

Negara Brunei Darussalam in 2018

Some Good News at Last

ABSTRACT

After four years of economic gloom, the Bruneian economy began showing signs of recovery, mainly thanks to improved global oil prices and the fruits of government policies introduced three years ago. In the meantime, the sultan's seriousness in combating corruption has taken center stage, with young new faces introduced in the recent cabinet reshuffle. Implementation of *sharia* law remains slow. On the international front, Brunei appears to be moving closer to China, which is emerging as the country's largest foreign investor.

KEYWORDS: Brunei, cabinet reshuffle, economy, diversification, sharia law, foreign relations

NEGARA BRUNEI DARUSSALAM IS RUN by a monarchy which dates back to 1363, making it Southeast Asia's oldest surviving monarchy. It was a British protectorate from 1888 onward and gained independence in 1984. Since 1984, no elections have been held, and the present sultan, Hassanal Bolkiah, rules as an absolute monarch, wielding overarching executive and legislative powers over a population of 421,300 (as of 2017). It is often said that "the sultan is the state and the state is the sultan."¹

The year 2018 started with the sultan announcing a major cabinet reshuffle, which was not due until 2020, as the earlier cabinet was appointed in 2015 for a five-year term. Six senior ministers and nine deputy ministers were

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1. Jatswan S. Sidhu, *Historical Dictionary of Brunei Darussalam*, 3rd ed. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017): 1.