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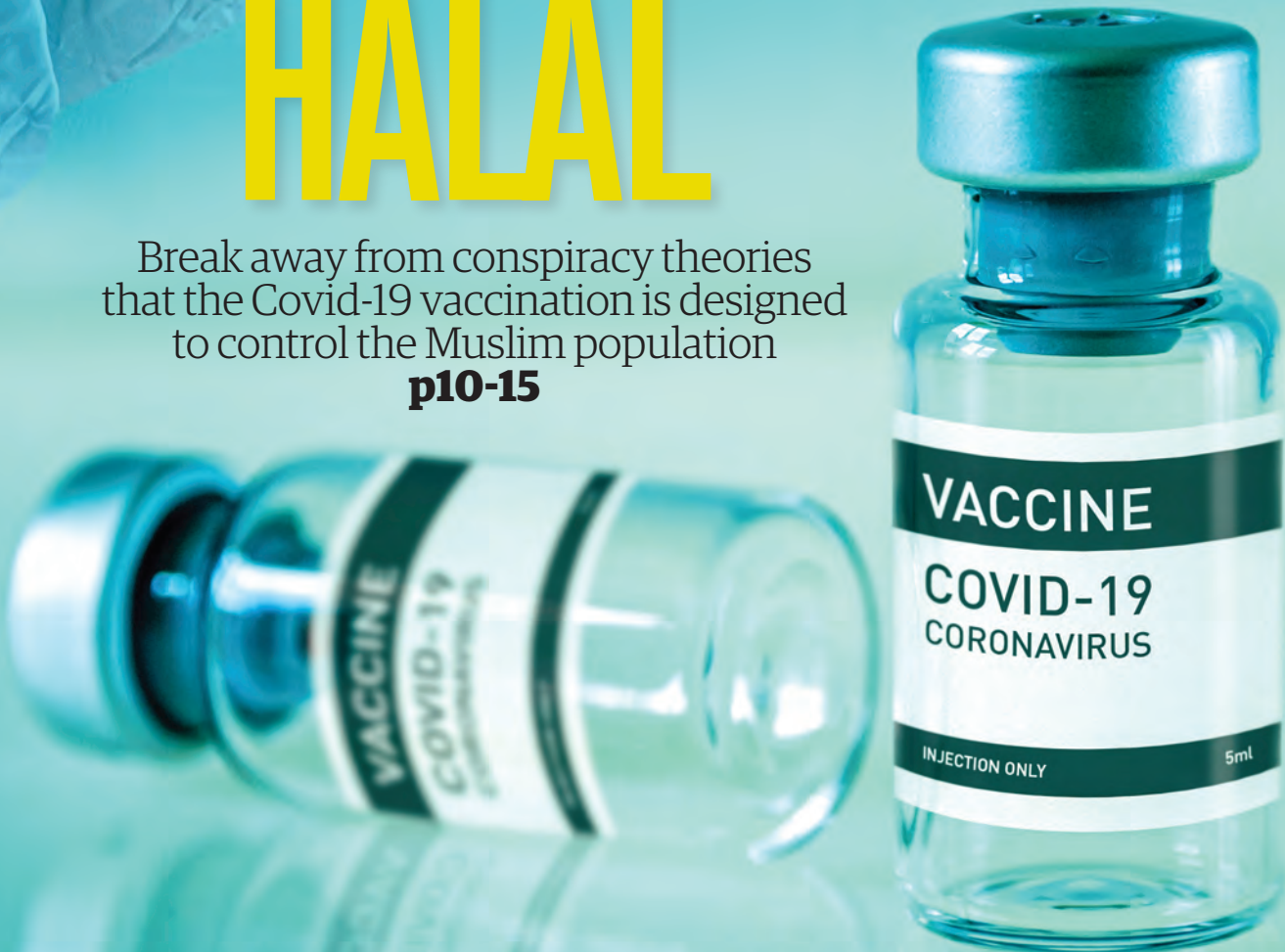


# @Halal



## SAFE AND HALAL

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## The challenge begins; win it

WITH the Covid-19 vaccines rolling out the world over, it is expected that tourism would be ignited again. Thailand, for instance, recently announced they would be accepting vaccinated tourists into Phuket. That would be the order of the day, but now popularly known as “the new norm”. Islamic tourism would not be left out of the race. Muslim countries would now be jostling for positions, for their place in the sun. All that pent-up energy, the urge to travel and especially the knotted purse-strings for over a year would now be cut loose. Where will Muslim tourists go? Which would be their favourite Muslim-friendly destinations be? It is a no-brainer. MALAYSIA. Consider this:

- The global Muslim population has surpassed three billion.
- The Muslim population has the fastest growth rate.
- The growth drivers are Saudi Arabia, UAE, Indonesia, China, Malaysia, India and Singapore.
- In 2019, before the pandemic hit, Muslim travel was worth US\$194 billion (that’s almost RM1 trillion).

Malaysia’s Islamic Tourism Centre (ITC) has been in overdrive. They knew this day would come when the demand for Muslim- destinations would be staggering. And they will have to be ready when that happens. True, there would be apprehensions. Would-be travellers will not dive right in. Caution would prevail, and yet, it is a reality. Muslim travellers’ budgets would open up even more now that Japan has announced they will not accept foreign spectators for the Tokyo Olympics this year. The needs of Muslim travellers are simple:

1. Places for prayers.
2. Halal food.

In both aspects, Malaysia is streets ahead of most, if not all, other Muslim countries. There are mosques and suraus in every Malaysian district. Halal food and beverage (F&B) outlets are on every street corner. And more ... Malaysia is a melting pot of diverse races, religions and cultures. Not something you get everywhere. There you go, ITC. The fruits of Islamic tourism are ripe for the picking. The time is now. The private sector too should rise to the occasion.



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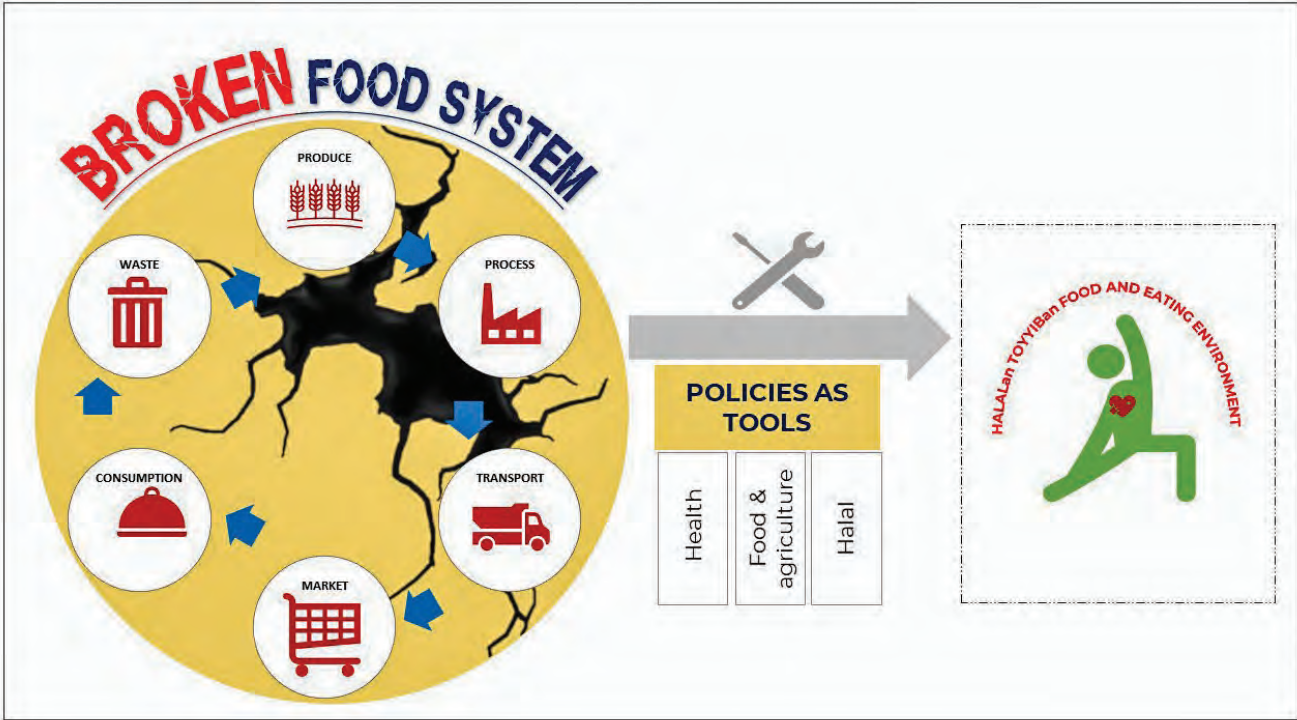


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# Let's fix our broken food system

Diet encompasses a broader spectrum of halalan toyyiban attributes



THE food system, an interlinkage of activities involving the way we produce, process, transport, market, and consume our food to the way we manage our food waste, has a significant impact on our diet. A flawed food system restricts access to a healthy diet and promotes a low-quality diet, a diet that may be halal but not toyyib.

### Self-motivation and control for toyyib diet

Rules and restriction may be the first things that come to our mind when we relate diet with religion. Halalan Toyyiban diet, however, is different. The diet encompasses a broader spectrum of toyyib (wholesome) attributes, including a healthy diet choice. It also symbolises a universally accepted lifestyle that emphasises both health and well-being.

Healthy diets are attained by consuming foods with sufficient macronutrients and micronutrients. A healthy diet is mainly composed of vegetables and fruits, whole grains, legumes, nuts, and unsaturated oils. The diet is further characterised by low to moderate seafood and poultry intake; and a very minimum intake amount of red meat, processed meat, added sugar, refined grains, and starchy vegetables.

Healthy food choice and eating behaviours can be influenced by individual factors, including our personal motivation or desire to control weight. The self-control or self-restraint concept is not something foreign in Islam. Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said:

*The people who most eat their fill in this world will be the hungriest on the Day of Resurrection.*  
[Ibn Majah, Hadith 3351]

*A human being fills no worse vessel than his stomach. It is sufficient for a human being to eat a few mouthfuls to keep his spine straight. But if he must (fill it), then one-third of food, one third for drink and one third for air.*  
[Ibn Majah, Hadith 3349]



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Besides self-control, individual factors such as attitudes, preferences, knowledge, values, lifestyle are also crucial for successfully adopting a healthy diet.

### Toyyib diet is not cheap

Some health experts believe individual behaviour for a healthy diet can only occur in a supportive environment that supports accessible and affordable healthy food choices.

In Malaysia, a study conducted by IAG in collaboration with Food Industry Asia in 2019 found that about 99 per cent of Malaysian respondents were, in fact, actively trying to improve their consumption habits.

This percentage is even higher than that of consumers surveyed in the United Kingdom (85 per cent). Despite the strong consumers' desire to improve their diet, 71 per cent believed a healthy diet is expensive (IAG).

This perception is not far-fetched. A separate study conducted in Malaysia on the relationship between cost and diet quality also confirmed the sentiment. The higher the diet quality, the higher the cost with healthier choices such as fruits and vegetables known to be relatively more expensive than other food groups.

Although Malaysia is blessed with a tropical climate which helps us produce a remarkable diversity of edible fruits, our local fruit prices are surprisingly expensive. With the cost as the barrier, it is not surprising that more than 80 per cent of Malaysians do not consume sufficient vegetables (300g daily) and fruits (at least 400g daily).

For several reasons, this is worrisome.

### The 'broken' food system

The high price of healthier foods or choices has been an issue for quite some time, and experts are not optimistic that the situation will get better over time. This global problem has much to do with our broken food system.

In many developed and developing countries, unhealthy food is cheap because the main ingredients can be mass-produced with a longer shelf-life. The global food markets have increased the accessibility of cheap ultra-processed food with inadequate nutrition but high energy, fat, sugar, and salt.

Healthy food such as fruits and vegetables, in comparison, is much more expensive and harder to be accessed.

In the United Kingdom, modelling predicted that more than half of children born in 2020 will experience diet-related disease if there are no drastic changes to their current food system.

This will affect their quality of life by the time they reach 65 years of age. Prediction based on the Malaysian current food system could be much worse given our standing as the 'fattest' country in Asia.

Complications arising from diet-related disease affect an individual's quality of life and impose a considerable burden on our healthcare system. Diabetes alone is estimated to cause Malaysia about US\$600 million annually.

In simple terms, we need to fix the broken food system to stop people from acquiring these preventable diet-related diseases.

### Can policies help fix the 'broken' food system?

Governments and the food industry, without a doubt, will continue to shape and direct our eating environments. The complementary and synergistic nature of different policies, including health, food, and agriculture, are needed to intervene in the current food system.

These policies should be aligned with national public health and nutrition goals to advance the nation's health and well-being.

Policies that not only promote but normalise healthy eating is essential. In normalising the healthy diet, which is part of the halalan toyyiban diet, halal policies (as well as the standards) also need to be aligned with national public health and nutrition goals.

While multiple strategies have been put forward in the Halal Industry Master Plan (HIMP) 2030, unfortunately, the national nutrition goals are yet to be addressed.

There is also no specific clause that specifies the nutrition requirement in MS1500:2019, one of the common Malaysian Standards adopted by the food industry.

### Halalan Toyyiban food and the eating environment is the goal

Individual behaviour change is difficult to achieve without addressing the context in which people make decisions. Improving dietary practice will require the synergistic nature of different policies, including halal, to shift our food system favouring toyyib eating.

In championing halal causes and be the global halal hub, our government needs to make sure the halal policies and Halal Industry Master Plan developed truly reflect and capture the comprehensive spirit of halalan toyyiban.

These efforts can intervene in our food systems, potentially creating ripple effects that transform our society's norm in general, specifically Muslim culture, towards halalan toyyiban food choice. In fact, Muslims should be the prime example of a healthy eating community.

*You are the best Ummah [as an example] raised up for mankind. You enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong, and you believe in God.*

[Q. al-Baqarah 3:110]

Thus, it is part of our calling as Muslims to be the benchmark for the rest of mankind, including in the way we eat.