

Halal hub boon for industry but R&D also vital

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MENTION halal, the Arabic word which means permitted, allowed or lawful, to non-Muslims and chances are many will be thinking of kebabs and animal slaughter.

But halal is not just about meat. It encompasses everything from precooked meals to pharmaceutical products, toiletries, fashion and safeguarding the integrity of the entire food chain; in addition to financial services.

The government has repeatedly highlighted the fact that the global halal market is worth trillions of ringgit.

Such is the size of the business that stakeholders in the halal market — the primary producers, processors, manufacturers, logistics providers, retailers, restaurateurs and others — constitute an industry in their own right.

The Malaysia External Trade Development Corporation (Matrade) services and product development division senior manager Yusram Yusup said several factors supported Malaysia's positioning as a leading global halal hub.

"We are recognised as a model Islamic country that portrays the image of a modern, liberal and progressive Muslim society.

"This recognition has facilitated the acceptance of Malaysian halal products. Malaysia also has a strong industrial and commercial setup to produce and market halal products."

Malaysia's expertise in halal guidelines and halal certification is recognised worldwide due to its stringent criteria. Yusram also credits strong

government support.

Malaysia's full out halal blitz is expected to shift into even higher gear with the establishment of a halal hub within the Northern Corridor Economic Region (NCER).

But, there is a serious need to address the dearth of research on analytical techniques to verify the status of halal products, said Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) Halal Products Research Institute director Professor Dr Yaakob Che Man.

He said halal research was only being carried out at the Halal Science Centre in the University of Chulalongkorn, Thailand, and UPM's Halal Products Research Institute (HPRI).

The International Islamic University has also recently started a halal research centre within its faculty of engineering.

Research is crucial because, among other things, it helps to determine whether products passed off as halal are adulterated with non-halal ingredients.

"Doubtful products can include mooncake, cake, bread, satay preparation, sausages with non-halal casing, ikan patin fed with pork byproducts; brushes with pig bristles, cosmetics, the use of gelatin in food, cosmetics and personal care products and many more," said Yaakob.

He urged institutions of higher learning and research institutes such as the Malaysian Agricultural Research and Development Institute (Mardi), the Malaysian Palm Oil Board, and the Institute of Medical Research to set up research programmes on halal products.



The word halal encompasses everything from precooked meals to pharmaceutical products and toiletries, among others.