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**FY2016 Budget:
Figures, plans
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explained**

HOT NEWS • 4-5

When it comes to innovation, the food industry has a winning recipe

JOY FANG
joyfangz@mediacorp.com.sg

SINGAPORE – Three years after she opened her dessert eatery in 2007, Ms Janice Wong found herself at a crossroads: Her 2am:Dessert Bar, which opens only at night, as its name implies, was drawing the crowds and the business was in the black. Where would she go from there?

She could go the usual route and open franchise stores overseas. Or she could take an unconventional path. She opted for the latter.

In 2011, she opened a research laboratory to experiment with ingredients and cooking techniques. The lab, where chefs do research and conduct workshops, started out at Fusionopolis before moving to Tokyo three years later. Currently, researchers there are studying sake.

“The model for Singapore food businesses is always: Do well, open another, franchise, and then retire ... I thought about it, but I decided to not do that and to instead put all my resources into research ... if I did (open) stores in Indonesia and Thailand, I would probably not have reached the stage that I am at,” said Ms Wong, 33, who has since picked up coding to help her program machines.

Her efforts in the lab led to creations of edible art and kickstarted a flurry of activities which saw her expanding her business and making a mark on the international stage: Among her edible art installations was one displayed last year at the

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PHOTO: DON WONG

SPECTACULAR AERIAL BALLET Four giant kites filled with helium from French performance group Luminéoles Ballet hover gently in the air at Clifford Square as the troupe preps for its debut appearance in Asia. In town for the French Festival Singapore 2016, the 15m by 7m polyester kites will be performing two shows on Saturday at 7.45pm and 8.45pm at Gardens by the Bay.

COUNTRY ‘NOT IN DENIAL STAGE’ ANYMORE

Zero chance of haze like last year in region, says Indonesian official

‘Much fewer hotspots’ promised, with peatland restoration, other actions to prevent fires

NEO CHAI CHIN
chaichin@mediacorp.com.sg

SINGAPORE – There is “zero chance” that any haze this year will be as severe as last year’s episode — where air quality hit hazardous levels and forced the closure of schools in Sin-

gapore and in the region — the head of an Indonesian agency recently set up to restore degraded peatland has boldly promised.

Acknowledging that fire prevention had not been a focus previously, Mr Nazir Foad, who was making his first overseas speech since taking the reins at the Peatland Restoration Agency, said “we are not in the denial stage anymore, we’re in the stage of correcting the mistakes of the past”.

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China growth slows, but stimulus measures gain traction

BEIJING – China has posted its slowest economic growth since the 2009 global financial crisis but a surge of new debt has helped fuel a recovery in factory activity, investment and household spending in the world’s second-largest economy.

That is good news in the near-term, soothing fears of a hard landing, economists said, but some worry it marks a return to the old playbook used during the financial crisis, when Beijing hand-cranked its economy out of a slowdown through massive stimulus rather than structural reform.

“All this obsession with a Chinese hard landing, I think, is a bit too much. Chinese economic data is showing signs of stabilisation,” said Mr Suan Teck Kin, economist at the United Overseas Bank in Singapore.

China’s gross domestic product grew at an annual rate of 6.7 per cent in the first quarter of the year, National Bureau of Statistics data showed yesterday, easing slightly from 6.8 per cent in the previous quarter and marking the slowest rate of expansion since the first quarter of 2009, when growth tumbled to 6.2 per cent. The latest reading was exactly as economists had expected and was in line with the government’s growth target of 6.5 to 7 per cent for the full year.

Other indicators released yesterday showed new loans, retail sales, industrial output and fixed asset investment were all better than forecast. While analysts said the data is evidence of a bottoming out in the economy’s slowdown, some warn that the first quarter of 2015 got off to a similarly glowing start before a stock market crash later that year.

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