



Yang Berhormat Pehin Orang Kaya Seri Utama Dato Seri Setia Awang Haji Yahya bin Begawan Mudim Dato Paduka Haji Bakar, Minister of Industry and Primary Resources

**OBG (Oxford Business Group) talks to Yang Berhormat Pehin Orang Kaya Seri Utama Dato Seri Setia Awang Haji Yahya bin Begawan Mudim Dato Paduka Haji Bakar, Minister of Industry and Primary Resources**

***What are the main priorities for the Ministry of Industry and Primary Resources (MIPR) in 2010?***

**PEHIN YAHYA:** The ministry is focusing on a few different areas, with food production being the primary subject of our attention at the moment. We are specifically focusing on building

capacity to ensure food security and meet production targets. For example, the MIPR is developing new areas for rice paddy plantations and is building up the necessary human resources to sustain increased levels of food production.

Secondly, the ministry is undertaking some entrepreneurship development programmes aimed at small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to help local businesses become more credible in both the domestic and international markets. The programmes offer human resource development activities that focus on technology, business and financial management.

Additionally, some of the projects described in the National Development Plan 2007-12 (RKN 2007-12) are being carried out, but we need to speed up implementation. These projects relate particularly to infrastructure and facility development in agriculture and food production. The MIPR is also looking to enhance collaboration with other government departments, which can help in better coordinating the country's economic development. Finally, the MIPR is exploring various avenues that could create stronger relationships with overseas organisations and institutions.

All of these priorities are influenced by the ongoing global economic situation, particularly with regard to how it affects food security. As a food-importing nation, we are subject to fluctuating degrees of supply and food prices. Some food-supplying nations have restricted their export supply recently, which exposes us to potential supply problems.

His Majesty has strongly emphasised the need to address food security and the relevant parties have devised solutions to rectify the situation. Investing in capacity and infrastructure is a crucial element in addressing the issue of the country's food security.

### ***What are the primary objectives of Brunei Darussalam's rice production programme?***

**PEHIN YAHYA:** The programme was devised to achieve domestic demand targets and move towards greater rice self-sufficiency. In 2008 domestic rice production satisfied only 3.12% of demand. The programme aims to increase production to meet 20% of domestic demand by 2010 and 60% by 2015.

The main objective is to increase the quantity of rice produced while at the same time making the industry more sustainable. The programme has to become a profitable activity for local farmers. The targets will be met by utilising technological advances and expanding overall production capacity. From a technical standpoint, we have developed a high-yielding variety of rice called Beras Laila. This type has a number of benefits over traditional rice such as a shorter gestation periods, a higher yield and resilience in the face of environmental changes. Additionally, areas earmarked for rice cultivation have been expanded and new farming technology is being introduced. We would like to mechanise the process as much as possible in order to increase efficiency and sustainability.

***The MIPR is trying to transform Brunei Darussalam's halal sector into a commercial industry. What steps need to be taken to achieve this?***

**PEHIN YAHYA:** We have established Ghanim International Food Corporation - a joint venture with Hong Kong's Kerry Group - as the commercial arm of the Brunei Halal Brand. Our initial means of capitalising the brand is through contracting global companies to manufacture food products under the brand and to market these products internationally. In the later stages the brand will also be used by local companies to manufacture and market their products. This helps local SMEs to open up their market space through the brand. SMEs can greatly benefit from the brand - number of different ways, not only in manufacturing. Product development for pharmaceuticals, personal hygiene products and cosmetics can all be researched and developed in the country. The Agro-Technology Park will also play a key role in the development of these new halal technologies and will help create high-skilled employment opportunities for locals.

***How do you feel the RKN 2007-12 is progressing?***

**PEHIN YAHYA:** I am pleased with the progress of the projects under the RKN 2007-12, as some of them have helped build up the infrastructure of the agriculture and aquaculture sectors, and I am quite optimistic that the current plan will be implemented during the allocated time frame. For example, in the fisheries sector the seawater pumping station in Tutong came on-line in July 2009. This station will help spur additional aquaculture activities for local SMEs and will attract foreign direct investment to the country.

In addition, the study for the Agro-Technology Park was completed in 2008 and this development will be implemented during 2010, facilitating further investment in the country and

adding value to domestic agro-businesses. Lastly, funds have been allocated for tourism developments under the RKN 2007-12. For example, the Kampong Ayer Cultural and Tourism Gallery was launched in August 2009, which has added to the country's tourism offering.

***What is being done to encourage the development of human capital, in the movement towards becoming a knowledge-based economy?***

**PEHIN YAHYA:** Current policy means the Ministry of Education places a strong emphasis on increasing the number of science and technology graduates, as these are vital areas in moving towards a knowledge-based economy. Brunei Darussalam also has technical institutes that work in tandem with private sector employers to make sure that graduate courses are relevant to the needs of the job market. As the country moves towards a knowledge-based economy, the answer to our future needs lies in human capital development.

***What investments are being made to develop infrastructure for the tourism sector?***

**PEHIN YAHYA:** Local product development is the primary focus at the moment. We are trying to build up local tourist attractions and recent examples of these developments are the Kampong Ayer Cultural and Tourism Gallery and the Ulu Ulu Resort in Temburong. Our tourism products are under constant review to identify what areas need to be improved and upgraded. There is currently sufficient hotel capacity to accommodate tourists, but private sector involvement is welcomed in future hotel developments.

Building domestic capacity in soft skills is also a major focus at the moment, so investments are being made to improve the training of tour guides and other members of the hospitality industry. Lastly, it is very important to have strong connectivity and linkage with the world's key tourism markets, and naturally we would like to increase the frequency of flights in the long term. In addition, we would like to position Brunei Darussalam as a regional destination within the Brunei Darussalam-Indonesia-Malaysia-Philippines-East ASEAN Growth Area to capitalise on the movement of people within this region.

***In which areas does the MIPR wish to see increased foreign investment in the future?***

**PEHIN YAHYA:** We are looking to attract more investment in biotechnology. This will help capitalise on Brunei Darussalam's natural environment and rich flora and fauna. Foreign investors can help provide biotechnology that will maximise the benefits to be gained from the country's biodiversity in a sustainable way. Agribusiness and the downstream processing of agricultural products in order to manufacture higher-value items are other areas that could benefit from increased foreign direct investment.

The growing halal industry - spearheaded by the Brunei Halal Brand - is another major area that we would like to attract additional foreign involvement. ~ *Courtesy of Oxford Business Group*

### **CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS, IT CENTRE MINISTRY OF INDUSTRY AND PRIMARY RESOURCES**

#### Sources

Writer: The Report Brunei Darussalam 2009

Extracted from [www.brudirect.com](http://www.brudirect.com)