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## ISLAMIC STUDIES INSTITUTIONS IN THE SULTANATE OF BRUNEI-DARUSSALAM

**Abstract:** This article describes general information on the comprehensive aspects the sultanate of Brunei-Darussalam such as history, economy, and socio-cultural life. However, most important emphasis is given towards shedding light on the Islamic Studies Institutions such as Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddin Centre for Islamic Studies (SOASCIS) at Universiti Brunei Darussalam and Universiti Islam Sultan Sharif Ali (UNISSA) of the Sultanate of Brunei-Darussalam.

**Key words:** Brunei-Darussalam, Islamic Studies Institutions.

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### Introduction

Brunei is located on the island of Borneo, along its north coast, bordering the South China Sea and Malaysia. Brunei consists of two non-neighbouring parts divided into a part of the Malaysian state of Sarawak, one part of which consists of 3 provinces inhabited by the main part Muara, Tutong and Kuala Belait, and the other part is Temburong Province, forming a tropical forest with unique flora and fauna. Brunei is 370 km off the coast of the sea and is an economic zone up to the middle of the South China Sea. Brunei covers an area of 5,765 km<sup>2</sup>, which is more than twice bigger than Luxembourg with an area of 2,586 km<sup>2</sup>. "The population of the country is over 430,000 (in 2018) and 65% are Brunei-Melayu, 25% Brunei-Chinese and the remaining 10% are local small ethnic groups." The capital is Bandar Seri Begawan. The official language is Melayu (Malay), English, Chinese and the native language is Brunei-Melayu, and almost all of the population is fluent in English. In 2014, Brunei became the first country in East Asia to adopt the first Islamic Sharia law. The Sultanate of Brunei is an oil-rich kingdom ruled by the Sultan. "According to the state system, it is an absolute monarchy and the current Sultan of Brunei, Haji

Hassanal Bolkiah Muizzaddin Waddaulah (Yang Di-Pertuan Negara), is the 29th ruler and is a dynasty of sultans who have ruled continuously for 600 years." [6, p.3] He ascended the throne in 1967 and has played an invaluable role in the development of the sultanate, ensuring the peace and prosperity of the country. On January 1, 1984, Brunei Darussalam gained full independence and the Sultan was appointed as Prime Minister of Chairman of the Council of Six Ministers, Minister of Finance and Minister of the Interior Affairs.

### Analysis of the Socio-economic life of Brunei-Darussalam

The economy of Brunei Darussalam primarily relies on revenues from liquefied natural gas and oil, 70% of the country's income comes from these natural resources, and the sultanate uses these funds to finance development programs. The country is one of the world leaders in terms of GDP per capita (GDP PPP) and ranked fourth in 2017 with \$ 79,000. Brunei's key economic indicators: "Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2017, according to the World Bank, amounted to 12 billion." and increased by 6.1% compared to the previous year and averaged \$ 30,000 per capita. The

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deflation rate in the country has averaged around 0.4% over the last 3 years.

The country's trade balance showed a positive balance, and over the past 3 years, export-import has yielded the following results:

**Table 1. Brunei Foreign Trade and Balance, 2015, 2016 and 2017.**

	2015	2016	2017
Export	6.4	5.2	5.9
Import	3.2	2.7	3
Balance	3.2	2.5	2.9

\* In Billion U.S. dollars.

**The military potential of the country.** According to official data, in 2017, Brunei accounted for 2.87% of GDP, or 418 million to the military sphere. The U.S. dollar has allocated funds. "The eligibility for military service in the country starts at the age of 17 and the total number is 108,356 of which the total number of active military personnel is 10,000. Military Forces: Consists of the Royal Brunei Armed Forces, the Royal Brunei Navy and the Royal Brunei Air Force (Tentera Udara Diraja Brunei). Non-Malays for volunteer military service are not eligible to serve and undergo a total of 43 weeks of initial training from the Army, Navy, and Air Force.

**The cultural sphere in Brunei.** Located in Kota Batu, the old capital near Bandar Seri Begawan, the museum building features carvings based on traditional Malay patterns, similar to the design of the tomb of Sultan Bolkiah, ruler of the Sultanate of Brunei in the 15th century. The museum has an Islamic art gallery, a natural history gallery and galleries for temporary exhibitions. The historical gallery contains exhibits related to the history of Southeast Asia, which belonged to Brunei from the time of its conquest by the Spaniards and Portuguese in the 16th century. The exhibitions cover the traditional way of life of many people in the country and the natural history of flora and fauna. In the ninth and tenth centuries, there are Iranian and Central Asian porcelain, Egyptian and Levantine bottles, woven fabrics, gold ornaments, a set of rituals used in the country, and sultan's weapons. The most ancient artefacts are the personal collections of the Sultan of Brunei, including silver and gold coins collected from a wide range of the Islamic world. Another important exhibition is a painting entitled "The Spirit of Buddha: A History of Japanese Martial Arts," which includes weapons and costumes and costumes used in Japan in the eighth and fourteenth centuries. There is also a local Brunei Shell Petroleum oil and gas industry exhibition displaying oil exploration and discovery processes in Brunei. Large-scale exhibition Large-scale exhibitions are displayed in the rooms behind the museum building in the park area.

Brunei Darussalam Maritime Museum. Like the ship, the museum consists of three galleries. A third gallery for two permanent exhibitions and temporary

exhibitions. The exhibition features more than 13,000 items made in China, Vietnam and Thailand, dug from a huge canal that sank off the coast of Borneo about 500 years ago.

The formation of the Islamic kingdom in Borneo dates back to the 14th century, and Avang Alak Betar converted to Islam in 1368 and proclaimed himself Sultan Muhammad Shah. This suggests that Islam has been in Brunei for almost 650 years, and that Brunei continued to increase its influence on the island of Borneo and the islands of present-day southern Philippines until the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries, and Brunei Darussalam was a powerful kingdom covering Sabah, Sarawak and the lower Philippines. Thus, the present Sultan is one of the oldest permanent ruling dynasties in the world. By the nineteenth century, the Brunei Darussalam Empire had been subjected to wars, piracy, and the colonial actions of European powers. In 1847, the sultan made a treaty with Great Britain, and in 1888, Brunei Darussalam officially became a British vassal. In 1906, the Residence System was established in Brunei Darussalam. A resident of England, he was appointed as a representative of the British government to advise the sultan on all matters except the traditions of the Malays and the religion of Islam. Because of an agreement signed with the United Kingdom in 1959, Brunei Darussalam created a constitution for self-government, in which Islam was recognized as the official religion in Brunei.

Among the religions [8, p.289] in Brunei, they follow the Shafi'i sect of Sunni Islam. "More than 75% of the population is Muslim, and other religions are important, such as 9% Buddhists and 8% Christians and 4% indigenous people."

State has organised many religious institutions, among them are the Zakat [3, p.4537] collection and distribution. Zakat [9, p.26] is one of the five pillars of Islam. [1, p.75; 2, p. 10; 5, P.441] The role of the zakat as a balancer in the society has been proved for many centuries since the spread of Islam. [2, P. 10; 4, p.314] The Islamic Religious Council of Brunei Darussalam (MUIB) under the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MORA) governs the management of zakat in Brunei Darussalam. [1, p.76]

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**Higher Education.** The Sultanate has four Higher Education Institutions Brunei Darussalam University, Brunei University of Technology, Sultan Sharif Ali Islamic University and College of Teachers of Religious Education. For Brunei citizens in the country, higher education is absolutely free, with monthly stipends and free accommodation and 3 meals a day. Classes at universities are conducted in English, Arabic and Malay. Almost all foreign students study based on a Brunei state grant. Each University has religious disciplines taught by experienced professors.

Brunei Government Expenditure on Education Total percentage of GDP data was reported at 4.425 % in 2016. This records an increase from the previous number of 3.353 % for 2014. Brunei Government

Expenditure on Education Total percentage of GDP data is updated yearly, averaging 3.706 % from Dec 1970 to 2016, with 27 observations. The data reached an all-time high of 8.793 % in 1973 and a record low of 1.191 % in 1980. Brunei BN: Government Expenditure on Education: Total: percentage of GDP data remains active status in CEIC and is reported by World Bank. The data is categorized under Global Database's Brunei – Table BN. World Bank. WDI: Education Statistics. General government expenditure on education (current, capital, and transfers) is expressed as a percentage of GDP. It includes expenditure funded by transfers from international sources to government. General government usually refers to local, regional and central governments.

**Table 2. Stats on Education and literacy rate in Brunei-Darussalam**

Duration of primary education	6 years
Duration of secondary education	7 years
Pupil-teacher ratio in primary education	10 students per teacher
Pupil-teacher ratio in secondary education	8.8 students per teacher
Youth literacy rate	99.6 %
Adult literacy rate	97.21 %

**UNISSA- Universiti Islam Sultan Sharif Ali.** The idea to open a second university in Brunei was first addressed by His Majesty Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah in his Titah “speech” delivered at University of Brunei Darussalam’s 16th convocation in 2004 and again in 2005 at UBD’s 17th convocation whereby His Majesty had stated that the second university shall be an Islamic university. The overall aim of the new university is to become a centre for the spread of Islam in the region.

The university took its name from the Sharifate of Mecca, Barkat Ali ibnu Sharif Ajlan ibnu Sharif Rumaithah, known as Sultan Sharif Ali, who was a descendant of Islamic prophet Muhammad and appointed as the third Sultan of Brunei after marrying the daughter of the previous sultan. He was the first sultan to build a mosque in Brunei; it was destroyed during Allied bombing in 1945/46.

On 11 Zulhijjah 1427AH (1 January 2007), Universiti Islam Sultan Sharif Ali was established. UNISSA received its first batch of students in August 2007. 125 undergraduates and 27 postgraduate students were admitted. On its launch, UNISSA absorbed academic and non-academic staff as well as its students from the Sultan Haji Omar Ali Saifuddin Institute of Islamic Studies (IPI SHOAS) which had hitherto been a part of UBD. At the time, UNISSA did not have their own premises and had to use IPI SHOAS as their base. In February 2009, the university moved to a new campus in Gadong at the former

Pengiran Anak Puteri Rashidah College of Nursing to allow more room for expansion and facilities.

**Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddin Center for Islamic Studies (SOASCIS)** at the University of Brunei Darussalam. The Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddin Center for Islamic Studies (SOASCIS) was established on September 30 with the consent of Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah Muizzaddin Waddaullah. One of its main goals is to train graduates and scholars who are equipped with the necessary knowledge and experience to lead Muslims facing the changes and challenges of today’s world. This centre also prepares intellectuals who think on modern issues and have a strong intellectual capacity and a strong Islamic thinking.

The Centre is dedicated to the advanced study of Islam, in particular Islam’s societal impact in terms of beliefs, practices, and organizational forms, by employing the tools and methods of Islamic sciences. In order to promote and improve our understanding of the Islamic world, in an increasingly inter-dependent world, this endeavor requires the continuous development of Islam-based tools of analysis to underpin the multi-disciplinary perspectives demanded by contemporary scholarship.

The Centre also organizes lectures, seminars, workshops and conferences, exhibitions and other academic events throughout the academic year. The SOASCIS welcomes scholars and students from all lifestyles and religious traditions to participate in Center’s venture.

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