatory in 2007.

The government has ratified the convention on April 11, 2016 and it will come into force officially on May 11, 2016.

Brunei signs agreement on global climate change

Brunei has signed the Paris Agreement on Climate Change on April 22, 2016.

Brunei issues more sharia-compliant bond (sukuk)

The Autoriti Monetari Brunei Darussalam (AMBD) has issued a BND100 million sukuk (sharia-compliant bond) on April 28, 2016 at a rental rate of 1.03 per cent with maturity date on July 28, 2016 (based on a 91-day tenor).

This is the 130th sukuk issuance.

With this issuance, the government has issued BND9.705 billion worth of short-term Sukuk Al-Ijarah securities since its maiden offering on April 6, 2006.

Total holdings of Brunei government sukuk outstanding until April 28, 2016 stands at BND575 million.

Brunei opens Defence Academy

Brunei has opened the Royal Brunei Armed Forces Defence Academy on April 28, 2016. The Academy sits on a 150-acre state property in Kampung Tanah Jambu.

UBD signs MOU with State Street

The Universiti Brunei Darussalam (UBD) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the financial services firm, State Street Brunei Sendirian Berhad on April 28, 2016 to promote financial literacy among local students.

UBD and State Street will implement several programmes including a stock pitch contest to help students understand stock investment, a series of lectures by State Street's executives and internship opportunities at State Street's Brunei office.

Brunei upgrades Progressif key licences

Progressif Cellular Sendirian Berhad (PCSB) announced May 3, 2016 the upgrade of two critical licences, which will allow the company to start officially its next major phase of network improvements and systems development. The licences will also enable the company to introduce capacity into the network and launch a new suite of innovative products and services in the coming months.

PCSB expects the licences to enable it to develop from a mobile only company to a fully converged telecommunication company.

The licences permit PCSB to deploy and operate infrastructure such as microwave transmission and fibre optic cables that are key to improving data performance of the mobile network, as well as the right to resell the services of another Brunei telecommunication company.

UBD signs MOU with APEN

The Brunei Times reported May 4, 2016 that Universiti Brunei Darussalam (UBD) will be collaborating with the Asia Professional Education Network-Japan ASEAN Integration Fund (APEN-JAIF) to study how education systems can support the growth of small and medium enterprises (SMES) and to map out the education system.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between UBD and Japan's Advanced Institute of Industrial Technology (AIIT) on these two projects was signed on March 30, 2016. The formal exchange of the documents took place on May 4, 2016.

IBTE, Velosi sign MOU on welding training

The Brunei Times reported that a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed on May 4, 2016 between the Institute of Brunei Technical Education (IBTE) Sultan Bolkiah Campus and Velosi (B) Sendirian Berhad.

Under the MOU, the two signatories will collaborate to share information, educational materials, training and coaching to develop students and employees pursuing a career in welding quality inspection and non-structure testing.

Velosi (B) Sendirian Berhad specialises in welding quality inspections and testing and will provide opportunities to students and staff through industrial attachments at the company.

Brunei launches BDAC

The Brunei Darussalam Arbitration Centre (BDAC) begins operations effective May 8, 2016.

BDAC functions as an alternative to resolve commercial disputes that are normally referred to courts through civil proceedings.

UBD signs MOU with Turkish university

The Universiti Brunei Darussalam (UBD) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Necmettin Erbakan University of Turkey for various collaborative work on Islamic studies on May 11, 2016.

JPMC introduces preimplantation genetic screening

A procedure to boost the success rate of healthy conception through In-Vitro Fertilisation (IVF) will be available in July 2016 after the signing of an agreement between the Jerudong Park Medical Centre (JPMC) and the research and diagnostics firm, Sengenics Sendirian Berhad on May 11, 2016.

IVF treatments could cost from BND8,000 to BND20,000, depending on the patient's case.

Brunei to open the Berakas Health Centre

The Berakas Health Centre will open its door to residents of Mukim Berakas on May 16, 2016, the Borneo Bulletin reported May 14, 2016.

The Berakas Health Centre features primary care services such as outpatient clinic, chronic disease clinic and a flu clinic.

Other facilities include mother and children health services, dental services, pharmaceutical services and special services such as rehabilitation services, psychiatric services, healthy lifestyle clinic, radiology (X-ray) services and paramedical services.

Brunei opens the Berakas Health Centre

Brunei has opened the Berakas Health Centre on May 16, 2016

IBTE awarded ISO certification

The Institute of Brunei Technical Education (IBTE) has been awarded the ISO 9001:2008 Quality Management System (QSM) certification on May 16, 2016.

IBTE is the first post-secondary educational institution in Brunei to receive the ISO 9001:2008 QMS certification.

UNISSA collaborates with the University of Sharjah

The Universiti Islam Sultan Sharif Ali (UNISSA) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the University of Sharjah, the Borneo Bulletin reported on May 17, 2016.

Under the MOU, the two universities agree to cooperate in academic fields, mobility of students/staff programme in the field of Islam and other areas that can be developed.

IBTE campus name changes

The Brunei Times reported May 17, 2016 on the name change of the IBTE campus.

Previous designation of technical and vocational institutions	New designation of the IBTE institutions
Maktab Teknik Sultan Saiful Rijal	IBTE Sultan Saiful Rijal Campus
Maktab Kejuruteraan Jefri Bolkiah	IBTE Jefri Bolkiah Campus
Sekolah Vokasional Nakhoda Ragam	IBTE Nakhoda Ragam Campus
Sekolah Vokasional Sultan Bolkiah	IBTE Sultan Bolkiah Campus
Sekolah Vokasional Wasan	IBTE Agro-Technology Campus
Sekolah Perdagangan	IBTE Business Campus
Pusat Latihan Mekanik	IBTE Mechanical Campus

Paediatric Development Services operational at RIPAS Hospital

The Paediatric Development Services, previously known as the Child Development Centre (CDC), will be fully operational at the Raja Isteri Pengiran Anak Saleha (RIPAS) Hospital on June 1, 2016, The Brunei Times reported on May 18, 2016.

Land Department applications now available online

The Ministry of Development announced May 18, 2016 that advocate services or third parties who intend to apply for land applications must now submit them online.

The Land Application Registration Information System (LARIS) enables land owners or advocates to submit land applications to the Land Department at the Ministry of Development through an online process.

The types of land applications made online are land ownership transfer, change of land title special condition, land changed to financial institutions, lease of private land and lease renewal for private land.

Brunei issues more sharia-compliant bond (sukuk)

The Autoriti Monetari Brunei Darussalam (AMBD) has issued a BND20 million sukuk (sharia-compliant bond) on May 19, 2016 at a rental rate of 0.9375 per cent with maturity date on February 16, 2017 (based on a 273-day tenor).

This is the 131st sukuk issuance.

With this issuance, the government has issued BND9.725 billion worth of short-term Sukuk Al-Ijarah securities since its maiden offering on April 6, 2006.

Total holdings of Brunei government sukuk outstanding until May 19, 2016 stands at BND295 million.

AMBD introduces inter-bank retail payments

Brunei's central bank, the Autoriti Monetari Brunei Darussalam (AMBD), will implement the Brunei Automated Clearing House (BACH) that allows inter-bank electronic retail payments and bulk electronic clearing of payments.

The BACH implementation marks the second phase of the National Payment and Settlement Systems, after Brunei's first electronic interbank payment system, the Real Time Gross Settlement System was implemented in November 2014.

BACH is expected to go live May 26, 2016, beginning with cheque processing.

Brunei and Russia sign agreement to promote culture and the arts

Brunei and Russia have signed the Memorandum of Cooperation to intensify the process of learning, exchange of information and experience in areas of culture and the arts on May 20, 2016.

The agreement was signed during the meeting of culture ministers held on the sidelines of the 20th Asean-Russia Commemorative Summit in Sochi, Russia.

Submarine cable links Brunei with East Malaysian economies

Brunei International Gateway (BIG) Sendirian Berhad has signed an agreement with Common Tower Technologies Sendirian Berhad (CTTSB) to land a new Labuan-Brunei Submarine Cable in Tungku, Brunei on May 25, 2016.

The new Labuan-Brunei Submarine Cable (LBC) will be landed at Tungku in Brunei and Kiamsam, Labuan.

The cable is owned by CTTSB, a wholly owned subsidiary of Warisan Harta Sabah Sendirian Berhad, which is the investment arm of the Sabah state government that owns and manages one of the largest network infrastructure facilities in Sabah.

The LBC system involves the construction of a new cable system across the Brunei Bay off the South China Sea as per the current global specifications.

The project is expected to be completed by the third quarter of 2016 and its primary aim is to gain access to international Internet gateways and capacity via BIG's Asia America Gateway (AAG), Southeast Asia Japan Cable System (SJC) and Southeast Asia-Middle East-Western Europe 3 (SMW3), with an option for further upgrades in the future.

Established in 2009, BIG is a member of the consortium for the Asia-America Gateway Cable System as well as the Southeast Asia Japan Cable System.

BIG currently provides international telecommunication carriers and digital content providers with wholesale bandwidth through Brunei fibre optic submarine cable systems, which offer extended connectivity and network diversity between the commercial centres of Southeast Asia, Hong Kong, Japan and the United States of America.

BIG is a joint venture company between the government investment vehicle, Broketon Sendirian Berhad and telecommunication providers, Telekom Brunei (TelBru) Berhad and DST International (B) Sendirian Berhad.

The government-linked company has been incorporated in August 2009 to take the role in investment and membership in the AAG, which is a cable system that runs over 20,000 kilometres connecting Southeast Asia with the United States of America.

IBTE establishes two networks of schools

The Institute of Brunei Technical Education (IBTE) announced May 27, 2016 the formation of two networks of schools.

The two networks of schools are intended to provide an effective and efficient management system for the campuses under IBTE.

In practice, this means the seven training centres under IBTE are restructured into two networks of schools known as 'IBTE Central' and 'IBTE Satellite', which are further divided into nine schools that are clustered according to the areas of specialisation.

IBTE Central comprises the following:

1. School of Aviation
2. School of Business
3. School of Building Technology Services
4. School of Energy and Engineering Central
5. School of Hospitality and Tourism
6. School of ICT

IBTE Satellite comprises the following:

1. School Energy and Engineering Satellite
2. Brunei Maritime Academy
3. School of Agro-Technology and Applied Sciences

Financial Planning Association of Brunei Darussalam launched

The Financial Planning Association of Brunei Darussalam (FPAB) was launched on May 28, 2016.

Total Debt Service Ratio (TDSR)

The Total Debt Service Ratio (TDSR) was implemented on June 8, 2015.

It measures the total monthly debt obligations as a proportion of an individual's net monthly income. It is meant to prevent an individual from borrowing beyond his financial means.

With the TDSR in place, all banks and financial companies in Brunei now have to assess a customer's TDSR, credit history through credit reports from AMBD's Credit Bureau before giving any loan of financing to the customer in order to ensure that banks or finance companies are giving loans only to customers who can afford to repay.

Brunei introduces the new Companies Act

The Ministry of Finance has introduced the Companies Act (Amendment) Order 2016 that features further protection for minority shareholders in a company to existing legislation.

The law also introduced the Companies (Corporate Governance) (Public Companies) Rules 2016. The Order and Rules take effect from May 30, 2016.

The introduction of corporate governance rules for public companies aims to facilitate effective entrepreneurial and prudent management that can deliver the long-term success of the company, thus promoting investor confidence.

The new amendments include provisions for personal remedies in cases of discrimination and injustice. It also listed the requirement for public companies to have an audit committee and to have a majority of independent directors on their board.

PUJA signs pact with counterparts

The Brunei Times reported June 1, 2016 that a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed between the Brunei Institution of Surveyors, Engineers and Architects (PUJA), Surveyor Division and their counterparts in Indonesia, the Philippines and Singapore.

The MOU enables the signatories to recognise mutual interest and benefits in area of technical information sharing and continual professional development.

The MOU was signed on the sidelines of the 20th Pacific Association of Quantity Surveyors (PAQS).

PUJA Surveyor Division signed the MOU with Ikatan Quantity Surveyors Indonesia, the Philippine Institute of Certified Quantity Surveyors and the Singapore Institute of Surveyors and Valuers.

Brunei issues more sharia-compliant bond (sukuk)

The Autoriti Monetari Brunei Darussalam (AMBD) has issued a BND100 million sukuk (sharia-compliant bond) on June 2, 2016 at a rental rate of 0.8125 per cent with maturity date on September 1, 2016 (based on a 91-day tenor).

This is the 132nd sukuk issuance.

With this issuance, the government has issued BND9.825 billion worth of short-term Sukuk Al-Ijarah securities since its maiden offering on April 6, 2006.

Total holdings of Brunei government sukuk outstanding until June 2, 2016 stands at BND395 million.

Ministry of Health joins global network

The Borneo Bulletin reported June 4, 2016 that the Ministry of Health and Imperial College, London exchanged Letters of Agreement for the participation in the Leading Health Systems Network (LHSN).

LHSN is a joint initiative of Imperial College in partnership with the World Innovation Summit for Health. It is a collaborative network of healthcare leaders and

organisations dedicated to improving healthcare delivery by using available resources effectively.

The network brings together the best ideas, models of care and strategies to drive sustained improvement, and connects healthcare leaders to a community of peers that share the same goals and challenges.

Participation in LHSN is a key activity towards meeting the ministry's strategic priorities for the next five years: to make health everyone's business, to prevent and control non-communicable diseases and to deliver excellent quality services through alignment and consolidation.

The exchange of letters was conducted on May 27, 2016 during a study visit to Imperial College Institute of Global Health Innovation by a delegation from the Ministry of Health.

First local firm to have certified paddy seeds

Local company, Syarikat Pakatan Mekar Hijau (SPMH) Sendirian Berhad, is to produce the first certified seeds that will supply paddy producers in Brunei with high purity and high yielding paddy seeds, the Borneo Bulletin reported June 13, 2016.

SPMH was awarded 10 hectares of land on July 7, 2014 and to date it is the only company that comes close to achieve the goal of producing the first Brunei-made certified seeds.

Halal permit obtainable within 45 days

The Council of Islamic Religion of Brunei Darussalam (known locally by its initials, MUIB) and the Halal Food Control Division of the Sharia Affairs Department, Ministry of Religious Affairs announced June 15, 2016 that both organisations are committed to issuing Halal certification and Halal permits within 45 calendar days for each application.

The purple Halal certification logo is given by MUIB to certify that food service industry premises and products follow the Brunei Halal standards.

Brunei launches the Defence Science and Technology Policy Framework

The Ministry of Defence has launched the Defence Science and Technology Policy Framework (DSTPF) on June 21, 2016.

The DSTPF outlines strategies for partnerships with industries, institutes of higher learning and other government agencies.

Brunei revamps public transport system

The Land Transport Department (known locally by its initials, JPD) of the Ministry of Communications has implemented initiatives to create a public transport system that

is regulated, efficient, reliable, well connected, 'people-centric', safe and sustainable, the Borneo Bulletin reported on June 23, 2016.

The project begins on the third quarter of 2016 for taxis and by mid-2017 for buses.

To improve the connectivity and accessibility of public buses, JPD has revamped the nationwide bus route network from the existing 29 routes to 42 main bus routes comprising 28 main bus routes in Brunei-Muara, five in the Kuala Belait-Seria area, two in Tutong, two in Temburong and five inter-district routes.

To further increase connectivity and accessibility, 21 feeder bus services for residential areas will also be introduced.

UBD signs MOU with HK PolyU

The Universiti Brunei Darussalam (UBD) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and a Student Exchange Agreement with the Hong Kong Polytechnic University (HK PolyU) on June 22, 2016 to formalise the on-going collaborations between the two institutions of higher learning and to initiate university-wide student exchanges.

The student exchange agreement formalises the exchange of students between the two universities. The university-level agreement will expand the scope of the student mobility that a previous faculty-level agreement signed in 2015 had already started.

The recently signed agreement allows UBD students to undertake their study abroad programme in PolyU during their mandatory third year out of the university (also known as the Discovery Year) and PolyU students to participate in UBD's inbound mobility programmes.

Foreign Office launches new website on trade-related information

The Department of Trade Development of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MOFAT) has launched a new website that provides the public access to trade-related information in Brunei on June 28, 2016.

The Brunei Darussalam National Trade Repository (BDNTR) website (www.bdntr.gov.bn) contains details such as import tariffs, rules of origin, non-tariff measures, procedures and documentary requirements.

Other details include information on trade agreements in which Brunei is signatory state.

Brunei opens the Telisai-Lumut Highway

The government has opened the BND168 million Telisai-Lumut Highway on June 28, 2016. The 18.6-kilometre highway is in the Belait District.

Brunei and China establish aquaculture joint venture

A Chinese aquaculture company is establishing a joint venture (JV) with a Brunei partner to cultivate and export golden pompano fish with an output worth BND300 million per year.

The Chinese company, Guangxi Hiseaton Foods will partner with a government-linked company to operate an offshore aquaculture farm in the coastal waters of Pelong Rocks later this year.

The Minister of Primary Resources and Tourism announced on July 2, 2016.

Brunei establishes association to attract more Chinese investment

The Chinese Enterprise Association in Brunei (CEAB) has been launched on July 18, 2016.

Membership is opened to Chinese enterprises doing business in Brunei as well as Brunei businesses that have interests in China as associate members.

Ports Department reduces charges

The Ports Department is enforcing a 36 per cent reduction of import and export laden container charges, effective August 1, 2016, the Borneo Bulletin reported July 25, 2016.

The specific reductions are on stevedorage charges accounted to shipping agents, and the Load-On Load-Off (LOLO) and wharfage charges accounted to forwarders. These are some of the charges borne by consignees for services rendered at the Muara Container Terminal.

The port charges reduction will be enforced at the Muara Container Terminal as part of the initiative to boost local industries by lowering logistics costs and for Muara Port to remain competitive with sub-regional ports within the BIMP-EAGA region.

On top of the port charges reduction, the Ports Department has extended the Free Storage period for all import and export containers. The extension from two days to five is expected to save storage costs for consignees and consignors as longer periods allow ample time for permit approval processing.

The Ports Department will continue to ensure that the transfer of containers will remain smooth and without disruption.

Brunei to set up the Port and Maritime Authority

The Ministry of Communications will soon establish a Port and Maritime Authority to oversee the regulation of ports and vessels in Brunei.

The Marine Department and Ports Department will be merged to create this new body, and that the government's role will shift from being ports operator to ports regulator.

KUPU SB introduces new programmes

The Kolej Universiti Perguruan Ugama Seri Begawan (KUPU SB) has introduced five new programmes after carrying out extensive research with a number of international education institutions, The Brunei Times reported July 28, 2016.

The programmes are to take place immediately for the academic year 2016/2017.

Supply and State Stores Department absorbed into the Treasury Department

The Ministry of Finance announced July 30, 2016 that the Supply and State Stores Department will be absorbed into the Financial Services and Supply Division of the Treasury Department effective August 1, 2016.

Brunei issues more sharia-compliant bond (sukuk)

The Autoriti Monetari Brunei Darussalam (AMBD) has issued a BND100 million sukuk (sharia-compliant bond) on July 28, 2016 at a rental rate of 0.625 per cent with maturity date on October 27, 2016 (based on a 91-day tenor).

This is the 133rd sukuk issuance.

With this issuance, the government has issued BND9.925 billion worth of short-term Sukuk Al-Ijarah securities since its maiden offering on April 6, 2006.

Total holdings of Brunei government sukuk outstanding until July 28, 2016 stands at BND395 million.

Brunei develops Collateral Registry System

The Autoriti Monetari Brunei Darussalam (AMBD) has signed a contract with IOS Partners to develop a Collateral Registry System that will allow the online registration of financial statements, The Brunei Times reported July 30, 2016.

AMBD says that registered users such as financial institutions and other agencies can use the online registry to retrieve information on debtors, the secured party and the description of the collateral. Consequently, this will reduce the risk of giving credit and cost of obtaining a loan.

The Secured Transactions Order (STO), 2016 has been gazetted in February 2016 and the Collateral Registry Office has been set up under Section 6 of this law.

The aim of this office is to maintain a register of security interests in personal property. This law will provide the framework for retrieving an interest in personal property in order to secure an obligation. In addition, it also facilitates the granting and obtaining of credit.

“The creation of a Collateral Registry System provides a modernised or effective means of searching for prior security interests, which previously lacked transparency,” says AMBD.

In addition, the Collateral Registry System and the STO will enable entrepreneurs to leverage their assets in order to obtain credit for growth.

In practice, this means that the CRS will centralise all moveable property (assets), which are secured for loans, and subsequently, facilitate and encourage the flow of credit.

The system will merge the registration of bill of sale (a certificate of transfer of personal property, used as security for debt), company charges, motor vehicles, certain types of ships and aircraft from the government department into a single registry.

This system will go live in December 2016.

Brunei issues more sharia-compliant bond (sukuk)

The Autoriti Monetari Brunei Darussalam (AMBD) has issued a BND60 million sukuk (sharia-compliant bond) on August 4, 2016 at a rental rate of 0.8125 per cent with maturity date on February 2, 2017 (based on a 182-day tenor).

This is the 134th sukuk issuance.

With this issuance, the government has issued BND9.985 billion worth of short-term Sukuk Al-Ijarah securities since its maiden offering on April 6, 2006.

Total holdings of Brunei government sukuk outstanding until August 4, 2016 stands at BND455 million.

Brunei lowers security deposit rates for foreign workers

The Borneo Bulletin reported August 8, 2016 that the government is reducing the security deposit rates for bringing in foreign workers to Brunei effective September 1, 2016. The government will also introduce a new method for companies to pay the deposit.

Under the Labour Law (Chapter 93) and Employment Order 2009, any employer who employs foreign workers is required to pay a deposit to the Labour Commissioner for the purpose of financing the cost of compensation to the government, such as the workers' cost of living, housing, medical and repatriation to their nation-state of origin should there be any dispute and/or when required by the commissioner.

The new payment procedure, the Foreign Worker Takaful Insurance Guarantee (known locally as the Jaminan Insurans/Takaful Pekerja Asing – JIPTA) will complement the two existing ways of deposit payment: via cash and banker's guarantee.

The new insurance payment option is available only for companies who received special approval and have completed the BUR500 form, and does not apply to domestic helper services.

The payment of security deposit for domestic helper services remains via cash only.

Brunei introduces self-certified sick leave for public sector personnel

Civil servants will be able to take self-certified paid sick leave for up to six days a year starting September 1, 2016, The Brunei Times reported August 9, 2016.

UNISSA signs MOU with international counterpart

The Universiti Islam Sultan Sharif Ali (UNISSA) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Kolej Universiti Insaniah (KUIN), Kedah Darul Aman, Malaysia, the Borneo Bulletin reported August 11, 2016.

The MOU enables both institutions of higher learning to establish cooperation in academic field, student and staff mobility programme and research in fields such as Islamic studies.

Kolej Universiti Insaniah is owned by the state of Kedah Darul Aman and registered under Malaysia's Ministry of Higher Education.

Kolej Universiti Insaniah was formerly known as the Institut Agama Islam Negeri Kedah Darul Aman (INSANIAH). The early objective of the institution was to produce more Islamic-related professionals that could lead communities and expand Islamic knowledge, and also to assist religious school graduates to continue to pursue higher level of education.

INSANIAH was upgraded to university college status on May 15, 2006.

Brunei dissolves the State Legislative Council

The Department of the Councils of State announced August 11, 2016 that Brunei has dissolved the State Legislative Council, effective August 6, 2016 under the Clause (1) Article 55 of the Brunei Darussalam Constitution 1959.

UTB joins ATU-Net and renews link with UTM

The Borneo Bulletin reported August 13, 2016 that the Universiti Teknologi Brunei (UTB) has become one of the founding members of the Asia Technological University Network (ATU-Net) together with other universities from Malaysia, Thailand, Republic of Korea, Japan, Indonesia, India and China. The network was officially launched on August 9, 2016 at the 8th University Presidents Forum (UPF) 2016 held at the Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM).

ATU-Net aims to strengthen the efforts of the participating universities and create active and effective alliances in research and education through the UPF.

UTB also renewed its formal link with UTM on the same day by signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that provides a platform for academic and

research collaborations, including staff and student mobility between the two universities.

Brunei introduces newest rice variety

The Brunei Times reported August 13, 2016 that the Department of Agriculture and Agrifood (DAA) has confirmed that the Brunei Darussalam Rice 5 (BDR5) is viable for commercial production.

The new rice variety has undergone trials in order to assess its sustainability for large-scale planting, which includes multi-location and up-scaling trials.

The BDR5 is a new type of inbred rice. It was previously reported that the BDR5 is a cross-breed between the Laila rice (a modern variety rice) and Beras Pusu (a popular traditional rice variety).

This new rice variety has inherited the drought-tolerant characteristics of the traditional rice but also has the higher yield of modern rice varieties, with three to five metric tonnes per hectare.

The growth duration of the BDR5 is 140 days – longer than the other modern rice varieties.

Laila and the MRQ76 have growth durations of 105 days and 120 days respectively.

Brunei amends land code

The Brunei Times reported August 14, 2016 that the government has gazetted the amended Land Code that bans non-Brunei citizens from buying or transferring land through the power of attorney (PA) or trust deeds.

The Land Code (Amendment) Order 2016 has been gazetted on June 2, 2016 but the revised laws will become effective only at a later date.

Previously the PA was the main method of property ownership for foreign investors and permanent residents, who can use PA's written authorisation for someone to act on an individual's behalf in private or business affairs to buy property.

The amendment on Section 32A of the Land Code says that land cannot be purchased by a buyer as nominee on behalf of another person.

Among the provisions of the amended Land Code include the following: "No person shall authorise or appoint as his nominee any person to purchase or acquire any estate or interest in any land with the intention that such person shall hold it on trust for himself or another person."

Non-citizens can still buy housing development under the strata title, whether 'vertical or conventional houses.'

Under the Land Code Strata Act (Chapter 189), a strata title can be issued as long as two or more units are built together on the same land either vertically or horizontally.

This means non-citizens cannot buy land and house, which is a landed property if it is not under the strata title.

The validity of property ownership under Brunei's strata title is 99 years.

UNISSA signs MOU with Indonesian universities

The Borneo Bulletin reported August 17, 2016 that the Universiti Islam Sultan Sharif Ali (UNISSA) has signed Memoranda of Understanding (MOUS) with two Indonesian universities: the Universitas Islam Sultan Agung (UNISSULA) Semarang and the Universitas Islam Nahdlatul 'Ulama (UNISNU) Jepara.

Brunei issues more sharia-compliant bond (sukuk)

The Autoriti Monetari Brunei Darussalam (AMBD) has issued a BND100 million sukuk (sharia-compliant bond) on August 18, 2016 at a rental rate of 0.6875 per cent with maturity date on November 17, 2016 (based on a 91-day tenor).

This is the 135th sukuk issuance.

With this issuance, the government has issued BND10.085 billion worth of short-term Sukuk Al-Ijarah securities since its maiden offering on April 6, 2006.

Total holdings of Brunei government sukuk outstanding until August 18, 2016 stands at BND555 million.

Brunei becomes graduated member of ADB

Brunei has become a graduated member of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on August 18, 2016.

The MOU paves the way for Brunei's classification as a graduated developing member-state. It identifies new areas of ADB support for the government's strategic development plan, Vision 2035.

Under the MOU, ADB will assist Brunei in the following:

1. Knowledge creation and capacity development to enhance education quality
2. Empower institutions
3. Boost private sector development
4. Diversify exports
5. Improve the investment climate
6. Strengthen environmental protection
7. Support regional economic cooperation

Brunei became the 65th member of ADB in April 2006.

In March 2013 the Board of Directors of the ADB approved the classification of Brunei as a graduated developing member state, effective upon the signing of a partnership MOU.

ADB provided Brunei its first reimbursable technical assistance in 2008. This assistance supported the development of the capital market and a modernised payment and settlement system, which had been completed in 2009.

As a member of the ASEAN Economic Community and the Brunei Darussalam-Indonesia-Malaysia-Philippines-East ASEAN Growth Area (BIMP-EAGA) sub-regional cooperation programme, Brunei is committed to increasing regional trade and cooperation.

Since its formation in 1994 BIMP-EAGA has helped its members to facilitate the free movement of people, goods and services and make better use of common infrastructure and natural resources. ADB provides advisory support to the BIMP-EAGA.

ADB, based in Manila, is dedicated to reducing poverty in Asia and the Pacific through inclusive economic growth, environmentally sustainable growth and regional integration.

Established in 1966, ADB will mark 50 years of development partnership in the region in December 2016. It is owned by 67 members: 48 from the region.

Bandar Seri Begawan declared ASEAN City of Culture

Brunei's capital, Bandar Seri Begawan, has been declared the ASEAN City of Culture for two years, effective August 24, 2016.

The ASEAN City of Culture initiative aims to strengthen the identity and culture of arts in promoting a dynamic and harmonious ASEAN community.

Brunei and Vietnam enhance cooperation

Brunei and Vietnam have signed two Memoranda of Understanding (MOUS) on August 27, 2016.

The first is the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on Economic and Trade Cooperation between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Brunei Darussalam and the Ministry of Industry and Trade of Vietnam.

The second is the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on Cultural Cooperation.

Brunei signs defence accord with Singapore

Brunei and Singapore have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on Defence Technology Cooperation on August 29, 2016.

MOF Treasury Department implements Facilities Rental System

The Borneo Bulletin reported August 31, 2016 that the Treasury Department of the Ministry of Finance is set to implement the Facilities Rental System (FRS) through a public private partnership in cooperation with Telekom Brunei Berhad (TelBru).

The project will be implemented through a pilot project starting August 31, 2016. The public, especially those intending to rent facilities operated by government organisations such as soccer fields, halls and other sports facilities could make a reservation to use them by logging on to the website, www.12book.com.bn.

Apart from making a reservation, users could also make payments online in addition to accessing more information provided by government organisations in question including the applicable rental rates.

Brunei launches the Halal cosmetic products guidelines

The Brunei Times reported September 1, 2016 that the government has launched the 'Brunei Darussalam Guidelines for the Manufacturing and Handling of Halal Cosmetic Products'.

The 41-page book has been published by the Technical Committee on the Development of National Standards and/or Guidelines for Halal Cosmetic Products of the Council of Islamic Religion of Brunei Darussalam.

Brunei and Thailand enhance cooperation on health

The Ministry of Health of Brunei Darussalam and BNH Medical Centre Limited of Thailand have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on September 1, 2016 to enhance the existing cooperation in the field of health.

The MOU enables the exchange of medical professionals, joint projects in medical research, joint seminars and training programmes, and the transfer of patients to undergo treatment at the BNH Medical Centre Limited.

Commercial Court hears disputes with claim up to BND300K

The Brunei Times reported September 7, 2016 that the Commercial Court will hear commercial disputes with claims of up to BND300,000.

The Commercial Court has the same level of authority as the Intermediate Court: judges of the Intermediate Court preside over the Commercial Court's sessions.

AMBD signatory of the IOSCO

The Brunei Times reported September 7, 2016 that the Autoriti Monetari Brunei Darussalam (AMBD), Brunei's central bank, is signatory to the International Organisation of Securities Commissions (IOSCO) Multilateral Memorandum of Understanding (MMOU) since March 4, 2016.

Brunei signs cooperative agreements with China

Brunei has signed several cooperative agreements with companies from the People's Republic of China on September 12, 2016 on the occasion of the 13th China-ASEAN Expo (CAEXPO).

The first was a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Brunei Economic Development Board (BEDB) and the Shenglong New Energy Automobile Co Ltd. The MOU allows for the proposed investment to develop a manufacturing and assembly plant for electric and new energy powered vehicles (i.e., mopeds, renewable cars, buses and engines) in Brunei.

Shenglong Energy Automobile Co Ltd has extensive capabilities and experience in manufacturing electric vehicles and is a new entity formed for the potential projects in Brunei.

The second was the signing of a Term Sheet between Darussalam Assets Sendirian Berhad and the Guangxi Beibu Gulf International Port Group Co Ltd for the establishment of a Joint Venture Company to operate and develop the Muara Port in Brunei.

Beibu has interest to develop Muara Port into a world class international port. It is also keen to look at the expansion of the port activities on Pulau Muara Besar together with the development of a Free Trade Zone (FTZ) and Industrial Park there.

The third was the signing on a Non-Binding MOU between the BEDB and Guangxi Zhongli Enterprise Group for the establishment of an integrated oyster cultivation and processing centre in Brunei.

Zhongli is one of the largest private companies in Guangxi province with experience of over 30 years in ceramics, real estate, finance, biotechnology and aquaculture. In 2014 Zhongli started venturing into the oyster industry through a strategic alliance with Qingzhou Haihua Industry Tech Company.

The two companies hope to expand their operations by undertaking value-added processing of oysters including processing of oyster sauce, dried oysters and oyster-related snacks by capitalising on the Brunei Halal brand and certification.

The fourth was the signing of a Letter of Intent between the Strategic Development Capital of the Ministry of Finance (Brunei) and the Guangxi Ruian Logistics (Group) Co Ltd for the processing and trading of Brunei Halal certified spices.

Established in 2014, Ruian is in the business of trading and logistics (shipping agency, land transportation and freight). The group is also involved in the trading of spices in which it supplies 75 per cent of cinnamon and 40 per cent of star anise spices to the world.

Ruian is also keen to expand its processing operations and look into higher value products that can be used in the health supplements and pharmaceutical industry.

The fifth was the signing of an MOU with Respect to the Offshore Sea Caged Farming and Processing Project in Brunei between the BEDB and Guangxi Hiseaton Foods Co Ltd.

Since its first visit in 2015 Guangxi Hiseaton Food Co Ltd has been facilitated by various agencies under the Brunei government to finalise the project proposal, obtain project approval and project implementation.

A group of Chinese scientists and experts in aquaculture will be invited to Brunei in September 2016 by the Guangxi Hiseaton Food Co Ltd for the establishment of the Brunei China Aquaculture Research Centre (BCARC).

The objective of the BCARC is to enhance the academic exchange between Brunei and China in the hope to retain key research and development achievements and intellectual properties in Brunei.

Brunei introduces environment-friendly agriculture courses next year

The Institute of Brunei Technical Education School of Agro-Technology and Applied Sciences announced September 10, 2016 that it will be introducing subjects on self-sustainable and environmentally friendly agricultural methods in its Higher National Technical Education Certificate (HNTec) in Agrotechnology course next year.

Subjects on agroforestry and permaculture will feature the teaching of organic and self-sustainable agricultural systems.

The School will introduce a new subject called permaculture that focuses more on natural and self-sustaining farming, teaching the students how to make use of natural resources for fertilisers and pesticides.

Agroforestry is similar to permaculture, with more emphasis on land-use management that combines and integrates forest landscapes with agricultural landscapes to prevent forest fragmentation.

Building and construction authority accepts plans from Qualified Persons only

The Authority for Building Control and Construction Industry (ABCi) of the Ministry of Development will accept plans submitted by Qualified Persons only, effective October 1, 2016, the Borneo Bulletin reported September 14, 2016.

With the enforcement of the Building Control Order (BCO), 2014 starting November 1, 2015, only Qualified Persons could submit plans for development approvals.

According to this law, Qualified Persons comprise architects or professional engineers who are registered and have practising certificates under the Architects, Professional Engineers and Quantity Surveyors Order (APEQSO), 2011 enforced since September 13, 2012.

Those who are not Qualified Persons such as draughtsmen who have the necessary qualifications are required to register as Qualified Persons and obtain practising certificate under APEQSO to continue to provide their services.

Alternatively, they could serve under the direction or supervision of a registered architect who has in force a practising certificate as provided by the APEQSO.

The objective of enforcing the BCO is to ensure the health and safety of the public through the control of building development.

BCO provides for Qualified Persons and Builders to be responsible for ensuring that the building works carried out comply with the standards and regulations.

For the purpose of implementing the BCO, draughtsmen who are not Qualified Persons are allowed temporarily to submit plans but limited to completing the on-going projects only that still had contractual obligation with their clients.

In this regard, draughtsmen are requested to submit to ABCi before October 1st 2016 a list of their on-going projects together with copies of their contracts with clients.

New submissions of plans not prepared by Qualified Persons will not be accepted from October 1, 2016.

Takaful Brunei introduces Takaful Guarantee for Foreign Workers

The Borneo Bulletin reported September 17, 2016 that the Islamic insurance company, Takaful Brunei Darussalam Sendirian Berhad (Takaful Brunei), has introduced the Takaful Guarantee for Foreign Workers for companies that employ substantial number of foreign workers (excluding domestic maids).

Under the Department of Labour regulations as reported by the Borneo Bulletin on August 8, 2016 an employer is required to provide a security deposit for the employing foreign workers.

The Takaful Guarantee for Foreign Workers is Takaful Brunei Am (TBA) product, which is relevant to the new deposit method (known locally as the Jaminan Insurans/ Takaful Pekerja Asing or JIPTA) as an alternative to cash deposit and banker's guarantee to the Labour Department for the employment of foreign workers.

The Takaful Guarantee for Foreign Workers covers payment for the repatriation expenses of foreign workers in the event employers fail to repatriate their foreign workers to their country of origin. It also covers the payment for daily subsistence, accommodation and medical expenses as required by the Department of Labour and stipulated in Rule No. 6 of the Labour (Immigrant Workers' Employment Licenses) Rules, Labour Act (Cap 93) and Section 112 of the Employment Order, 2009.

The Takaful Guarantee for Foreign Workers aims to reduce the burden of employers on paying security deposit for their foreign workers in which they now pay the takaful contribution only.

The advantages of having the Takaful Guarantee for Foreign Workers include the following:

1. Employers will pay only a small portion of the guaranteed amount i.e., as takaful contribution (premium)
2. TBA does not require cash collateral unlike when obtaining banker's guarantee
3. Faster approval of application with policy issuance on the spot

Takaful Guarantee for Foreign Workers could also be used for payment of unpaid salaries, which are not afforded by employers in cases of disputes or as instructed by the Department of Labour.

The period of the takaful coverage follows the validity of the Work Pass/Special Approval by the Department of Labour with an additional of six months.

Takaful Guarantee for Foreign Workers in a nutshell...

Takaful Guarantee functions as a payment guarantee to indemnify the Brunei government for the cost of repatriation of foreign workers to their country of origin.

The expenses include:

1. Cost of repatriation
2. Cost of daily subsistence
3. Accommodation
4. Medical expenses

Brunei lowers taxi fares with new meter system

The Ministry of Communications announced September 17, 2016 that it will launch a taxi meter system on September 23, 2016.

The new system will ensure the existing 50 taxi drivers charge regulated and consistent fares.

The meter system will calculate the distance travelled, and the time spent to get from point A to B in the event of traffic congestion.

Under the new taxi meter fare structure, passengers will pay BND3.50 for the first kilometre or minute travelled. The passenger will then pay 20 cents for every 250 metres or 15 seconds travelled thereafter.

A trip for up to a distance of 10 kilometres will now cost BND12, but could increase subject to traffic congestion.

Prior to the introduction of the new taxi meter system, passengers had to pay between BND20 to BND40 for up to 10 kilometres of distance travelled.

Passengers travelling from the Brunei International Airport will pay an extra loading fee of BND3 on top of their taxi fares.

Brunei ratifies Paris global climate agreement

Brunei has ratified the Paris global climate agreement to curb carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions and global temperature rise on September 21, 2016 at the United Nations headquarters in New York.

Brunei issues more sharia-compliant bond (sukuk)

The Autoriti Monetari Brunei Darussalam (AMBD) has issued a BND100 million sukuk (sharia-compliant bond) on September 22, 2016 at a rental rate of 0.7500 per cent with maturity date on March 23, 2017 (based on a 182-day tenor).

This is the 136th sukuk issuance.

With this issuance, the government has issued BND10.185 billion worth of short-term Sukuk Al-Ijarah securities since its maiden offering on April 6, 2006.

Total holdings of Brunei government sukuk outstanding until September 22, 2016 stands at BND455 million.

Brunei and India Islamic universities establish cooperation

The Universiti Islam Sultan Sharif Ali (UNISSA) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Darul Huda Islamic University of Kerala, India on September 23, 2016.

JPMC signs MOU with Malaysian company for cord blood banking services

The Jerudong Park Medical Centre (JPMC) has become partner with Malaysian company, StemLife Berhad to provide cord blood banking services for its patients after the two organisations signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on September 23, 2016.

Under the MOU, JPMC will provide comprehensive cord blood and tissue stem cell collection, transportation and cryopreservation services in Brunei.

Cord blood banking involves collecting blood left in a new-born's umbilical cord and placenta and storing them for future medical use.

By storing the cord blood and the cord tissue, JPMC and StemLife Berhad can preserve the cells with them for potentially a lifetime.

The stem cells extracted from the cord blood and blood tissue can be used for various medical conditions of the baby and the immediate relatives.

The stem cell collection facility has been around in JPMC for about eight years and through this partnership with the Malaysian company, the medical centre hopes to create more public awareness of the service's availability.

In the past JPMC had to direct patients to companies doing stem cell collection. Patients had to collect the materials needed from the companies and bring the materials back to JPMC to do the stem cell collection.

Moveable property could become collateral for loans soon

The Brunei Times reported September 27, 2016 that businesses in Brunei will soon be able to use moveable property including cars, crops and livestock as collateral for loans with financial institutions.

This is made possible through the introduction of the Secured Transaction Order (STO) earlier this year, which paved the way for the establishment of the Collateral Registry System (CRS) by December 2016.

Previously business loans in Brunei require either land or property to serve as collateral. The reforms will allow most moveable property to act as security for a loan, provided the lender deems the item credit-worthy.

CRS and STO do not supersede other regulations like loan caps (total debt service ratio), or change repayment terms or policies set by banks. It simply changes what can act as collateral.

Brunei introduces new licence for foreign worker recruitment

The Brunei Times reported September 27, 2016 that the Ministry of Home Affairs has discontinued the use of the foreign worker labour quota in place of a streamlined foreign work licence.

The new foreign worker licence will have an approval process based on pre-determined ratio of local to foreign workers.

Through the Department of Labour, this new system will come into effect for new companies looking to hire foreign staff on October 1, 2016.

For existing companies looking for additional licences, the process will be introduced in January 2017, whilst the process for renewals of existing licences will be introduced in April 2017.

The new system is a streamlined process of the two existing steps, which involved the Foreign Worker Licence (Quota) application and the Work Pass Recommendation Form (BUR500/BUR555). The two systems have been streamlined and housed under the new system called the Foreign Worker Licence.

Streamlining the process has shortened the overall process from 41 working days to nine, and a reduction of steps under the purview of the Department of Labour from 12 processes to seven.

Brunei introduces new demerit point system for health, beauty businesses

The Brunei Times reported September 27, 2016 that health and beauty establishments that have accumulated 20 demerit points will be shut down immediately after a new assessment system unveiled by the Ministry of Home Affairs.

The new system, known locally as the Penilaian Establismen Kecantikan dan Kesihatan (PEKKa) has been implemented recently to ensure businesses comply with the Health and Beauty Establishment (EKK) Order, which came into effect on January 1, 2016.

Food Import Registration online only starting October 6, 2016

The Ministry of Health announced September 29, 2016 that food importers are required to make their Food Import Registration (FIR) applications of processed food online starting October 6, 2016 when a new online system is introduced.

The ministry said that when the system is implemented next week, paper-based applications will no longer be accepted.

The system is expected to reduce processing time from ten working days to seven.

To use the system, importers must first register for an e-Darussalam account before being required to fill in the online form and upload any accompanying document into the system.

The ministry said that the new online system enables food importers to obtain faster approval for their applications, which will be notified through their e-Darussalam inbox.

With this new system, an administrative processing fee of BND30 for each application will also be introduced, which is payable online using debit or credit cards.

Importers and applicants can access the system at the ministry website, www.moh.gov.bn.

Brunei and Malaysia signed agreement on green technology

Brunei and Malaysia have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on green technology on October 4, 2016.

New foreign worker licence implemented in phases

The Department of Labour announced October 7, 2016 that the new foreign worker licence will be implemented in phases, starting October 1, 2016.

The first phase will apply to new companies only, which have yet to acquire foreign worker licences prior to this month (i.e., October 2016).

The subsequent phases will begin in 2017 with applications for additional licences on January 1, 2017 and renewal or transfer of foreign workers on April 1, 2017.

Any company, which has obtained a foreign worker licence before October 1, 2016 may continue to apply for the BUR 500 (Work Pass Recommendation). The same criteria apply to those whose applications were processed before the start of the month in question.

The issuance of the new foreign worker licences will take into account of a number of factors including supporting documents from relevant government agencies based on the company's respective sector such as a letter of support from the Department of Agriculture and Agrifood for a farming-related company.

Other factors will include verification or supporting letters from the Local Employment and Workforce Development Agency (known locally by its initials, APTK).

The Department of Labour will also consider the number of local workers as indicated by the Employees Trust Fund (known locally by its initials, TAP) e-Amanah documents as well as the local-to-foreign worker ratio applicable to selected sectors.

Other on-going government policies that prioritise the employment of local jobseekers will also be considered.

Brunei joins global trademark registration system

The Brunei Times reported October 8, 2016 that Brunei brand owners will be able to use an international registration system to protect their trademarks in 114 territories across the world starting January 2017.

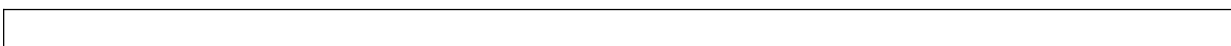
According to the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO), Brunei has become the 98th nation-state to join the Madrid System, which is a one-stop process for registration and management of trademarks worldwide.

The system will enter into force for Brunei on January 6, 2017. From this date trademark owners can file a single application in one language and pay one set of fees in a single currency to register their marks for protection.

Brunei "deposited" its instrument of accession to the Madrid Protocol for the International Registration of Marks on October 6, 2016 through its Permanent Representative in Geneva.

In Brunei, the Brunei Intellectual Property Office (BrulPO) of the Energy and Industry Department, Prime Minister's Office acts as the national office for the registration of trademarks, patents, industrial designs and plant varieties protection.

Brunei's accession to the Madrid System is also part of its commitment to the ASEAN Intellectual Property Action Plan 2011-2015, which expects ASEAN member states to accede to the system by 2015.



Associated news snippets...

Brunei protects intellectual property rights

Brunei has passed five legislations that protect intellectual capital, effective since 2000, in a bid to induce the growth of knowledge-driven enterprises and lessen its dependence on the hydrocarbon sector.

1. Copyright Order 1999.
2. Industrial Designs Order 1999.
3. Layout Designs Order 1999.
4. Trade Marks Act 2000.
5. Trade Marks Rules 2000.

Brunei is 191st CBD member

The Brunei Times reported October 17, 2008 that Brunei Darussalam is the 191st signatory state of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

The Convention on Biological Diversity, known informally as the Biodiversity Convention, is an international treaty that was adopted in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992.

The Convention has three main goals: conservation of biological diversity; sustainable use of its components; and fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from genetic resources.

In a nutshell, its objective is to develop national strategies for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity.

It is often seen as the key document regarding sustainable development.

Brunei Darussalam is one of the few countries that have much its biodiversity still intact because of strict forestry and conservation laws. As of this month, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) in its annual conference in Portugal identified Brunei Darussalam as still having much of its biodiversity.

Only the Asian elephant, orang-utan, proboscis monkey and otter civet are endangered.

There are 157 mammal species in Brunei Darussalam in its forests categorised as central Borneo Montane Forests, Northern Borneo-Palawan Moist Forests, and Sundaland Rivers and Swamps.

Brunei passes law on patent

The Patents Order 2012 becomes effective January 1, 2012 in which the patents office is housed at the Brunei Economic Development Board (BEDB).

The patents law complies with the World Trade Organisation's Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights and takes account of the Free Trade Agreement issues, which are useful in Brunei's Trans Pacific Partnership negotiations.

Brunei strengthens Intellectual Property protection

The Attorney General announced April 26, 2013 that last year Brunei has become part of the Paris Convention and signed the Patent Cooperation Treaty and the Budapest Treaty.

The government has also agreed to accede to the Hague Agreement.

Brunei is also reviewing a stack of other treaties: the Madrid Protocol, WIPO Copyright Treaty (WCT) and WIPO Performances and Phonograms Treaty (WPPT).

Brunei establishes Intellectual Property office

The Brunei Economic Development Board (BEDB) and the Attorney General's Chambers (AGC) announced jointly on June 7, 2013 that the government has transferred the Registry of Trademarks from AGC to the BEDB, effective June 2013.

This is in line with the joint effort between the BEDB and the AGC on the on-going restructuring of the administration of Intellectual property (IP) in Brunei, which includes the setting up of the Brunei Intellectual Property Office (BruiPO) under the BEDB. The restructuring is aimed to foster better policy coordination and enhance the efficiency of Brunei's IP administration.

The transfer of the Registry of Trademarks to the BEDB is a significant development in the expansion of the Patent Registry Office (PRO), which is now known as the Brunei Intellectual Property Office (BruiPO) as it will accept applications for the registration of trademarks in addition to patents and industrial designs.

Starting July 1, 2013 all applications for the registration of trademarks must be lodged at the Registry of Trademarks, Brunei Intellectual Property Office (BruiPO).

The PRO has been established on January 1, 2012.

With the new patent system, Brunei acceded to the Patent Cooperation Treaty (PCT) and the Budapest Treaty on the International Recognition of the Deposit of Microorganisms for the Purposes of Patent Procedure on April 24, 2012.

This has been followed by the transfer of the Registry of Industrial Designs from the AGC to the BEDB on October 1, 2012.

Brunei becomes signatory to international agreement on Intellectual Property

Brunei has become signatory to the Geneva (1999) Act of The Hague Agreement Concerning the International Registration of Industrial Design on September 24, 2013.

The main purpose of the 1999 Act is to provide a simple, rapid and economical procedure to secure and maintain the protection of industrial designs for their owners through a single international registration.

The Hague system provides a mechanism for registering a design in nation-states and/or intergovernmental organisations member of The Hague Agreement.

The mechanism is administered by the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) in Geneva.

The Hague system offers the owner of an industrial design a means of obtaining protection in several nation-states by simply filing one application with the International Bureau of WIPO.

An international registration produces the same effects in each of the designated nation-state, as if the design has been registered directly with each national office.

The Hague system simplifies the management of an industrial design registration since it is possible to record subsequent changes or to renew the registration through a single step with the International Bureau of WIPO.

The Brunei Intellectual Property Office (BruiPO) of the Brunei Economic Development Board (BEDB) is responsible for administering The Hague system, which will be in force from December 24, 2013 after the ratification of Brunei's accession.

Brunei strengthens bilateral relations with Kuwait

Brunei and Kuwait have signed two agreements and four Memoranda of Understanding (MOUS) on October 11, 2016.

1. Agreement between the Government of Brunei Darussalam and the Government of the State of Kuwait on mutual exemption of visa for holders of diplomatic, special and official passports
2. Protocol amending the agreement between the Government of Brunei Darussalam and the Government of the State of Kuwait for the avoidance of double taxation and the prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income
3. Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Government of Brunei Darussalam and the Government of the State of Kuwait on in the field of higher education and scientific research
4. Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Government of Brunei Darussalam and the Government of the State of Kuwait on tourism cooperation

5. Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on establishing a joint commission for cooperation between the Government of Brunei Darussalam and the Government of the State of Kuwait
6. Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Brunei Darussalam and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the State of Kuwait on training

Brunei is hosting the 3rd Joint Committee Meeting (on Economic and Technical Cooperation) from December 5-6, 2016 in Bandar Seri Begawan, which aims to identify and explore deeper cooperation, particularly in trade and investment.

DARe launches new initiatives to help local SMES

The Borneo Bulletin reported October 13, 2016 that Darussalam Enterprise (DARe) has launched two new initiatives to further help local businesses: the Startup Bootcamp and the Microcredit Financing Scheme.

The Startup Bootcamp is a platform for aspiring entrepreneurs and startups to gain knowledge on building a sustainable business for a period of 100 days.

The bootcamp, which has been running since September 27, 2016. At the end of 100 days, there will be a presentation where selected startups and businesses will pitch to investors at home and abroad.

The Microcredit Financing Scheme offers a microcredit facility of up to BND15,000 with a repayment period of up to 36 months for at least 100 startups in Brunei.

Brunei issues more sharia-compliant bond (sukuk)

The Autoriti Monetari Brunei Darussalam (AMBD) has issued a BND38.2 million sukuk (sharia-compliant bond) on October 13, 2016 at a rental rate of 1.1250 per cent with maturity date on October 12, 2017 (based on a 364-day tenor).

This is the 137th sukuk issuance.

With this issuance, the government has issued BND10.2232 billion worth of short-term Sukuk Al-Ijarah securities since its maiden offering on April 6, 2006.

Total holdings of Brunei government sukuk outstanding until August 13, 2016 stands at BND468.2 million.

UBD signs MOU with University of Adelaide

The Pengiran Anak Puteri Rashidah Sa'adatul Bolkiah Institute of Health Sciences (PAPRSB IHS) of the Universiti Brunei Darussalam (UBD) and the University of Adelaide, Australia have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), the Borneo Bulletin reported on October 17, 2016.

The MOU enables more placements for UBD students for their clinical learning experience in continuing their MBBS programme at the University of Adelaide.

UBD and the University of Adelaide will also develop more collaboration in the fields of health sciences and biodiversity. PAPRSB HIS will send its first batch of BHSc Medicine to the University of Adelaide in January 2017.

Brunei renames the Agro-Tech Park

The Borneo Bulletin reported October 20, 2016 that the Agro Technology Park (ATP) has been renamed recently as the Tungku Agriculture Development Area (KKP Tungku) by the Ministry of Primary Resources and Tourism.

Government hotline introduces 'TD123 Live Chat' and 'TD123 Mobile App'

The E-Government National Centre (eGNC) of the Prime Minister's Office announced October 21, 2016 that it has introduced the Darussalam Line 123 (TD123): the 'TD123 Mobile App' and the 'TD123 Live Chat'.

The 'TD123 Mobile App' enables the public to send photographs and keep track of the status of their complaints, in addition to receiving notifications on their smartphones and tablets.

The app is available on iOS and Android and can be downloaded from the App Store and the Google Play store.

The 'TD123 Live Chat' allows the public to use the WhatsApp messaging platform to forward photographs and videos in addition to their queries to +673 8333123.

The two new channels are an extension of the existing hotline via telephone (123), email (info@123.com.bn), website (www.123.gov.bn) and social media (Facebook, Instagram and Twitter).

Darussalam Line 123 is a national contact centre for non-emergency services under various government agencies such as the Department of Electrical Services, Ministry of Development, Ministry of Health, Land Transport Department, Marine Department, e-Darussalam, PSC Recruitment and OneBiz.

UNISSA to offer new sharia diploma course

The Universiti Islam Sultan Sharif Ali (UNISSA) will offer a diploma course in sharia criminal justice system in 2017, the Brunei Times reported October 25, 2016.

Brunei food brand enters China market

Ghanim International Corporation Sendirian Berhad has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Golden Tree Sendirian Berhad and Chinese company, Pure Fresh International Holdings Limited on October 25, 2016.

The MOU enables the integration of the three signatories' competitive advantage for international business development.

Ghanim International Corporation Sendirian Berhad is a state-owned enterprise, which develops, markets and promotes high-quality halal food products under the "bruneihalal" brand with production bases and suppliers across the world.

Golden Tree Sendirian Berhad operates diversified industries with multiple in-depth cooperative resources in Southeast Asia.

Pure Fresh International Holdings Limited is located in the People's Republic of China. The company is the leading O2O (online to offline) fresh product chain platform worldwide, which integrates all resources from global supply chain.

Brunei opens BND20m bioproduction facility

Brunei will be producing natural Astaxanthin, a nutraceutical ingredient from the cultivation of microalgae after launching the Sinar Suria Bio Centre on October 26, 2016.

The BND20-million installation is Brunei's first commercial biotechnology facility.

The facility is run by MC Biotech Sendirian Berhad, a subsidiary of Mitsubishi Corporation and Nissui.

Located at the Bio-Innovation Corridor, MC Biotech will be producing 18 metric tonnes of the biomass each year, which is exported to Japan for final processing.

Brunei adopts accounting standards

The government announced October 26, 2016 that the nation-state will adopt the Brunei Darussalam Accounting Standards (BDAS) for all non-public interest entities, effective January 1, 2018.

The BDAS ensures a higher level of uniformity and consistency in financial reporting among all non-public interest entities.

Through the enforcement of the Accounting Standards Order, 2010, the BDAS was introduced officially in 2011.

KUPU SB signs MOAS with two foreign universities

The Kolej Universiti Perguruan Ugama Seri Begawan (KUPU SB) has signed Memoranda of Agreement (MOAS) with the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) and the Pascasarjana Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN) Bukit Tinggi on October 29, 2016.

Brunei launches iPost mobile app to track mails and parcels

The Postal Services Department has launched a mobile app called, iPost, on October 29, 2016, which allows customers to track their mail and packages 24 hours per day.

Brunei introduces higher fines for traffic offences

The government announced October 31, 2016 that motorists who commit compoundable traffic offences will pay fines up to BND500 starting February 1, 2017.

Seven road violations previously treated as summons cases will become compoundable traffic offences.

Summons cases are processed at the court for conviction whilst compound traffic offences can be fined on the spot by the Police or Land Transport Department or are required to pay the fine within 14 days from the date of the offence.

Compoundable traffic offences will include driving with an invalid, expired vehicle licence or road tax, or without a vehicle licence, driving a car affixed with plastic film on windows or with fixed shades, driving with an invalid driver's licence or without a driver's licence and driving without the consent of the car owner.

The changes are part of the Road Traffic (Composition of Offences) Rules 2016, which replaces the Road Traffic (Compounding of Offences) Rules 1967.

UNISSA signs MOU with IAIN Bukit Tinggi

The Universiti Islam Sultan Sharif Ali (UNISSA) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN) Bukit Tinggi, Indonesia on October 31, 2016.

The MOU enables cooperation involving academicians, student exchange programmes, knowledge sharing, seminars and symposium, research and short-term courses.

Brunei passes law to improve tourism industry

The government announced November 2, 2016 that Brunei has passed the Tourism Order, 2016, a law to promote better governance for the nation-state's tourism industry.

The Tourism Order 2016 covers four main areas: the establishment of the Brunei Tourism Board, which has been gazetted officially under this law, the licencing of travel agents, licencing of tourist guides and the registration of tourist accommodation premises.

Brunei issues more sharia-compliant bond (sukuk)

The Autoriti Monetari Brunei Darussalam (AMBD) has issued a BND100 million sukuk (sharia-compliant bond) on November 3, 2016 at a rental rate of 0.5625 per cent with maturity date on February 2, 2017 (based on a 91-day tenor).

This is the 138th sukuk issuance.

With this issuance, the government has issued BND10.3232 billion worth of short-term Sukuk Al-Ijarah securities since its maiden offering on April 6, 2006.

Total holdings of Brunei government sukuk outstanding until November 3, 2016 stands at BND468.2 million.

UNISSA signs MOU with Malaysian Islamic University

The Universiti Sultan Sharif Ali (UNISSA) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the International Islamic University of Malaysia (UIA), the Borneo Bulletin reported November 7, 2016.

The MOU enables both universities to continue and solidify existing cooperation in the fields of academic, mobility programme for students and staff, and research in Islamic studies.

Brunei launches two online systems to accelerate permission and site approval

The Department of Town and Country Planning announced November 8, 2016 that it has launched the Planning Permission Electronic System (e-KP) and the Site Selection System (e-3S).

Both web platforms accelerate the process of issuance of planning permission and site approvals.

The Planning Permission Electronic System enables qualified persons (QPS) to submit applications online.

The Site Selection System enables users to submit applications and the Department of Town and Country Planning can comment whether to approve the proposed sites electronically. It also allows the department to process and refer the proposed sites to members of the Site-Selection Working Committee for reviews, opinions and approvals via online.

Associated news snippet...

Brunei launches guidelines on land and building planning

The Department of Town and Country Planning has launched two planning guidelines on November 10, 2012 to commemorate the World Town Planning Day 2012 and the department's 40th anniversary.

The first planning guideline was called the Garispandu Kebenaran Perancangan bagi Permohonan Kemajuan Tanah dan Bangunan (translated loosely as, "The Guidelines on permit for land development and building planning").

The second guideline was the “Guidelines for Earthwork Development (Focus on Developments in Environmentally Sensitive Area)”.

Both guidelines were published to provide explanation to the public especially development applicants, architects, qualified persons and government agencies.

The first planning guidelines outline the existing process and procedures needed in handing in applications for land development and buildings in areas under the control of the Development Control Competent Authority.

The “Guidelines for Earthwork Development (Focus on Developments in Environmentally Sensitive Area)” focuses on regulations that need to be followed especially in carrying out earthwork on sensitive areas such as highland areas, seashores and mangrove peat.

The Department of Town and Country Planning has been established on January 1, 1972.

Among the activities lined up starting November 10, 2012 include the launching of the third version of the Electronic Development Application Status (e-DAS) system.

The first and second versions of the e-DAS system were launched in May 2010 and April 2011 respectively. With the third version, applicants can find out about the status of their development applications via Short Messaging Service (SMS).

Other features in the third version of the e-DAS system include online enquiry for Qualified Persons (QP), land owners and development applicants.

Additional facts on the occasion of the World Town Planning Day 2012 that coincided with the 40th anniversary of the establishment of the Department of Town and Country Planning...

The 1972 Town and Country Planning Act governs the work of the Department of Town and Country Planning (TCP).

The act was later supported by various development guidelines produced by the Department of Town and Country Planning for residential, commercial and industrial buildings and by the implementation of the 2008 Advertisement Regulations for advertisements and signboards.

The official expansion of the Development Control Competent Authority (DCCA) Area on February 16, 2012 chaired by the Commissioner of Town and Country Planning strengthened the authority’s role in development control.

The Authority for Building Control and Construction Industry (ABCi) began operations under the Ministry of Development on August 14, 2010. ABCi is responsible for approving development applications whilst the TCP at present issues

only the Planning Permission prior building approval by ABCi.

In land use planning, the preparation of the Brunei Darussalam Master Plan 1987-2005 was the landmark of a more comprehensive land use planning comprising a blueprint for future national land-use policy and strategies. This was then followed by the preparation of the National Land Use Master Plan (NLUPM) 2006-2025 that outlined strategic planning framework for the next 20 years.

UBD signs MOU with Japan's AIIT

The Universiti Brunei Darussalam (UBD) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Advanced Institute of Industrial Technology (AIIT) of Japan on November 13, 2016 to formalise collaboration on Project-Based Learning (PBL) Education.

The PBL project is focussed on generating a platform called the Robot Service Network Protocol (RSNP), which is carried out as part of the enPIT (Education Network for Practical Information Technologies) programme.

UNISSA and UNNES sign MOU

The Universiti Islam Sultan Sharif Ali (UNISSA) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Universitas Negeri Semarang (UNNES) on November 14, 2016.

SEAMEO VOCTECH signs MOU with foreign university

SEAMEO VOCTECH has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the State University of Malang, Indonesia on November 22, 2016.

The MOU covers exploring potential for joint research, exhibitions, conferences and lectures in TVET (Technical and Vocational Education and Training); exchange of data, documentation and research materials; and academic mobility such as expert exchange.

JPKE launches new mobile application

The Consumers Affairs Division (CAD) of the Department of Economic Planning and Development (known locally by its initials, JPKE) has launched the Smart Consumer mobile application (the application is known locally as the "Pengguna Bijak"), the Borneo Bulletin reported November 28, 2016.

The main aim and key function of the mobile application is to educate users to become smart consumers by providing a platform to compare prices of goods of daily necessities in addition to providing information on the prices of goods listed under the Price Control Act, Chapter 142. It will also introduce users to consumer related laws and a platform for lodging complaints, and information associated with consumer protection and price control.

The mobile application, which has been developed by a local company, DotRoot Technologies Sendirian Berhad, is available for download at the iTunes App Store for iOS users and the Google Play Store for Android users.

DARe signs MOU with SME Corp Malaysia

Darussalam Enterprise (DARe) and Small and Medium Enterprises Corporation Malaysia (SME Corp Malaysia) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on November 27, 2016.

The objective of the MOU is to encourage cooperation on matters associated with policy, expertise and information sharing on the development of MSMES in Malaysia and Brunei, as well as the establishment of business networking, industrial linkages and other forms of technical collaboration between the two nation-states on the basis of equality and mutual benefits.

Brunei issues more sharia-compliant bond (sukuk)

The Autoriti Monetari Brunei Darussalam (AMBD) has issued a BND100 million sukuk (sharia-compliant bond) on December 1, 2016 at a rental rate of 0.5625 per cent with maturity date on March 2, 2017 (based on a 91-day tenor).

This is the 140th sukuk issuance.

With this issuance, the government has issued BND10.4282 billion worth of short-term Sukuk Al-Ijarah securities since its maiden offering on April 6, 2006.

Total holdings of Brunei government sukuk outstanding until December 1, 2016 stands at BND473.2 million.

Home Affairs Ministry establishes Office of Strategic Management

The Ministry of Home Affairs announced December 8, 2016 that it has established the Office of Strategic Management to assist all departments under its supervision to monitor projects.

Islamic Trust Fund to establish an Islamic Bank

The Perbadanan Tabung Amanah Islam Brunei (an Islamic trust fund known locally by its initials, TAIB) has signed key documents with the Islamic Corporation for the Development of the Private Sector (ICD) on December 14, 2016 in order to establish its own Islamic banking subsidiary.

BruneiHalal brand set to enter Korean market

Ghanim International Corporation Sendirian Berhad and Quantum Emas Korea have signed a partnership agreement on December 16, 2016, which enables the bruneihalalfoods products to be sold in the Republic of Korea.

Ghanim International Corporation is a state-owned enterprise in Brunei Darussalam that develops, markets and promotes Halal food products under the bruneihalalfoods brand with production bases and suppliers across the world.

Quantum Emas of the Republic of Korea produces food products and intends to source, produce, market and trade Halal food to retailers around Asia and the Middle East.

UNISSA signs MOU with UNDHAR

The Universiti Islam Sultan Sharif Ali (UNISSA) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Universitas Dharmawangsa (UNDHAR) of Indonesia, the Borneo Bulletin reported December 29, 2016.

The MOU covers the exchange of students and academic staff from both institutions, journal writing and research. It also covers the sending of student and staff to pursue Master and PhD at UNISSA.

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