

SME WEEKLY NEWS

(25 December 2017 – 29 December 2017)

Countries	Highlights
<p>MALAYSIA</p> <p>Employers want levy policy review</p>	<p>Employers are making a last-minute appeal to the Government to review the policy of shifting levy payment to the bosses. The current arrangement whereby foreign workers pay the levy themselves should be maintained, said the Executive Director of Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF), Datuk Shamsuddin Bardan. Should the levy be imposed, it is likely that the cost of products will see an increase next year as industries have to pass the cost to consumers in order to survive, and this will have a spiralling effect on inflation. MEF said businesses would also struggle as employers stand to lose about RM3bil to RM4bil working capital. National President of SME Association of Malaysia, Datuk Michael Kang Hua Keong also said that the SMEs will have to pass the buck to customers as their cost of doing business will increase by 15% to 20%.</p> <p>Previously on 20 December, MOHR announced that starting 1 January 2018, employers nationwide are required to pay the levy for their foreign workers. The levy ranges from RM410 to RM1,850 depending on the sector. The levy system had been fine-tuned as to regulate the influx of low-skilled foreign workers and cap their employment number at 15% by 2020. This means that employers will no longer be able to deduct the levy from the wages of foreign workers.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>(Source: The Star Online, 27 December 2017)</i></p>
<p>SINGAPORE</p> <p>SMEs in Singapore more upbeat about prospects in 2018</p>	<p>Smaller firms here are increasingly optimistic about their business prospects, as reflected in a new survey that showed index on business outlook for the next six months has risen across the board, from 50.6 to 51.2 (score above 50 indicates growth expectation, score below 50 signals possible contraction). SMEs in the business services sector recorded the highest level of optimism, likely buoyed by increased economic activity from other sectors driving up demand. The next two best performers were manufacturing and commerce/trading, with a score of 51. Meanwhile, construction and engineering, which recorded 49.9 in the previous quarter, registered a positive score of 50.4. The expectation of a stronger pipeline of public-sector projects and the launch of the Industry Transformation Map for the construction sector have added to the sector's positive outlook. SMEs also showed positive expectations for turnover, profitability, financing and business expansion. Capital investment was the only component that faltered, as report suggests that many SMEs may be holding back new capital expenditure as they await for next year's Budget.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>(Source: The Straits Times, 28 December 2017)</i></p>
<p>MYANMAR</p> <p>Myanmar to accelerate SME development in early 2018</p>	<p>Myanmar is planning to accelerate the SME development starting early January 2018 by introducing work sector competitions across the country. The products from the SMEs will be displayed and those which are up to standard in the regional competitions will contest in the final round in Nay Pyi Taw, said the First Vice President, U Myint Swe. He pledged that the government will be working together on obtaining cash investment, main infrastructural requirement of electric power and obtaining loan without collateral. Loans will be provided to those entitled within 30 days, disclosing that the state-owned Myanmar Economic Bank will provide the loan totalling 200 billion kyats (about USD 147 million). According to research by the Central Statistical Organization, 98% of the more than 120,000 businesses registered in Myanmar are SMEs. In the employment sector, of the 21.9 million workers, 83% are working in un-registered SMEs. Businessmen were urged to take the advantage of the newly enacted Myanmar Companies Law for the development of SMEs.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>(Source: Xinhuanet, 31 December 2017)</i></p>

HAVE YOUR CAKE AND EAT IT TOO

JULIANA Omar finds baking fun and intensely satisfying. In fact, the petite baker finds so much pleasure in baking that she quit her job to set up Bake To Play, a one-stop centre for those who crave special cakes or dessert treats. Juliana was very much inspired by her mother, a former baking teacher.

After learning the basics of baking from her mother, she started experimenting with her own flavours, which helped her with product development when she eventually joined the world of entrepreneurship. The cake business started in 2013 under Bisque Bites Sdn Bhd as an online, made-to-order cake connoisseur. “When I first started, I was struggling to manage everything. Then my brother, Hakim, came along and helped me.

The siblings found a proper location with proper equipment and a team. They also created an e-commerce website to make it more convenient for customers to select their cakes and place their orders. She also invested RM150,000 into setting up her kitchen to get the business going. Having done this for several years now, Juliana notes that the experience has been priceless and “worth the effort.”



Early this year, Juliana created the over-arching brand Bake To Play that covers four different segments of the business – Bisque, Wildcard, Bisque Café and Poppy. Bisque continues to offer customers with a menu of cakes that they can order from through the website while Wildcard provides bespoke, customised and exclusive cakes for order for special events like weddings. Poppy is a business-to-business dessert supplier that supplies treats to other cafes in the Klang Valley. It offers a selection of cakes and desserts at a lower price and is cost-effective.

She emphasises that Bake To Play does not use preservatives and every product is homemade with no artificial flavour, cake stabilizers or enhancers. This gives the cakes and desserts their distinctive original taste. Extra attention is given to the quality, texture and taste of all their products. “We only use high quality butter and vegetable oil. Our products are strictly pork-free and we do not use alcohol. The ingredients and suppliers used are carefully selected, and are halal-certified with proof of recognition provided by the suppliers,” she adds.

In mid-2015, Juliana also launched Bisque Cafe which served a full range of cafe delicacies other than cakes. However, the cafe closed its doors late last year for a rebranding exercise and Juliana hopes to open an outlet in the Klang Valley soon. Bake To Play has also partnered with GoGet Services to make deliveries within the Klang valley so that it is more convenient for customers who can’t pick up their orders.

Next in the pipeline is a baking studio to teach other people how to bake. Just as she had learned from her mother, Juliana hopes to pass on her knowledge to others. “We recently started our very own YouTube channel too, where viewers can learn recipes, tips and tricks on baking,” she says. This has helped Bake To Play with some of its promotional efforts. Juliana says its brands are mainly promoted through words of mouth and on social media.

All the cakes at Bake To Play are from Juliana’s and her mother’s personal collection of recipes. She continues to experiment and improvise along the way to produce more treats for her customers.

(Source: The Star, 25 December 2017)