

**Opening Ceremony of 21<sup>st</sup> Annual SME Conference**

**Time: 21 Aug 2019 at 9.15 am**

**Venue: Suntec Singapore**

**Speech by SCCCI President Roland Ng**

Honourable Minister for Trade and Industry Mr Chan Chun Sing

Senior Minister of State for Ministry of Communications and Information  
& Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth, Ms Sim Ann,

Excellencies, Senior Government Officials

Distinguished speakers and friends

SCCCI Council Members and Members

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Morning everyone!

On behalf of the SCCCI, I extend a warm welcome to all of you for participating in this year's SME Conference.

Our conference is now into its twenty-first (21<sup>st</sup>) year. Over the last two decades, we have continued to innovate and seek new breakthroughs, in order to make this annual grand business

gathering into the most definitive event for the local small and medium enterprises. It is where our businesses and SMEs would come to get insights, interact and network.

The number of participants for this year's SME Conference has reached 7,000. Through this platform created by the Chamber, I urge everyone to seize the chance to actively expand your network and uncover new business opportunities.

The theme of this year's conference is "Global Innovations: Navigating the New Future". We are facing a challenging external environment and the Singapore economy is slowing down. Chamber's Annual Business Survey this year revealed that businesses have indeed been affected by the current economic downturn. However, our companies must continue with the momentum to transform, innovate and upgrade their capabilities. Through this two-day conference, we have curated a rich programme that we hope can help you to navigate this complex business setting.

I shall now continue my speech in Mandarin.

Honourable Minister for Trade and Industry Chan Chun Sing  
Senior Minister of State for Ministry of Communications and Information  
& Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth, Ms Sim Ann,

Excellencies, Senior Government Officials

Distinguished speakers and friends

SCCCI Council Members and Members

Ladies and Gentlemen

Today marks the grand opening of the 21<sup>st</sup> SME Conference. On behalf of the SCCCI, I extend my warm welcome to all of you for participating in this event.

In the last 20 over years, the SME Conference has assiduously provided businesses with a platform for learning, interaction and growth. It has evolved to become a premium bilingual event for businesses. Over these two days, 100 outstanding entrepreneurs and domain experts of various sectors, from Singapore and abroad, would be here to share their valuable experiences. There are also 80 exhibitors in the SME Expo to provide solutions sought by small and medium enterprises.

The conference has attracted a total of 7,000 registered participants. We have set this year's theme as "Global Innovations: Navigating the New Future". The aim is to encourage all of you to boldly innovate to overcome our constraints and set sights on becoming SMEs equipped with the capability to compete internationally.

## **Findings from the 2019 Annual Business Survey: Economic slowdown**

In conjunction with this conference, SCCCI conducted its 2019 Annual Business Survey over the last three months, collecting feedback and views from nearly 1,000 member companies. Among them 95 per cent were SMEs. Now please allow me to share some of the key findings.

This survey reflects the effects from the slowing down in Singapore's economy. Close to 40 per cent of the businesses polled expect a drop in their revenue. This is 12 percentage points higher than last year. 70 per cent of the businesses indicated they are facing the challenge of rising business costs. 55 per cent forecast a dip in profits this year. Fortunately, most of them (60 per cent) are committed to retaining their present employees. Only a small number (17 per cent) said they would cut back on manpower.

In such a business environment, the topmost concerns of the respondents are how to grow their revenue, innovation of products and services, attraction and retention of workers, and how to digitalise their businesses. Their three major challenges are increase in business costs, stiff market competition, and manpower shortage.

As for global developments, the businesses polled are most concerned about the Sino-US trade tension (63 per cent), cyberattacks (20 per cent), and Singapore-Malaysia bilateral relationship (18 per cent). The top internationalisation-related topics of interest are how to make use of and

benefit from free trade agreements and how to utilise the digital channels for expansion.

### **Key highlights of the 21<sup>st</sup> Annual SME Conference**

I greatly appreciate it that our member businesses have made time to give us your valuable feedback. This year we have meticulously planned a series of forums and workshops to help businesses with upgrading of relevant capabilities. If your business is in the process of transformation and undertaking innovation, or if you wish to find out more about the benefits related to free trade agreements, you could gain insights by listening to the experts from the various sectors and the prominent enterprises at this year's SME Conference.

The ongoing Sino-China trade war also reminds us of the utmost importance of acquiring technology to build up competitiveness. SMEs could embrace digitalisation to drive transformation, including making use of artificial intelligence and internet of things to improve operational efficiency. These topics are covered in this year's conference as well.

Today's global economic environment, where protectionism is on the rise, is complex, ever-changing, and rife with challenges. Businesses considering venturing abroad need to be even more agile. They could diversify their internationalisation strategy to spread out the risks. Our companies could collaborate to make inroads into international markets instead of going it alone.

SCCCI provides a wide range of support to SMEs. Our three offices in Shanghai, Chengdu and Chongqing are all actively helping SMEs to break into the China market. Our SME Centre@SCCCI and the Singapore Chinese Chamber Institute of Business are also offering business advisory services to enterprises, helping them to leverage government assistance schemes, and providing business training. If you are interested, you are welcome to make enquiries at any time!

### **Strengthening tripartite collaboration to overcome challenges**

In an environment ridden with challenges, I urge the business community to actively participate in the tripartite collaboration involving our government and the union to share your constructive views and strengthen this relationship. I absolutely agree with the commitment that Minister Chan Chun Sing made recently, that is: as Singapore undergoes economic restructuring, the government will remain transparent to explain with openness the challenges ahead to Singaporeans, helping them to adjust and adapt.

SCCCI will continue its collaboration with the government to find more effective ways to help our SMEs transform and upgrade, uncover their potentials and develop their competitive edge. In a rapidly changing business environment, the growth of an enterprise will decline if it stalls. Although the economy is slowing down, businesses should continue the momentum in enhancing their competitiveness. Should economic prospects remain uncertain or if there is a sharp downturn in the global

economy, I also hope the government is prepared to offer businesses timely and effective help.

In closing, I wish to express my heartfelt thanks to Minister Chan Chun Sing for being the Guest of honour of this year's SME Conference. I would also like to thank all sponsors and government agencies for your tremendous support as well as the business community for your enthusiastic response. I wish everyone a fruitful time learning from the experts and harvesting from the pooling of ideas and convergence of views. I wish you every success in steering your business towards a new journey of growth. Thank you.

\*\*\*\*\*