

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 2015

Brunei opens Women and Children's block of the RIPAS Hospital

The government has opened the Women and Children's block of the Raja Isteri Pengiran Anak Saleha (RIPAS) Hospital on January 12, 2015.

The 11-floor new block has been built under the 9th National Development Plan (known locally by its initials, RKN).

It features specialist facilities and services: paediatrics ward, obstetrics and gynaecology ward, children's specialist ward, general paediatric ward, neonatal intensive care unit, special care baby unit, paediatric intensive care unit, oncology ward (children), 13 suites (labour room), two operation rooms, gynaecology ward (private rooms) doctor's office, seminar rooms, prayer rooms, pharmacy, car park for staff and the public and a café.

It also features private rooms comprising two Bunga Kuning suites, two deluxe suites and 16 single rooms for patients.

Brunei signs anti financial crimes agreement with Bangladesh

Brunei and Bangladesh have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on the prevention of money laundering and combating the financing of terrorism on January 27, 2015.

Under the MOU, Brunei and Bangladesh will cooperate in the exchange of financial intelligence that could assist in the investigation and prosecution of persons suspected of money laundering and financing acts of terrorism.

This is the fourth MOU of such kind signed by Brunei. The other three nations-states that have signed similar MOU are the Republic of Korea, Indonesia and Malaysia.

Associated news snippet...

Brunei strengthens anti-terror law

Brunei has upgraded its existing laws against terrorism by passing the Anti-Terrorism Order 2011, effective July 18, 2011. Some of its provisions now cover punishment for offences such as the commission of terrorist acts, membership of terrorist groups, financing of terrorism and support or assistance to any terrorist group or act.

The new law criminalises not only individuals or groups who commit acts of terrorism but also those who support it by financial and other means. It carries a 30-year imprisonment and a BND5 million fine.

Its definition of a 'terrorist act' now covers acts that are intended to influence an international organisation.

The new law features definitions of offences on terrorism financing such as arrangement for acquisition; retention or control of terrorist property; dealing with terrorist property; soliciting and giving support to terrorist groups or for the commission of terrorist acts and so on.

It enables the Financial Intelligence Unit of the Autoriti Monetari Brunei Darussalam (AMBD) to receive and disseminate reports on suspicious transactions and allows the sharing of information with its foreign counterparts. The new law also enables the AMBD to intercept communications during counter-terrorism investigations.

It also criminalises the recruitment of individuals to become members of terrorist groups or to participate in terrorist acts; the provision of facilities in support of terrorist acts; membership of terrorist groups; and the arrangement of meetings in support of terrorist groups and terrorist bombings.

The new law replaces the Anti-Terrorism (Financial and Other Measures) Order 2003.

Central bank issues Securities Market Regulations 2014

Brunei's central bank, the Autoriti Monetari Brunei Darussalam (AMBD), has issued the implementing guidelines for the Securities Market Order 2013 (SMO), which paves the way for the establishment of a capital market, The Brunei Times reported on February 3, 2015.

The guidelines, the Securities Market Regulations 2014 (SMR), will become enforced effective February 1, 2015.

The SMR has been issued in line with Section 268(1) of the SMO.

Brunei Islamic university establishes links with IRTI

The Universiti Islam Sultan Sharif Ali (UNISSA) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Saudi Arabia-based Islamic Research and Training Institute (IRTI) on February 25, 2015.

The MOU enables UNISSA to organise joint conferences and workshops in the fields of economics, finance and banking continually with IRTI.

The MOU has outlined the signatories' future projects, which include researches, student placements, student mobility, workshops and training.

The MOU contains general framework that facilitates collaboration and cooperation between the signatories, allowing both UNISSA and IRTI to learn more about Islamic finance and economy.

National carrier promotes Ras al-Khaimah, UAE

Brunei's flag carrier, Royal Brunei Airlines Sendirian Berhad (RB) will promote Ras al-Khaimah of the United Arab Emirates after signing a long-term agreement with the emirate's tourism body.

RB announced on February 25, 2015 that it will be working with new and existing tour operators and travel trade partners. The airline will participate in several marketing and branding initiatives and familiarisation trips that will be held for the next 12 months.

Associated news snippet...

Brunei streamlines aviation access to the UAE

Brunei's 'open skies' policy now covers its air linkage with the United Arab Emirates after the two governments signed the bilateral liberalised air services agreement on April 19, 2005.

Local telco introduces new payment plan

Telekom Brunei Berhad (TelBru) announced February 27, 2015 that it will change its pricing plans for broadband Internet subscribers, effective March 1, 2015.

The new rates will be 40 per cent lower than the existing broadband plans to enable Brunei citizens to access broadband technology at more affordable rates.

Associated news snippets...

Brunei will introduce new framework on telcos tariff

The Authority for Info-communications Technology Industry of Brunei Darussalam (AITI) will soon regulate tariffs in order to ensure telecommunications and broadcasting services remain affordable for Brunei consumers.

Amid growing concerns for high rates and prices for telecom services, AITI will develop a price regulation framework that promotes availability, affordability and choices of telecom and broadcasting services for consumers whilst still allowing healthy growth, profit-driven and competition among market players.

AITI has awarded a contract to Detecon Asia Pacific Limited on April 24, 2013 for consultancy services to help it develop and support the implementation of the new framework.

The project called the Converged Licensing and Regulatory Framework, will be conducted in four phases, which will involve multi-stakeholders engagement from telecom and broadcasting service providers, information and communications technology (ICT) industry players and government agencies.

Among the tasks the project entails include reviewing laws, policy, licence terms and conditions associated with the telecommunications and broadcasting sectors.

The project will help develop policies, regulatory frameworks and tools to enable AITI to regulate tariffs effectively in both telecom and broadcasting sectors. And it will culminate with the introduction of Brunei's first Telecom and Broadcasting Competition Code that matches the Prime Minister's Office plan to pass a Competition Law.

The objective of the tariff regulation framework is to ensure that telecom and broadcasting services remain affordable to all levels of society and encourage

competition among market players. It also rationalises the tariff filing and control system that AITI administers.

Brunei plans to simplify ICT regulatory compliance

The government announced on May 26, 2013 that the Authority for Info-communications Technology Industry of Brunei Darussalam (AITI) is in the process of developing new converged licensing and regulatory framework for telecommunications, broadcasting and media industries.

The purpose of the license revamp is to streamline the regulatory compliance and reduce duplications.

At the same time, this will support the delivery of locally developed content through secure and robust communications networks.

Brunei transfers administration of its domain name (.bn) from TelBru to AITI

The government announced September 27, 2013 that a subsidiary of the Authority for the Info-communication Technology Industry (AITI) called the Brunei Network Information Centre Sendirian Berhad (BNNIC) will administer the registration of **.bn** domain names beginning March 2014.

The administration of domain names and policies associated with it were previously carried out by Telecom Brunei (TelBru) Berhad.

TelBru completes 'Telhouse' refurbishment

Telekom Brunei Berhad (TelBru) has completed a major facelift of one of its oldest buildings in a bid to enhance quality and public image, The Brunei Times reported on October 11, 2014.

Refurbishment work on the 30-year-old building also known as the Telephone House or 'Telhouse' by its employees, began in June 2013. It was completed early 2014 in time for TelBru's rebranding initiative and now boasts a sleek new design fitted with aluminium cladding to emulate modern architecture.

Telhouse now accommodates more than 300 staff and a number of departments and units such as Access Networks, Network Systems, Information Technology, Product Development, Human Resources and so on.

UBD launches Pixela research laboratory

The Universiti Brunei Darussalam (UBD) has launched the Pixela Laboratory on February 26, 2015, to train graduate students in the field of photo-catalytic coating.

Brunei develops greenhouse gas inventory

The Department of the Environment, Parks and Recreation (known locally by its initials, JASTRE) announced February 27, 2015 that Brunei is in the process of developing its greenhouse gas inventory to track carbon emission levels.

The inventory report will determine the level of carbon emissions and other greenhouse gases in the nation-state.

Brunei introduces online public sector recruitment

The government announced February 28, 2015 that the Public Service Commission (PSC) online recruitment system is activated today.

Jobseekers and civil servants who wish to apply for government vacancies can do so via the portal, <https://recruitment.gov.bn>

Free incoming calls for DST and Progressif subscribers

Local mobile operators DST Communications Sendirian Berhad (DST) and Progressif Cellular Sendirian Berhad (PCSB) have scrapped the charge for incoming call for post-paid and pre-paid subscribers, effective March 1, 2015.

Brunei rebases GDP baseline

The Department of Economic Planning and Development (known locally by its initials, JPKE) announced March 3, 2015 that it will be rebasing the gross domestic product (GDP) baseline to the year 2010 in order to gain better picture of Brunei's economic development.

The newly rebased GDP will enable government stakeholders to analyse the current structure of the economy and formulate plans on how to best channel investment and resources.

The new GDP estimates have been adopted to replace the base year 2000, taking into account structural changes in the economy, as well as the results of latest surveys and census.

Associated news snippets...

Brunei establishes the Vision 2035 Council

Brunei has established the Vision 2035 Council, the government announced August 15, 2014.

The Vision 2035 Council works closely with the Executive Committee of the National Development Plan and the Delivery Unit (known locally by its acronym, PENGGERAK) of the Prime Minister's Office.

The role of the Council is to assist government agencies' efforts in realising the Vision 2035 objectives.

Vision 2035 Council holds first meeting

The Vision 2035 Council (known locally as the Wawasan Brunei 2035 Council) held its first meeting on October 8, 2014.

The establishment of the Vision 2035 Council was announced on August 15, 2014.

Health science institute establishes links with Irish and Scottish universities

Students reading the Bachelor of Health Sciences (medicine and dentistry) programme at the Universiti Brunei Darussalam (UBD) will have the opportunity to further their studies at the University of Ireland, Galway (NUIG) or the University of Glasgow in Scotland.

The Pengiran Anak Puteri Rashidah Sa'adatul Bolkiah Institute of Health Sciences (PAPRSB IHS), UBD, has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the two universities on March 11, 2015.

The MOU enables students of the PAPRSB IHS to undergo their Discovery Year Programme in Ireland.

Brunei issues new criteria for government scholarships

The government announced March 13, 2015 that new criteria have been established for awarding government scholarships to study at foreign institutions of higher learning.

To ensure quality results are in line with the Wawasan Brunei 2035, applicants who wish to study overseas are required to ensure their choice of universities meet the following criteria:

1. Among the top 250 universities for Bachelor Degree
2. Among the top 20 universities for Master Degree (from 200 leading universities)
3. Among the top 10 universities for PhD (from 100 leading universities)

The ranking is based on benchmarks from QS World University Rankings, Times Higher Education Rankings and Shanghai Jiao Tong University Rankings and the US News and World Report colleges rankings.

Brunei launches plant guide book

Brunei has launched a pocket guide book on the 32 types of plants found along the trails of Bukit Shahbandar Recreational Park on March 21, 2015.

Brunei opens museum of maritime history

The Brunei Darussalam Maritime Museum has been opened on March 23, 2015.

Brunei quickens the processing of court cases

Court cases are now processed quicker and court documents accessible to the public after the government introduced the Judiciary Case Management System (JCMS) on March 23, 2015.

JCMS covers civil and criminal litigation, bankruptcy, probate and marriage processes in both the Supreme Court and Subordinate Courts.

The system comprises three components. First is the online portal called the e-Filing System where government agencies and law firms could pre-register cases, file and retrieve court documents and check court schedules.

Second is the Case Management System, which allows court officials to track and monitor cases in addition to access past records and notes of proceedings.

Third is the Queue Management System (QMS), which allows members of the public and legal practitioners to obtain up-to-date court schedules via kiosks available in court buildings. Lawyers could also apply for a hearing with a Supreme Court Registrar in chambers through the QMS.

Brunei develops climate model

The government announced March 23, 2015 that Brunei is developing its own climate model for better future projections.

Climate models have been used by other nation-states to simulate the interactions of the atmosphere, oceans, land surface and ice.

For Brunei, developing its own climate model is one of the initiatives carried out by the Brunei Darussalam Meteorological Department (BDMD) in an effort to achieve the international standards in meteorology.

A system to detect sudden changes in the atmosphere posing risk to incoming and departing flights at the Brunei International Airport has also been introduced this year.

Associated news snippet...

Brunei improves weather prediction

Brunei's meteorological service is set to sharpen its weather forecasting by the time it installs the new BND11 million Doppler Weather Surveillance Radar (DWSR) in August 2011. DWSR is used to detect and monitor rains and thunderstorm movements throughout Brunei.

Brunei meteorology department introduces new logo

The Brunei Darussalam Meteorological Department (BDMD) has introduced a new departmental logo on March 23, 2015.

Brunei builds naval training school

Brunei is building a Naval Training School at the Muara Naval Base to conduct courses such as navigation, seamanship, weapons, fire fighting and damage control, naval warfare, and communications and engineering, the government announced March 24, 2015.

Construction began on October 31, 2014 and set for completion on October 31, 2015. The training school will have facilities such as administration department, student wing, mechanical engineering, workshop, weapons engineering, warfare division and common facilities wing, common lecture room, auditorium, library and prayer room.

Brunei declared measles-free

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has declared Brunei as measles-free, the government announced March 31, 2015.

International company plans a USD17 million investment in Brunei

An international joint-venture company is keen to invest USD17 million (BND23.4 million) to develop a multi-purpose organic farming base and integrated organic fertiliser facility in Lumapas, the Brunei Economic Development Board (BEDB) announced March 31, 2015.

BEDB is facilitating an investment by United Agri-Fishery Market Sendirian Berhad (UAF), a joint-venture enterprise comprising Taiwanese companies He Xin Farm Group and Golden Corporation Sendirian Berhad and a Singapore-based rice research firm, Sunland Agri-Tech Pte Ltd.

The project is expected to be fully operational by the second quarter of 2016. The organic farming base will create jobs and produce a minimum of 120 metric tons of organic fruits and vegetables annually for export.

BEDB will initiate the facilitation with the signing of a licence agreement with UAF.

The project is also expected to benefit the local logistics and transport sectors and help diversify the economy and ensure self-sufficiency in food.

The project is the latest agriculture-related foreign direct investment in Brunei after a previous investment by Golden Corporation Sendirian Berhad for an organic shrimp farming and integrated seafood processing centre.

BEDB and other government agencies have facilitated four other FDI projects: Simpor Pharma, CAE Brunei MPTC, Brunei Methanol Company Sendirian Berhad

and Gold Coin (B) Sendirian Berhad, all of which amounted to USD740 million and has generated 495 jobs.

BEDB is also overseeing the integrated refinery and aromatics cracker facility project by Hengyi Industries Sendirian Berhad, the welded carbon steel pipe facility project by Huludao City Steel Pipe and eight other FDI projects in the sectors of manufacturing, agriculture, logistics, pharmacy and aquaculture.

BEDB says that total investment for these projects is estimated to amount to USD5.61 billion and will create over 2,400 employment opportunities.

BEDB is in charge of several industrial parks: Salambigar Industrial Park, Anggerek Desa Industrial Park, Rimba Digital Junction, Bukit Panggal Industrial Park, Telisai Industrial Park and Sungai Liang Industrial Park, in addition to Pulau Muara Besar.

Associated news snippets...

Brunei reactivates agency for in-bound investment

The Brunei Economic Development Board (BEDB), formerly part of the finance ministry, has been restructured on November 26, 2001 after the government passed the Brunei Economic Development Board (Amendment) Order 2001.

It is now a statutory body that runs on commercial logic. BEDB leads the diversification of the economy and creates employment opportunities for Bruneians by attracting local and foreign investments.

BEDB has disclosed its two-pronged strategy to reinvigorate Brunei's economic diversification on January 15, 2003. The strategy is expected to bring USD4.5 billion investment into Brunei and create 6,000 new permanent jobs by 2008.

The first prong engages foreign investors to develop downstream and manufacturing industries in the Sungai Liang area in the Belait district and the Pulau Muara Besar in the Brunei-Muara district.

The second prong opens four industry clusters to foreign investment: hospitality and tourism; transportation and logistics; business services; and financial services.

Laws on business licensing, industrial activities and investments have also been amended in 2001 in a bid to streamline the process of economic diversification.

Brunei provides financial assistance for local SMES

Brunei SMES with sound business plans and concepts that could turn into promising prototypes could each apply for a BND150,000 grant after the government introduced the Brunei SME Product Development Programme on July 6, 2010.

Through a BND2,000,000 funding, the government has entrusted the Brunei

Economic Development Board (BEDB) to screen the application process.

Some of the criteria include product export potentials; commercial application in either the private or public sector; and a demonstrated commitment of the entrepreneurs behind each application.

The grant is designed to finance the development of new technology and products by local SMES.

The Brunei SME Product Development Programme is one of the BEDB initiatives to help the growth of local SMES. Other BEDB initiatives include the iCentre, a business incubator for local ICT companies; Accel-X, a venture capital fund for local ICT companies; the Micro Grant Scheme that helps young people from poor background to start their own businesses; and the Padian.com, a marketing portal.

Brunei provides financial assistance for innovative companies and individuals

Companies, and students and researchers of institutions of higher learning with innovative business ideas could now apply for government grant, effective August 3, 2010.

Run by the Brunei Economic Development Board (BEDB), the BND2,000,000 Local Enterprise Applications and Products (LEAP) programme helps to translate the early stages of innovative ideas into credible working prototypes or proof-of-concept.

A maximum of BND150,000 is available for each application. The motive behind such scheme is that a successfully implemented proof of concept or a demonstrable working prototype could lead to easier access to more funding to enlarge the business and market the product.

The application criteria include innovative technology in areas of ICT, agriculture, aquaculture, and other high-growth sectors; sound business plan with commercial applications in either the public or private sector; and a committed and qualified team.

Brunei provides more assistance for local companies to expand overseas

The Brunei Economic Development Board (BEDB) has introduced the Promising Local Enterprise Development Scheme (PLEDS) programme on February 3, 2012.

The programme focuses on three components to enable a company to grow: capital, competency and connectivity.

Companies under PLEDS have access to support packages, which include networking and advice opportunities with the PLEDS Panel of Advisors/Mentors, assistance with access to market and logistics, financial support and capability support.

Companies also receive privileges with the Enterprise Technical Assistance Scheme (ETAS), which is part of the PLEDS financial support package, with further guidance and consultation given tailored precisely to absorb the industry needs in a more intricate and challenging environment.

Businesses will engage with consultants as they play a role to advise, identify, provide solutions based on international experiences and provide the support for changes in areas that require change or improvement in order to enhance their competency to international level.

The ETAS also assists PLEDS companies in the hiring of professional staff to strengthen their competency and overcoming common market entry cost barriers when venturing overseas.

ETAS is awarded in the form of a grant, on a cost-sharing basis, whereby the BEDB will co-fund up to 50 per cent of the eligible costs capped at the maximum of BND300,000 per company.

Brunei builds technology park

The Brunei Economic Development Board (BEDB) has held a foundation-laying ceremony for the Anggerek Desa Technology Park on June 26, 2013.

The BND20 million venue will house foreign high-tech, high-growth industries. It is also Phase 3 of the development project after the completion of Phase 1 (the iCentre) and Phase 2 (the Knowledge Hub).

Economic development board to launch overseas placement programme for start-ups

The Brunei Economic Development Board (BEDB) announced August 26, 2014 that it is planning to launch an extended overseas placement programme, which can help more local companies expand abroad.

Brunei and China sign Minutes of Symposium

The Ministry of Industry and Primary Resources (MIPR) and the government of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region of China have signed the Minutes of Symposium for the Brunei-Guangxi Economic Corridor on April 1, 2015 to highlight the latest status of the project.

The Minutes of Symposium noted the progress made in the previous stage and it was revealed that under the guidance of the Joint Committee established by the two signatories, all works have been conducted as scheduled, the preliminary cooperative projects in ports, agriculture, fisheries, Halal food, Halal medicine and other key areas have been promoted, and the Brunei-Guangxi Economic Corridor is beginning to take shape.

Specific key projects that will be promoted in 2015 have also been mentioned such as the China (Nanning)-Brunei Agricultural Industrial Park, Yulin Traditional Chinese Medicine Health Industry Garden, cooperation in the operations of Brunei-Muara Container Terminal, cooperation in oyster breeding and fishery, and cooperation in rice cultivation.

Brunei also welcomes the opportunity to establish a regular scheduled flight between Brunei and Guangxi to promote commercial and tourism activities.

Both signatories will also work together to promote the Bio Innovation Corridor (BIC) and the Brunei-Guangxi Economic Corridor.

Brunei launches portal for private jobs

Hiring Bruneian workers is now faster and more cost-effective for private sector employers after the government launched the online system, e-Labour Exchange on June 20, 2015.

e-Labour Exchange also allows registered private sector employers to post vacancies and seek prospective employees.

Employers can access the website, www.job-centrebrunei.gov.bn anytime and obtain the list of jobseekers who qualify the relevant requirements.

Jobseekers could register and update their profiles, too. They could also apply for courses offered on the e-Labour Exchange.

Applicants will be notified the status of their applications via SMS and email.

Public Service Commission revamps recruitment portal

The Borneo Bulletin reported June 23, 2015 that the Public Service Commission (PSC) Recruitment Portal, which caters for jobseekers who wish to apply for government vacancies, has been upgraded.

The PSC Recruitment Portal has been activated since February 2015. It is now divided into two phases and contains 11 modules comprising advertisement and application for jobs, search ability, tracking, qualifications, layers of security, data migration, confirmation and report preparation.

Phase one focuses on replacing manual application form whilst phase two deals with the management of recruitment, which has begun since April 2015 and is expected to be completed by the end of 2015.

China company explores opportunity to develop Brunei's computer graphics industry

A Chinese technology company has announced its interest to develop Brunei's computer graphics (CG) industry and market, with future plans to establish a CG centre.

Sesame World Technologies Sendirian Berhad has awarded 15 Brunei candidates with places for its scholarship and Computer Graphics Academy on June 24, 2015.

The company has collaborated with the Brunei Economic Development Board (BEDB) and the Authority for Info-communications Technology Industry of Brunei Darussalam (AITI) for the launch of the programme.

Classes will begin on July 6, 2015 and at the end of the programme Sesame World Technologies Sendirian Berhad intends to hire the top students to set up a computer graphics centre in Brunei.

The CG scholarship programme is also supported by the Department of Economic Planning and Development and funded under the 10th National Development Plan for Human Capacity Development.

Associated news snippet...

Brunei increases grant for ICT and digital media firms by BND50K

The Authority for the Info-communications Technology Industry of Brunei Darussalam (AITI) announced July 19, 2013 that it has increased the grant it offers to BND300,000 from the previous BND250,000.

The grant applies to developers of local ICT and digital media industries.

Introduced in July 2010, the grant is an incentive to encourage, promote, facilitate and assist the development and expansion of local ICT and digital media sectors. And since 2010, AITI has awarded BND1.7 million of such grant to 12 local ICT and digital media associated businesses under the National Development Plan.

Brunei signs double taxation treaty with Luxembourg

Brunei Darussalam signed the Avoidance of Double Taxation and the Prevention of Fiscal Evasion with Respect to Taxes on Income and on Capital with the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg on July 14, 2015.

Brunei acquires fifth gas carrier vessel

Brunei Gas Carrier (BGC) Sendirian Berhad, which transports liquefied natural gas (LNG) for export has acquired its fifth LNG carrier, the Amadi. The Brunei Times reported on July 23, 2015.

The new carrier has been financed through a USD183 million Islamic finance facility. The funding has been provided by a syndicate comprising Bank Islam Brunei

Darussalam Berhad (BIBD), Bank of Tokyo Mitsubishi UFJ (Malaysia) Berhad, HSBC and Sumitomo Mitsui Banking Corporation Europe Limited.

The Amadi has been delivered on July 13, 2015 and will be employed under a long-term charter to Brunei LNG Sendirian Berhad.

The Amadi, which has been constructed by Hyundai Heavy Industries Co. Ltd., is a 154,800 cubic metre membrane-type LNG carrier.

Brunei's biggest health centre nearing completion

The Borneo Bulletin reported July 29, 2015 that the three-storey BND14 million Lambak Kanan Health Centre is set for completion by end of 2015.

Once completed the Lambak Kanan Health Centre will be Brunei's biggest health centre that will house a public clinic, chronic disease clinic and a flu clinic. The centre will also offer mother and children health services, dental services and pharmaceutical services.

The Lambak Kanan Health Centre sits on a 4.45-hectare state property and caters for residents of Kampung Sungai Hanching, Kampung Salambigar, Kampung Sungai Tilog, Kampung Manggis and the Lambak Kanan Housing Scheme of Mukim Berakas 'B'.

Brunei Cancer Centre building completes in 2016

The Borneo Bulletin reported July 29, 2015 that the BND100 Brunei Cancer Centre building will be completed by 2016.

Construction work began in August 2012.

Brunei issues more sharia-compliant bond (sukuk)

Brunei's central bank, the Autoriti Monetari Brunei Darussalam (AMBD) announced July 30, 2015 of its 120th issuance of the short-term sukuk (Islamic bonds).

The BND100 million sukuk is offered at a rental rate of 0.78 per cent and matures on January 28, 2016.

To date, Brunei has issued more than BND8.83 billion worth of Sukuk Al-Ijarah securities since its maiden offering on April 6, 2006.

Brunei opens an archaeological park

Brunei has opened the Kota Batu Archaeological Park on August 11, 2015.

Brunei signs two contracts on the Temburong Bridge

Work on building navigation bridges and viaducts of the Temburong Bridge will begin on October 1, 2015 after the government signed two contracts on September 10, 2015.

Daelim Industrial Company Limited of the Republic of Korea and Swee Sendirian Berhad of Brunei have been awarded a contract to build the navigation bridges.

China State Construction Engineering Corporation Limited (CSCEC) and Ocean Quarry & Construction Sendirian Berhad have been awarded a contract to build the Temburong viaduct.

Brunei issues more sharia-compliant bond (sukuk)

The Autoriti Monetari Brunei Darussalam (AMBD) has issued a BND100 million sukuk (sharia-compliant bond) at a rental rate of 0.8 per cent with maturity date on December 10, 2015.

This is the 122nd sukuk issuance that has been made on September 10, 2015.

With this issuance, the government has issued BND9.03 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 10, 2015 stands at BND700 million.

Brunei and Malaysia cooperate on digital and cyber forensics

Brunei and Malaysia have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on cooperation in areas of digital and cyber forensics on September 16, 2015.

The specific objectives cover the establishment of relationship for digital and cyber forensic research, collaboration on the exchange of information programmes and monitoring the progress of cooperative activities.

Brunei prepares to become an economic hub

Brunei and the Guangxi Beibu Gulf International Port Group have signed a Letter of Intent (LOI) on September 19, 2015.

The LOI aims to result in the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to explore potential cooperation areas to make Brunei a hub for the ASEAN and BIMP-EAGA regions.

Associated news snippets...

Brunei strengthens road linkage with the BIMP-EAGA member states

Brunei is one of the signatories of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on the Transit and Inter-State Transport of Goods signed on June 25, 2009 in Manado,

North Sulawesi, Indonesia.

The MOU prompts a collaborative arrangement to promote; develop; and enhance trade and investment among the BIMP-EAGA member states (Brunei Darussalam-Indonesia-Malaysia-the Philippines East ASEAN Growth Area). In practice it calls for border arrangements that facilitate the flow of goods and a reduction in transport costs of moving goods (and those in transit) within the BIMP-EAGA sub-region.

Brunei reinforces business viability of small-and medium-size enterprises

Local company potentials to expand market share in ASEAN are set to improve after the government introduced the Export Refinancing Scheme (ERS) on April 15, 2010.

Applicable to locally registered and certified direct and indirect product exporters, the ERS facilitates both the pre-shipment and post-shipment stages of the business operations.

At the pre-shipment stage, the ERS enables local small- and medium-size enterprises (SMES) to finance the purchase of raw materials and general costs. At the post-shipment stage, the ERS helps to defray the expenses of delivery.

Brunei initiates EAGA RFID tagging

Bruneian company, ZimacSilicon Technologies Sendirian Berhad (ZST), announced February 28, 2011 that it is developing a project to make practical use of identification tagging to facilitate trade across borders.

ZST is working with Sarawak Information Systems Sendirian Berhad (Sains) to carry out this pilot project, which has been supported and endorsed by the BIMP EAGA Business Council (BEBC).

The project makes use of radio frequency identification (RFID) and web technology to increase trade investment and tourism in the sub-region. It holds the promise of moving the Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines-East ASEAN Growth Area (BIMP-EAGA) closer to its goals of improving the facilitation of trade by reducing customs paperwork with the use of machine-readable tags for verification purposes.

BEBC's Transport, Infrastructure and ICT Development (TIICTD) Cluster signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on the Intelligent Clearance Identification (i-CLID) project on the same day (February 28, 2011), which in the long run will act as a cross-border solution to facilitate freer movements of people, goods and services.

The TIICTD Cluster is trying to ease crossing borders using an electronic device that could be tracked by fitting vehicles or containers with RFID transmitters.

An initiative from Brunei, this pilot project will begin involving the nation-state and Malaysia. It is designed to reduce processes required of commercial vehicles when

crossing borders.

The RFID electronic tagging cuts the number of times that customs forms have to be filled, especially for BIMP EAGA member states where border crossing requires repeated customs verification.

With this tagging system, every vehicle that passes the gantry will be scanned, showing engine and chassis number and other details. The checkpoint officer will just have to check whether the details on the computer match the vehicles passing through.

To track goods, containers will be tagged the same way.

Bruneian company establishes hybrid rice plantation in Mindanao, Philippines

Bruneian company, Four Bays Iman Sendirian Berhad (FBIS), has entered into a joint venture with Filipino firm, SL Agritech Corp (SLAC) for a hybrid rice plantation in Mindanao to boost business and bring economic progress in the Brunei-Indonesia-Malaysia-Philippines East ASEAN Growth Area (BIMP-EAGA), a Philippine newspaper reported August 26, 2013.

The Manila Bulletin says that FBIS has signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with SLAC Chairman Henry Lim Bon Liong, and Dr Frisco Malabanan, an SLAC hybrid rice specialist.

Under the partnership, SLAC will provide the hybrid rice technology, seeds, agricultural chemicals and marketing work to the joint-venture, whilst FBIS will put in the investment in irrigation, farm to market road, land to be subjected for contract farming or lease, drying equipment, transport, post-harvest and other processing facilities.

FBIS director, Jocelyn Bidaure Lebanan was reported as saying that her company would put in initial investments of PHP1.3 billion (BND37 million) in the first year of the programme. The amount covers working capital for leasing the area used for the plantation, the contract growing area and operation expenses amounting to P688 million.

Mechanisation, warehousing, trucks, and drying facilities will amount to PHP427 million and milling facilities will have an allocation of PHP185 million.

Lebanan says that more will be invested in the five-year programme. Her company has also resolved previous issues in the local banking process after meeting with Malaysian lender, Maybank.

Lebanan says that FBIS will step up investments to PHP1.905 billion in the second year and PHP2.43 billion in the third year.

The fourth- and fifth-year investments will be PHP2.87 billion and PHP11.740 billion respectively.

The plan is expected to identify a 20,000-hectare plantation by the fifth year of operation, which is expected to help with the livelihood of Muslims in Mindanao.

According to the report, FBIS is partnering with SLAC in supporting a previous venture of Tinghua Foundation that Lebanan headed. Tinghua has been engaged in agricultural contract growing among Muslims planting high-value crops like asparagus in South Cotabato.

Brunei amends law against corruption

The government announced September 28, 2015 regarding the amendments on the Prevention of Corruption (Amendment) Order 2015.

Brunei issues more sharia-compliant bond (sukuk)

The Autoriti Monetari Brunei Darussalam (AMBD) has issued a BND25 million sukuk (sharia-compliant bond) at a rental rate of 1.03 per cent with maturity date on October 6, 2016.

This is the 123rd sukuk issuance that has been made on October 8, 2015.

With this issuance, the government has issued BND9.055 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 October 8, 2015 stands at BND625 million.

Brunei Islamic university develops linkages with Malaysian and Indonesian universities

The Universiti Islam Sultan Sharif Ali (UNISSA) has signed Memoranda of Understanding (MOUS) with Malaysian and Indonesian universities in order to establish linkages in student mobility programmes on October 17, 2015.

The MOUS enable UNISSA to establish collaboration such as strengthening academic and research programmes with the Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Syarif Kasim (UINSUSKA) in Riau, Indonesia and the Kolej Universiti Islam Sultan Azlan Shah (KUISAS) in Perak, Malaysia.

Brunei reshuffles the Council of Cabinet Ministers

The government announced October 22, 2015 the reshuffle of the Council of Cabinet Ministers.

The last time Brunei reshuffled the Council of Cabinet Ministers was on May 29, 2010.

Brunei enhances capability on Halal food production

The Brunei Economic Development Board (BEDB), the AZ Food (B) Sendirian Berhad and the Catering & International Trading (CIT) from Tunisia have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on October 22, 2015 to invest in Halal food production and an export facility in Brunei.

The proposed production facility is expected to begin construction at the third quarter of 2016, with its full completion by the fourth quarter of 2017.

In addition to providing an infrastructure-ready site of 4.48 hectares at the Salambigar Industrial Park, BEDB will continue to facilitate and support the project towards its successful implementation through collaboration with key stakeholders and government agencies.

The development of the BND90 million Halal food production and export facility is expected to create 206 new jobs, generate export revenue as well as enabling the transfer of technology and skills to locals. It also creates business opportunities for local SMES.

The facility will prepare ready-made Halal meals using locally-sourced raw materials, manufacture packaging materials and assemble vending machines that will be used to distribute the packaged meals.

The packaged food, which has a shelf life of 24 months, is intended to be exported to markets in ASEAN and beyond, where it will be distributed through vending machines and retail stores.

Associated news snippets...

Brunei introduces new Halal guidelines and associated laws

Restaurants and food manufacturers catering for the Muslim community are now required to obtain the Halal Certificate and Halal Branding, the government announced on October 13, 2011.

Food enterprises including ice-cream, food and drinks manufacturers, bakeries and food stalls will be segregated under two licensing categories: the General Restaurant Licence that caters for Muslims and non-Muslims that will need to obtain the Halal Certificate and Halal Label; and the Limited Restaurant Licence that caters for non-Muslims.

Implementation is stages starting January 2012 and full enforcement beginning January 2014.

Starting October 15, 2011 food premises that apply or renew their licences will have eight months to obtain the Halal Certificate and Halal Branding during which time they will be issued a temporary licence instead of the hitherto one-year licence until certified by the Halal Food Control Section of the Sharia Affairs Department.

Effective January 1, 2012 food premises that apply or renew their licences will have six months to obtain the Halal Certificate and Halal Branding during which time they will be issued a temporary licence.

Licences that are still valid after January 2014 could be revoked if such enterprises fail to become certified for the Halal certification and branding by the time deadline approaches.

June 30, 2013 is the latest date to apply for such credentials in order to meet the January 2014 target date, assuming the application meets all the criteria. This means that enterprises in question have two years and two months to submit their applications.

Brunei Halal Brand opens UK distribution base

A Bruneian company, Brunei Halal Brand, has set up a base in Birmingham, United Kingdom for its business operations in Europe, reports The Brunei Times on November 25, 2011.

The company is the latest tenant of Saltley Business Park in Birmingham where it has signed a five-year lease contract for a 25,000 square feet unit.

GBR Phoenix Beard, a UK-based property consultancy that helped Brunei Halal Brand in the search for the property, said in a statement earlier this week that the new office would create 30 new jobs for the region.

Dr Muhammad Nazir OBE is the Chief Executive Officer for the Brunei Halal UK office.

Brunei Halal is a subsidiary of Brunei Wafirah Holdings Sendirian Berhad.

Dr Muhammad has been appointed as CEO of Brunei Wafirah UK Limited in August 2011.

Brunei tracks Halal produce using RFID technology

The government announced January 11, 2012 that it will soon implement a pilot project on tracking Halal food products by using Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) technology.

The Authority for Info-communications Technology Industry (AITI) is collaborating with the Ministry of Religious Affairs for this project.

The government has commissioned a local IT company, John Harith Technology Sendirian Berhad to supply, develop, deliver, install commission and provide training and maintenance for the Brunei-made RFID Halal Food Traceability System.

Under this project, an RFID traceability system authenticates and tracks the Halal

status of food products. The initial focus will be on detection of chicken and raw meat produced by local abattoirs.

The authentic Halal logo issued by the relevant authority will be validated using an RFID tag embedded into the meat packages. There will be an RFID reader placed at the retail store for consumers to validate the products' status and obtain a range of information including the slaughtering processes, sources of ingredients, manufacturing and expiry date of the product and so on.

The pilot project will be carried out for six months involving users from the Halal Food Control Division of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, a selected local abattoir and a retail store.

Brunei strengthens capacity to develop Halal food industry

Brunei has signed three Memoranda of Understanding (MOUS) in an effort to enhance capacity to develop its Halal food industry on May 25, 2013.

Memorandum of Understanding on Academic Exchange and Research Collaboration between the Government of His Majesty The Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan of Brunei Darussalam and Florida State University

Memorandum of Understanding on Academic Exchange and Research Collaboration between the Government of His Majesty The Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan of Brunei Darussalam and the Graduate School of Engineering, Osaka University

Memorandum of Understanding on Academic Exchange and Research Collaboration between the Government of His Majesty The Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan of Brunei Darussalam and Japan Food Research Laboratories

Association with the three international institutions will strengthen the capabilities of the Brunei Darussalam Halal Science Centre in the field of Halal science and technology. The main focus of the capacity enhancement is to enable regular monitoring and analysing of products in order to ensure food products comply with Brunei's requirements on food safety and Halal status.

The MOU with Florida State University establishes research collaboration on detection technology for food quality.

The MOU with the Graduate School of Engineering, Osaka University establishes food and ingredient testing technology.

The MOU with the Japan Food Research Laboratories enables Brunei to acquire the detection technology for food and beverage analysis.

The three MOUS pave the way for technical training and collaboration to develop technology for food analysis and research and development projects.

Brunei to establish a National Standards Committee on Food

The government announced on June 18, 2013 that Brunei is in the process of setting up a National Standards Committee on Food to enable the nation-state greater involvement and participation in the Codex activities.

Codex standards and associated tests have been used as reference points in international trade, especially in the framework of the WTO Agreements on the Application of Sanitary and Phyto-Sanitary Measures, in addition to the Technical Barriers to Trade.

Bottled water from North Devon is Brunei Wafirah UK's first British product

Brunei Wafirah UK Limited, the Birmingham-based arm of the Brunei Halal Brand for the United Kingdom and European markets, has sourced its first British product, according to HalalFocus.net, The Brunei Times reports on August 1, 2013.

Brunei strengthens capability to produce Halal products

BioLeaders Corporation of the Republic of Korea has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Ministry of Industry and Primary Resources (MIPR) on September 18, 2013.

The MOU enables BioLeaders Corporation to collaborate with the Halal Industry Innovation Centre (HIIC) in research and technical cooperation for the development of Brunei Halal-certified products both regional and international markets.

Brunei opens R&D facility for Halal industry

An international research and diagnostics company, Sengenics, has opened its DNA sequencing and microarray facility at the Universiti Brunei Darussalam (UBD) on October 26, 2015.

The facility will focus on Halal meat and food related research and commercialisation projects.

The UBD-Sengenics collaboration is part of the Brunei Research Incentive Scheme (BRISc), which encourages local capacity building and commercial outreach.

Sengenics is a genomics and proteonomics-based research and diagnostics company with a range of patented technologies and products that are marketed to pharmaceutical companies, scientists and hospitals.

Brunei telco opens staff learning centre

Telekom Brunei Berhad (TelBru) has launched a dedicated corporate learning centre on October 27, 2015.

The centre covers all of the company's training needs that range from technical skills development to leadership know-how.

The TelBru Learning Centre (TLC) features Virtual Blended Learning capabilities, the first of its kind in Brunei.

Brunei is 84th in Ease of Doing Business ranking

The World Bank announced October 28, 2015 that Brunei is 84th in the Ease of Doing Business ranking: last year it was 105th.

Brunei public sector introduces psychometric test for jobseekers

The government announced November 2, 2015 that jobseekers applying for high-ranking positions in the public sector can now sit for the psychometric assessment online. The test has been introduced in written format since May 25, 2015.

Brunei telco offers two-way radio service

Telekom Brunei Berhad (TelBru) has launched the Digital Mobile Radio (DMR) on November 3, 2015.

DMR is a two-way radio service offered with enhanced and additional features to cater for the basic needs of residential customers and business needs for the corporate and government customers.

Brunei military establishes company in Temburong

The Royal Brunei Land Force (RBLF) announced November 4, 2015 the establishment of the E-Company in Bangar in the Temburong District, which could serve as a nucleus to set up a fourth battalion there.

Brunei issues more sharia-compliant bond (sukuk)

The Autoriti Monetari Brunei Darussalam (AMBD) has issued a BND100 million sukuk (sharia-compliant bond) on November 19, 2015 at a rental rate of 1.15 per cent with maturity date on May 19, 2016.

With this issuance, the government has issued BND9.155 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 9, 2015 stands at BND525 million.

Brunei specialised agency signs agreement with international counterparts

The Centre for Islamic Banking, Finance and Management (CIBFM) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on cooperation in the exchange of information and mutual assistance with the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation –

Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (OIC-SESRIC) on November 19, 2015.

CIBFM has also signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on the same day with the Association of National Development Finance Institutions in Member Countries of the Islamic Development Bank (ADFIMI).

The objectives of the MOUS are to establish working relations between CIBFM and OIC-SESRIC and ADFIMI in human capacity building efforts for the financial industry in Brunei Darussalam.

Areas of cooperation include organising conferences, symposia and seminars, conducting training programmes and exchanging of knowledge, expertise, research papers and studies.

Brunei central bank signs agreement with Turkish capital markets authority

The Autoriti Monetari Brunei Darussalam (AMBD) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on cooperation in the exchange of information and mutual assistance with the Capital Markets Board of Turkey (CMBT) on November 19, 2015.

The MOU aims to protect investors in both nation-states and promote the integrity of their markets.

The MOU provides a framework for cooperation, including channels for communication, increased mutual understanding, mutual assistance and the exchange of regulatory and technical information between the two signatories.

ITB signs agreement with UNSW

The Institut Teknologi Brunei (ITB) will continue to work with the University of New South Wales (UNSW), Australia in offering the four-year articulation undergraduate degree programme in Petroleum Engineering under the newly signed Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) on November 24, 2015.

The ITB-UNSW Pathway follows the 2+2 format, whereby ITB delivers the first two years of the programme, and subsequently the remaining two years are delivered by UNSW.

The degree will be awarded by UNSW.

The partnership between ITB and UNSW began in 2009 when ITB offered undergraduate degree programmes in Chemical Engineering and Petroleum Engineering with a 1+3 format for the first time.

In 2012 the Chemical Engineering and Petroleum Engineering are offered under the 2+2 format, which is in line with the development of ITB capacity.

UBD signs MOU with SMART

The Faculty of Science, Universiti Brunei Darussalam (UBD) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Singapore-MIT Alliance for Research and Technology (SMART) on November 16, 2015.

The MOU enables the two institutions to work together in facilitating academic mobility for both students and academic staff in order to encourage knowledge and skills transfer.

Under the MOU, both institutions also agree to cooperate in joint publications, collaborative research and other areas.

Brunei strengthens bilateral relations with the Philippines

Brunei has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for Cooperation in the Field of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and Multimedia with the Republic of the Philippines on December 4, 2015.

The MOU promotes cooperation in ICT and multimedia initiative and helps both signatory states' aspirations to achieve economic and social development, connectivity and shared prosperity in the BIMP-EAGA sub-region.

One of the areas of cooperation is in the BIMP-EAGA Submarine and Terrestrial (BEST) Cable project. This project aims to facilitate direct inter-connections and allows telecommunication services in BIMP-EAGA through satellite, microwave and fibre-optic cable.

This project allows BIMP-EAGA to expand, connect and diversify its networks with other nation-states outside its sub-region.

Prime Minister's Office establishes four new divisions under the Department of Energy and Industry

The Prime Minister's Office has established four new divisions under the purview of the Department of Energy and Industry, effective November 26, 2015.

The four new divisions comprise Innovative Technology and Creative Industry, Global Halal Industry Development, Cottage Industry/Cooperatives, and Business Environment.

The Brunei Industrial Development Authority (BINA), previously under the Ministry of Industry and Primary Resources (MIPR) but has since transferred to the Department of Energy and Industry after the cabinet ministers' reshuffle on October 22, 2015, has been renamed Business Management Sites.

MIPR has also been renamed the Ministry of Primary Resources and Tourism since October 22, 2015.

The Ease of Doing Business Unit and the National Standards Centre, which were previously under MIPR, now operate under the Business Environment Division.

Telco to offer nationwide WIFI

Telekom Brunei Berhad (TelBru) announced December 8, 2015 that it will launch its Nationwide WIFI Service at the first quarter of 2016.

The upcoming service will provide customers with faster access to the Internet outside their homes at selected locations across Brunei.

Brunei receives Global Money Week Award

Brunei has received the Global Money Week Award under the Child and Youth Finance International (CYFI) Awards 2015 on December 10, 2015.

The CYFI Awards recognise and honour those that achieve greatness, and those who demonstrate innovation in financial inclusion and financial, social and livelihoods education for children and youth at the national, regional and international levels.

The Global Money Week, initiated by the Child & Youth Finance International, aims to encourage children and youth to learn about money and saving, gaining employment and becoming an entrepreneur.

Brunei UNISSA establishes link with Indonesian university

Universiti Islam Sultan Sharif Ali (UNISSA) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Universiti Darussalam Gontor (UNIDA) of Indonesia, The Brunei Times reported on December 15, 2015.

The MOU enables future collaborations in terms of student mobility, inter-Arabic courses for students of the universities, staff exchange programmes, academic resources and material sharing.

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