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Alcohol content: Many still confused as to what is haram

KUCHING: Malaysian Muslims are told against misunderstanding the content of alcohol in some food that are declared 'halal' by the authorities.

According to Universiti Putra Malaysia's Halal Products Research Institute Prof Dr Russly Abdul Rahman, many Malaysian Muslims are confused with this and tend to think that anything with alcohol content is "haram" or illicit according to the Islamic law.

Speaking during the state-level Fatwa seminar here yesterday, he said the Malaysian Fatwa Committee of the National Council for Islamic Affairs declared that any food items which were not of alcoholic beverages (arak) would be considered and declared Halal by the authorities if the alcohol content did not exceed 0.01%.

"Even so, this is still not elaborate enough and not practical as there are several Halal products that have more than 0.01% alcohol content such as some bicarbonate drinks, cooking sauces and ketchups and 'tapai' (fermented rice)," said Dr Russly.

He said because the permitted alcohol content on food items was not sufficiently specified, many people resorted to boycotting some well-known food products.

"Essentially, not all food items with alcohol are alcoholic beverages like liquor or beer.

Alcohol sometimes exists naturally in many natural and organic food items such as fruits due to natural fermentation," explained Dr Russly.

He said due to the mass misunderstanding among consumers, the Malaysian Fatwa Committee of the National Council for Islamic Affairs had made a revision.

According to him, the revised the condition is that any food item containing not more than

1% alcohol content and not meant to be alcoholic is legitimate. Examples of this are sauce, ketchup and any permitted food additives.

Dr Russly also revealed that medication and perfume products with small amount of alcohol not intended to be alcoholic beverages were also legitimate.

"Food and drinks which contain alcohol naturally like fruits, nuts or grains are also legit," said Dr Russly.

He said permitted alcohol content in food items should be looked in both Islamic and scientific perspectives.

Dr Russly said there should also be a detail research on the medico-legal principles on how much alcohol would cause drunkenness.

"This is to make clear the Fatwa or rules on permitted alcohol content, and eventually would solve related issues in the Halal industry," he added.