

**The 7th World Halal Forum
(Kuala Lumpur, 2-3 April 2012)**

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Malaysia seeks leadership of the Islamic finance industry and plays a dominant role in the burgeoning global *halāl* industry currently valued at several trillions of dollars. This seventh international gathering of industry actors along with corporate, government and academic experts demonstrated that the World Halal Forum (WHF) has become the premiere gathering of this industry. Hosted by International Halal Integrity Alliance and the boutique firm KasehDia Sdn Bhd, over 350 persons from all continents attended. Following the Forum, Malaysia's Prime Minister Mohd Najib bin Tun Abdul Razak launched the *Malaysia Halal Week* along with the 8th International Halal Showcase (MIHAS). The intent of sponsors and the government is to uphold Malaysia's status as 'ideas leader' in the development of the global *halāl* economy and strengthen its position as the world's Islamic finance and banking hub.

The World Halal Forum 2012 had as its themes "Inspire – Innovate – Invest," with eight sessions plus the opening event, covering:

- Opening: Keynote address by Muhyiddin Mohd Yassin (Deputy Prime Minister, Malaysia); and a video advertisement by the new media platform *Salam World*;
- On *halāl* and *ṭayyib*, with Islamic scholars including Shaykh Afeefuddin al-Jailani (Darul Jailani International, Iraq);
- Gold and silver: *Halāl* currency for trade and investment; including the redoubtable Shaykh Umar Ibrahim Vadillo (World Islamic Mint);
- The *Halāl* consumer market: Marketing to Muslim consumers.
- International trade – *halāl* and kosher: From trade barrier to trade enhancer
- Regulation: How to regulate *halāl*;
- The influence of media and entertainment: on 'selling Islam; and
- New sectors and opportunities (on green themes and risk sharing).

It was a fascinating blend of technical minutia about shipping, certification, animal stunning, or consumer preferences, along with slick sales pitches from Turkish, New Zealand, and Australian based enterprises. The WHF sponsors state on their website (www.worldhalalforum.org): "With so much mainstream media predicated on maximising consumer reach by any means no matter how titillating or provocative, we need to offer an alternative that would espouse positive universal values." They also sought corporate sponsors, promoting the Forum as "an ideal opportunity to enhance your company's profile amongst the key players involved in the decision making process of the Global Halal Industry." There were several discordant notes

when two Muslim members of the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), from Egypt and India, detailed inhumane abuses currently inflicted on livestock in several major Muslim countries that cannot be justified in Islamic terms. The overall tone was the glamour of sales and promise of profits. When asked about the proprieties of ‘selling Islam’, Sir Iqbal Sacranie (Chairman of Muslim Aid, United Kingdom) affirmed: “It’s a good product!”

**International Seminar on Islam in Myanmar
(Kuala Lumpur, 29 April 2012)**

Tengku Ahmad Hazri, IAIS Malaysia

The International Seminar on Islam in Myanmar, with the special theme “Democratisation in Myanmar: Opportunities and Challenges for Its Muslim Community”, was jointly organised by IAIS Malaysia, the Myanmar Muslim Intellectual Forum (MMIF), the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) East Asia, the Regional Islamic Da’wah Council of Southeast Asia and the Pacific (RISEAP) and the Institute for the Study of the Ummah and Global Understanding (ISUGU). The speakers were Dr Maung Maung (Haji Mohammed Hussein; on the “Education of Myanmar Muslims in the Age of Globalisation”), Soe Myint Than (“Economic, Social and Welfare Position of Myanmar Muslims”) and Maulana Akbar Shah (U Tun Aung; on “The Future of Muslims Youths in Myanmar”) from Myanmar, and Ambassador Dato’ Mat Amir Jaafar from the Asia-Europe Institute, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur.

Most of the speakers began by addressing the current plight of Myanmar Muslims, highlighting particularly the challenges and opportunities in regard to democratisation, with a strong focus on education. Generally speaking, the educational infrastructures and facilities remain rudimentary: while formal schooling and even higher education exist, many Myanmar Muslims are denied the opportunity for various reasons, such as lack of funding and transportation, as well as poverty; e.g., children have to work as daily wage-labourers to help their family, thus being deprived of education. The challenge is greater for religious education, which faces the problem of integrating traditional knowledge with modern disciplines.

While there is much to be desired from the present situation, sources of hope lie in both history and current opportunities. For instance, it was argued that despite seeming political inertia among contemporary Muslim youth, a different picture of the past can be gauged from the lives of such figures as Sayar Gi U Nun, U Razak, U Rashid and U Pe Khin. These were past leaders who were active politically even during youth, such as in the struggle against colonialism or the Rangoon University student strike in the 1920s.