The Emergence of Halal Food Crimes amidst COVID-19: An Analysis of Illegal and Frozen Meat Issues in Brunei Darussalam

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ABSTRACT

COVID-19, caused by SARS-CoV-2, is a zoonotic respiratory epidemic declared a global public health emergency by the World Health Organization (WHO). As a result, COVID-19 has caused food shortages in almost every country, including Brunei Darussalam. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Brunei has had shortages of meat products such as chicken, lamb, and processed meat. Food crime, such as smuggling meat products in Brunei Darussalam, has resulted from halal meat shortages. Therefore, this paper aims to examine the causes of halal-related food crimes in Brunei Darussalam and the proposed solutions. This study employs a library research method, and the data gathered is analysed qualitatively. This study discovered that, amid COVID-19, there are emerging threats of food criminality. As a result, relevant parties face a significant challenge in not only combating food criminality, which has the potential to harm the halal food industry but also in managing food shortages.

Keywords: Brunei Darussalam, COVID-19, Food Crime, Food Security, Illegal Meat

INTRODUCTION

Epidemics of infectious diseases, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, have hindered the free and frequent movement of products and people across
geopolitical borders (Salem & Jagadeesan, 2020). In other words, the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the global food system due to changes in food supply and demand and food disruption (Hashem, et al., 2020). Furthermore, the livestock business has been affected by lockdowns and other restrictive measures undertaken to combat the COVID-19 outbreak (Galanakis, 2020). Besides, there was difficulty delivering live animals, meat, and frozen meat items to markets, resulting in reduced production logistics (Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), 2020). The disturbances in the livestock production supply chain have jeopardised livestock production's long-term viability and food security (FAO, 2020).

To curb the spread of COVID-19, most European countries have enacted border controls (Seleiman, Selim, Alhammad, M. Alharbi, & Juliatti, 2020). The imposed lockdown to deal with the health difficulties produced by the disease's outbreak has posed substantial challenges and severely influenced all sectors of the modern global economy (Hashem, Gonzalez-Bulnes, & Rodriguez-Morales, 2020). The livestock chain was disrupted because of the COVID-19 blockade (Hashem, Gonzalez-Bulnes, & Rodriguez-Morales, 2020).

Despite being a globalised country, Brunei is still heavily reliant on the dynamics of commodities and services trade and the flow of technology and finance (Musa & Basir, 2021). As a result of these obstacles, the livestock supply chain has been severely disrupted (FAO, 2020), resulting in food crimes such as the smuggling of meat and meat-based products into Brunei with uncertain halal status and illegal slaughtering. Md Ariffin, et al. (2021) further noted that the rise in halal food instances implies that the crime is spreading. Food chain criminality is an issue that must be tackled for the halal industry to thrive (Md Ariffin, et al., 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic lockdown and other restrictive measures hurt the livestock sector, particularly the meat industries and related processes (Seleiman, Selim, Alhammad, M. Alharbi, & Juliatti, 2020; Galanakis, 2020), resulting in the smuggling of illegal meat and meat-based products into Brunei Darussalam. As a result, further research into this topic is needed to address the problem effectively and, more importantly, to improve preparedness in the event of a national disaster.

**METHODOLOGY**

Given that the issue is still fresh, most of the information acquired in this
study is based on currently available grey literature resources, such as government documents, newspaper articles, and related authority websites or Facebook pages, especially for Brunei-specific information. In addition, this paper gathered and reviewed data from white literature on the subject, such as pertinent documents, journals, and proceedings. This paper hopes to contribute to the literature by compiling and analysing the currently available data. The study concentrated on practical solutions in Brunei Darussalam, highlighted in the sub-topic below.

This study also investigates food crime in Brunei Darussalam, notably the issue of illegal meat, as a factor or cause of domestic crime. Therefore, loopholes in monitoring and enforcement must be reevaluated and re-examined, and recommendations for combating food-related crimes must be emphasised.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Meat is the most prevalent target of halal food crime, according to Md Ariffin, et al. (2021), because it is the world community’s favourite. Meat production is the most straightforward objective, as meat demand rises yearly (Md Ariffin, et al., 2021). The Food Standards Agency (FSA) in the United Kingdom, in conjunction with Food Standards Scotland (FSS), defines food crime as "dishonesty on the part of the producer or supplier" (FSA/FSS, 2016). As a result, during the COVID-19's last two years, Brunei Darussalam has seen halal food crimes such as meat smuggled into the country without a halal import permit permission and animals slaughtered illegally at an unregistered halal slaughterhouse.

**Illegal Meat and Frozen Meat Food Crimes in Brunei Darussalam**

The Halal Food Control Division (HFCD), Syariah Affairs Department, with the assistance of the Royal Brunei Police Force (RBPF), and Royal Custom Excise Department (RCED) have discovered several cases involving the smuggling of meat and meat-based products into Brunei Darussalam since the COVID-19 outbreak. Aside from that, the team uncovered the sale of questionable meat cuts and illegal slaughterhouses. These criminals cover many issues, including meat safety, which indirectly puts consumers at risk (Md Ariffin, et al., 2021).

Recently, many individuals have been arrested for halal food
crimes, such as halal meat fraud and meat-based products. Table 1 tabulated some of the reported cases of fraudulent activities discovered in Brunei Darussalam in the last two years.

**Table 1.** A list of some of the reported cases involving illegal meat in the Brunei Darussalam

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Facts in Brief</th>
<th>Sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.12.2021</td>
<td>Seized dubious cuts of Japanese Wagyu beef, which were intended to be sold via social media</td>
<td>(Othman A., 2021a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>24.11.2021</td>
<td>Illegal slaughterhouse raided</td>
<td>(Othman A., 2021b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>27.10.2021</td>
<td>Slaughterhouse found without a licence</td>
<td>(Othman A., 2021c)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>16.10.2021</td>
<td>Seized a massive haul of 256 packs of chicken frankfurters, six chicken parts, three boxes of beef and eight boxes of beef lungs.</td>
<td>(Kon, 2021a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>31.05.2021</td>
<td>Discovered raw chicken parts</td>
<td>(Kon, 2021b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>10.05.2021</td>
<td>Seized 626 packets of frozen meat</td>
<td>(Kon, 2021c)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>22.04.2021</td>
<td>Seized 4,754.22 kg of frozen Allana meat</td>
<td>(Othman A., 2021d)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>03.04.2021</td>
<td>Smuggle 10 boxes of raw meat and 300 packets of chicken sausages</td>
<td>(Kon, 2021d)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>11.02.2021</td>
<td>Confiscated a total of 1,120 kg of raw meat and 191.2 kg of beef lungs</td>
<td>(Othman A., 2021e)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>21.01.2021</td>
<td>Seized some 150kg of raw chicken wings and 20kg of raw chicken parts</td>
<td>(Othman A., 2021f)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>18.01.2021</td>
<td>Confiscated raw meats without a halal import permit. – 50kg chicken wings, 10 kg chicken thighs, 18kg lamb and 59 packets</td>
<td>(Othman A., 2021g)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>14.01.2021</td>
<td>Seized 26.2kg of chicken parts and 9.1kg of chicken wings</td>
<td>(Othman A., 2021h)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
13 11.01.2021  Confiscated nearly 1,601.1kg of chicken and beef (chicken wings and tail, lamb, beef bones and chicken sausages) (Othman A., 2021i)

14 05.01.2021  Nearly 300kg of dubious meat were seized. (Othman A., 2021j)

15 29.12.2020  Seized 1.4 tonnes of smuggled frozen meat (Othman A., 2020a)

16 22.12.2020  Dubious halal chicken and beef totalling nearly 71 kilogrammes, as well as sausages, were seized (Othman A., 2020b)

17 17.09.2020  Undeclared meat, processed food seized (Othman A., 2020c)

Meanwhile, data on the number of seizure cases received by HFCD during the COVID-19 transmission in Brunei Darussalam, for instance, are tallied in Chart 1 through seizure cases undertaken by HFCD itself or by RCED or RBPF. In addition, according to the HFCD officer, the confiscated goods were only handed over to HFCD as storage solely in the case of RCED and RBPF seizures; however, other RCED seizures were not handed over to HFCD. Therefore, the data presented in Charts 1 and 2 exclude those stored by RCED at control posts or during operational arrests. As shown in Chart 1 and Chart 2, crime rates have gone up from 2020 to 2021.
Several factors cause food-related halal crimes. Despite Brunei Darussalam's best attempts to reduce crime, it is impossible to eradicate it (Md Ariffin, et al., 2021). Despite the numerous arrests and actions, incidents like halal meat fraud continue. Hence, the emergence of halal food crimes must be researched to establish the source and close any loopholes. Food crime in Brunei Darussalam can be traced back to several factors. This discussion, however, is limited to the causes of smuggling and cases of illicit meat in Brunei Darussalam.

Food Security

According to Barrett (2010), food security is "the condition in which all individuals have constant physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious foods that match their dietary needs and food preferences for a healthy life". Food security in Brunei Darussalam has long been a cause of worry. As a result, the government has been working to establish a self-sufficiency ratio (SSR) regarding food production to feed the country's roughly 400,000-person population. In 2018, Brunei's
poultry SSR was projected to be 89.5 per cent, producing 25.38 thousand tonnes (Wong, 2020).

Furthermore, the agriculture and agri-food sector’s gross output value climbed by 14.1 per cent between 2016 to 2020, growing from B$412.74 million in 2016 to B$470.86 million in 2020 (DOAA, 2020). The livestock industry represents approximately 57 per cent of the agriculture and agri-food sector’s total gross output (DOAA, 2020). Despite increases in gross output value in the livestock industry, Brunei’s SSR, especially in the livestock sector, remains low, as the country still imports approximately 70 per cent of its beef (Musa & Basir, 2021). Hence, during the COVID-19 outbreak, it was adversely impacted (Mohamad, 2020). In 2020, Brunei’s beef, buffalo, and cattle SSR was 61.84 per cent, while goat and sheep SSR was 19.96 per cent (DOAA, 2021). As a result, Brunei’s food security issues have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 outbreak (Musa & Basir, 2021).

The COVID-19 outbreak has impacted China’s socioeconomic by disrupting the transportation of raw resources, even in a huge city like Beijing (Seleimian, et al. 2020). Seleimian, et al. (2020) also suggested that transportation restrictions between countries could limit export operations, making it difficult for the world to export various food goods from one country to another. COVID-19 has disrupted the supply chain and hampered livestock importation into Brunei, making food difficult to obtain from the market.

Additionally, Bruneians were evacuated from various COVID-19 hotspots (Othman, 2020a), resulting in an increase in food demand due to the influx of returning Bruneians. As a result, in the early days of the pandemic, locals in Brunei were said to be “panic shopping” or “panic buying” (Musa & Basir, 2021). Hence, retailers claimed that livestock and poultry supplies were insufficient to meet consumer demand, particularly in the second half of 2020 (Othman, 2020b).

**Profitability**

The price of imported animal products such as beef and lamb has soared with the introduction of COVID-19 in Brunei (Musa & Basir, 2021). The price of beef increased from $15.20 per kilogram in September 2020 to $16.14 per kilogram in December 2020. Similarly, by 2020, frozen beef prices have climbed from $12.40 per kilogram to $13.50 per kilogram.
As a result of the rising price, individuals and businesses are more inclined to perform food crimes.

The desire to make a profit drives intentional food crime (Abd Razak & Ramli, 2020). Food fraud is an old habit that is usually motivated by profit, according to Manning et al. (2016). According to Md Ariffin, et al. (2021), food crime is "malicious behaviour that is planned and purposefully carried out by one party, either individually or in groups, on any process throughout the food chain with the ostensible goal of reaping big profits.

Illegally slaughtered animals, frequently associated with poor animal welfare and the sale of unwholesome meat for human consumption, are examples of fraudulent Halal meat trafficking (Fuseini, et al., 2017). In response to rising meat prices, individuals and businesses illegally smuggled frozen meat into Brunei. The products are then sold to the market, confirming that there is a buyer and making a profit.

**Importation Permits**

Permits for the importation of fresh halal meat are obtained from three government agencies, namely, Animal Quarantine Services, Ministry of Primary Resources and Tourism (MPRT); HFCD, Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA); and Food Safety and Quality Control, Ministry of Health (MoH), before being declared with the RCED for clearance (MoH, n.d.). Furthermore, HFCD is a constitution of the Board of Issuing Halal Import Permits, which is chaired by RCED and includes members from the Department of Syariah Affairs (DoSA), Department of Agriculture (DoA) and Ministry of Health (MoH). As a result, HFCD has the authority to control any halal meat imported into this country per Section 83 (3) Emergency Order (Halal Meat), 1988.

Section 28 of the Customs Act (Prohibition and Restrictions Imports and Exports) (Amendment) (No 2), Order 1995 mandates the issue of an import permit to importers intending to import Halal meat into the nation. Only after applicants have satisfied and complied with the conditions imposed by the Islamic Religious Council of Brunei Darussalam, MoRA, MoH, and DoA can such an import permit be provided.

Furthermore, any meat imported into the country, including beef,
mutton, lamb, deer, ostrich, and processed meat, requires an Approved Permit (AP) from the Department of Customs, permission from the DoA, and approval from the HFCD, DoSA, MoRA, where the meat will be inspected after it arrives in Brunei Darussalam.

The government's stringent import requirements for halal, chilled and frozen meat have further decreased the number of approved alternative suppliers. Due to the negligence and the scarcity of livestock products during the COVID-19 situation, some people took shortcuts to smuggle illegal meat and frozen meat that did not meet the criteria. As a result, individuals and businesses frequently choose to import meat illegally into the Brunei Darussalam market.

Dealing Methods

The emergence of halal food crimes amid COVID-19 demonstrates gaps in Brunei Darussalam's control of the halal food supply. Therefore, all stakeholders should band together and collaborate to combat halal food crime in Brunei to protect the integrity of halal food. As a result, several approaches are provided below to prevent the spread of this problem.

Prosecution for Food Crimes

The law should protect consumers because consuming halalan tayyiban is a Muslim obligation. The law is enforced to protect consumers from being taken advantage of by deceptive individuals or businesses. Ultimately, the concern in this matter will save Muslims from falling into consuming non-halal or syubhah meats (Haji Ibrahim, 2022). Criminals, whether individuals or groups, should face punishment. As a result of the cases above involving smuggled meat and based-meat products, as well as illegal slaughtering, it is clear action of violations of Cap.183 Halal Meat Act and the Halal Certification and Halal Label Order 2005 have been rampant in Brunei since the COVID-19 outbreak. Since then, halal meat fraud has emerged, with increases in cases caused due to COVID-19 in 2020 and 2021. Table 2 below shows the nature and severity of the offences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the Act/ Specific Section</th>
<th>Nature of the</th>
<th>Punishment</th>
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<td>Table 2. The Nature and Offences</td>
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<tr>
<td>Order</td>
<td>Offence</td>
<td>Section</td>
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<tr>
<td>Halal Certification and Halal Label Order 2005</td>
<td>Section 37</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Failure to comply with order etc</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding $4,000, imprisonment for a term not exceeding one year or both</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Certificat e and permit not to be altered</td>
<td>Section 39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding $8,000, imprisonment for a term not exceeding 2 years or both</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Offences relating to imported meat</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding $8,000 and imprisonment not exceeding 2 years or both</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>i. Liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding $4,000 and imprisonment not exceeding one year or both.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ii. In the second or subsequent offence, a fine not exceeding $8,000 and imprisonment not exceeding 2 years and the Court shall cancel the Halal Import Permit.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Offences relating to the sale of imported meat</td>
<td>Section 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>i. Liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding $4,000 and imprisonment not exceeding one year or both.</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>ii. In the second or subsequent offence, a fine not exceeding $8,000 and imprisonment not exceeding 2 years and the Court shall cancel the Halal Import Permit.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Offences relating to local meat</td>
<td>Section 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>i. Liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding $4,000 and imprisonment not exceeding one year or both.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ii. In the second or subsequent offence, a fine not exceeding $8,000 and imprisonment not exceeding 2 years and the Court shall cancel the Halal Import Permit.</td>
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or imprisonment not exceeding 2 years and the Court shall cancel the licence.

i. In the case of uncostumed goods, such goods being dutiable goods, be liable for the first offence to a fine of not less than 6 times the amount of duty or $40,000, whichever is the lesser amount, and of not more than 20 times the amount of duty or $40,000 whichever is the greater amount, and for the second or any subsequent offence to imprisonment for a term of 2 years or both:

Provided that when the amount of duty cannot be ascertained, the penalty may amount to a fine not exceeding $40,000;

ii. In the case of uncustomed goods, such goods not being dutiable or prohibited, to a fine not exceeding twice the value of the goods or $8,000, whichever is the greater amount:

Provided that where the value cannot be ascertained, the penalty may amount to a fine not exceeding $8,000;

i. In the case of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S 39, Customs Order 2006</th>
<th>Penalty for various smuggling offences</th>
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<tr>
<td>Section 140</td>
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</table>
Increase the local supply of poultry and livestock

Food is the most basic human need (Sutawi, Hermawan, & Hidayati, 2020). Thus, food is also essential for life; without it, any life form, particularly humans, will suffer from malnutrition, famine and even death (Abd Razak & Ramli, 2020). The demand for livestock, particularly halal meat, is increasing and is expected to continue to rise (Farouk, 2013; Sungkar, 2008; Bonne & Verbeke, 2008).

Therefore, during the ‘Agriculture Sector: Challenge and Way Forward’ conference, held in conjunction with the Brunei Mid-Year Conference and Exhibitions (MYCE) 2021 at the International Convention Centre, Hajah Dahliana Binti Haji Aliakbar, Deputy Permanent Secretary, MPRT, emphasised the livestock industry's role in supporting food security for livestock commodities (Azahari, 2021). Hajah Dahliana also mentioned that several initiatives had been put in place to support the industry's hopes for developing food security, such as the creation of a clear and concise direction for key performance indicators, the allocation of agricultural sites, the provision of support services, and the provision of advice and brief training (Azahari, 2021).

Furthermore, in response to rumours of a broiler supply shortage in the market, MPRT recently met with entrepreneurs who expressed willingness to increase production to ensure the supply of broilers in the country as a short-term intervention measure, if necessary, taking into
account expected domestic demand, which will rise due to year-end activities in the country, as well as various celebrations and events in conjunction with the New Year and Chinese New Year early next year (Othman A., 2020c). Another method the government has stepped to help with the poultry scarcity is by working with three of the country’s largest poultry producers to boost the number of available chicken coops and capacity to meet local demand (Wong, 2020).

Besides that, government agencies with Government-Linked-Companies (GLCs) worked together to increase efficiency and level of productivity by constructing a feedlot facility and a Napier farm with an area of 55 hectares under the Feedlot Project of PDS Abattoir Sdn Bhd, which will afford to accommodate 2,800 head of cattle in one time and process about 7,000 head of cattle a year (Jabatan Majlis-Majlis Mesyuarat, 2021). This initiative will help improve meat production and reduce the need for meat imports.

**Halal Virtual Inspection**

Premise inspection is an important step for importing halal meat into Brunei Darussalam. Two HFCD officers will fly off to the site of halal meat production to inspect the process from beginning to end before dispatching it to Brunei Darussalam. The COVID-19 outbreak, on the other hand, has hindered this process because the two HFCD officers cannot cross the border. Therefore, the importers are unable to bring halal meat into the country. Due to that, individuals or businesses tend to smuggle meat to Brunei.

Therefore, the relevant authorities should consider a better method of implementation to address these issues. It is recommended that HFCD applies halal virtual inspection (HVI) to reduce this type of crime. Even Noordin, et al. (2021) proposed the HVI as an innovation in inspection systems to solve the problem. With the advancement of technology, human labour has improved, and amidst COVID-19, the majority of work is done virtually.

Regarding the imports of meat, Jabatan Majlis-Majlis Mesyuarat, (2021) stated that there are indeed rules that ministries are often in touch with authorities in the country before the concerned country exports their goods to Brunei Darussalam. For instance, the ministry will communicate
with the authority in Australia or Malaysia to ensure that their farms are clean, free from disease and safe to export to Brunei Darussalam (Jabatan Majlis-Majlis Mesyuarat, 2021). Hence, if possible, HFCD should conduct the HVI by informing the authorities to record the production site or video call during the inspection. The HFCD should establish a framework that provides basic support in how humans can interact and collaborate with technological support that must be complied with and handled properly by Islamic law (Noordin, Ali Azizan, A.M., & Daud, 2021).

CONCLUSION

All relevant authorities, including the HFCD, RBPF, and RCED, should cooperate in combating halal food crime effectively since the discovery of illicit and frozen meat. The HFCD and other law enforcement agencies must enhance patrols and operations to ensure the law and regulations are obeyed. Aside from that, an awareness program on the procedure for obtaining a halal import permit and establishing a halal slaughterhouse must be implemented to offer individuals and businesses more information and insight. Numerous measures may need to be implemented to prevent this from spreading.

In other words, to improve the halal food industry in Brunei Darussalam, these initiatives must entail cooperation from all stakeholders, including suppliers, operators, distributors, and consumers. Ideally, halal food crime will be completely eradicated with the help of both authorities and stakeholders.

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CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare no competing interests, such as financial or personal relationships, concerning the writing of this article.
AUTHORS’ CONTRIBUTIONS

Both authors designed the study and gathered the literature. S.N.S analysed the results and wrote the article.

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Halal Meat Act
S 39, Customs Order, 2006