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**20th Feb 2013 (Wed) 7pm to 10pm**  
**27th Feb 2013 (Wed) 7pm to 10pm**

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Commercial Mastery Program Introductory Talk  
Date : 21<sup>st</sup> February 2013 (Thu) Time : 2pm - 5pm (Reg starts at 1.45pm)

Register Through  
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Email : cmp@lifemasteryacademy.com  
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New April Intake Due to Demand

### ONLINE GURU TRADER Presents

## FREE TRADE TO WIN Wealth Seminar

Date/Time: 20th Feb, Wednesday (7pm - 9pm)  
Venue: Six Battery Road #20-01 Singapore 049909 (Above Raffles Place MRT Exit H)

21st Feb, Thursday (7.30pm - 9.30pm)

Topics include:  
• Getting Your Direction And Timing Right To Succeed In Any Market  
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• Start To Grow Your Money With Only \$500  
• Know When To Enter And Exit With High Success  
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For Enquiries & Tender Document  
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Tender Closing on 27 February 2013 (Wed), 3pm

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Productivity is the key buzzword for economic planners, as the Government moves ahead to restructure the economy. But how are firms coping with the productivity drive? Are the gains

sustainable? **The Straits Times** speaks to firms in the much-criticised construction sector and finds that bosses are changing the way they build, relying more on technology and less on cheaper foreign labour.

# Firms warming up to productivity drive

By AARON LOW  
ASSISTANT MONEY EDITOR

THREE years since Singapore first outlined plans to raise productivity, the results have so far been unspectacular. The Republic started off the drive with a big bang in 2010, when productivity rose an impressive 11.1 per cent, on the back of a strong economy which grew 14.8 per cent. But the initial euphoria soon faded. In 2011, productivity growth slumped to a mere 1 per cent while productivity actually fell an average of 2.4 per cent for the first nine months of last year.

Beyond the numbers, it is clear, however, that the productivity message is getting through, going by the dozens of companies **The Straits Times** interviewed over the past three weeks.

We went out to talk to firms

in five sectors: construction, food manufacturing, furniture, logistics, and food and beverage, all of which have been targeted by the Government's productivity drive.

We wanted to know how firms were taking to the push for productivity.

How was the campaign affecting business and can the gains be sustained? The answers were mixed.

Many bosses are squaring up to the reality that the old way of doing things can no longer persist.

For instance, Mr Poh Ah

Seng, managing director and founder of Seng Hua Hing Foodstuff, which manufactures Camel Nuts, said that the firm "has no choice but to automate our processes".

"Our factory is already understaffed at the moment. We want to try and hire more Singaporeans but this has been very difficult," he said.

"Our solution at the moment has been to look into more automation in our production process."

But others, especially small firms, shrugged off the need to raise productivity.

Said Mr Seah Soew Khiang, founder of spice maker Seah's Spices: "Using automation comes with a large cost and is very risky."

"It's not that we don't want to, but it's a matter of not being able to implement because of budget constraints."

The Budget statement, due to be delivered next Monday, will go some way in addressing these issues faced by small firms.

In particular, Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam is expected to announce new "pain-killers" to aid struggling firms, said DBS economist Irvin Seah.

"The Government will persist and firms will have to go along."

"But it will make the medicine a bit easier to swallow with new measures in the Budget," he said.

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### SPOONFUL OF SUGAR EXPECTED

The Government will persist and firms will have to go along. But it will make the medicine a bit easier to swallow with new measures in the Budget.

- DBS economist Irvin Seah



Samwoh Corporation technical manager Kelvin Lee (left) and director Ho Nyok Yong at the company's new hot-mix asphalt recycling plant in Sungei Kadut. The facility, which started manufacturing last month, was imported from Switzerland. ST PHOTO: DESMOND FOO

## Samwoh builds up recycling efforts

By CHERYL ONG

LOW productivity is a curse of the building industry, but Samwoh Corporation is one company that is investing heavily to lift output and produce more sustainable building methods.

One way has been in developing pioneering efforts to recycle construction debris.

The civil engineering and building material company, with a turnover of \$350 million last year, was the first in the region to construct a building using recycled granite, also known as recycled concrete aggregate.

The material is commonly

used to build road kerbs, but was not used in building structures due to concerns over its strength.

However, after five years of intensive research, Samwoh realised it could be adapted for this use, and went on to employ it to construct the Eco-Green Building.

It also embedded fibre-optic sensors within the building's columns, which track how much material is compressed by the weight of the building.

The real-time data collected then shows whether the structure is sound.

The building, which was officially opened in March 2010,

cost about \$5 million to build - of which \$4.5 million came from Samwoh and \$500,000 came from government grants.

The company has also set up a hot-mix asphalt recycling plant at a cost of \$5 million.

The facility, which started manufacturing last month, was imported from Switzerland.

Samwoh technical manager Kelvin Lee said it has replaced two older plants, and can produce asphalt mix from reclaimed pavement waste.

It also produces 320 tonnes of asphalt mix per hour from asphalt, granite and sand fillers - more than the combined output of 270 tonnes per hour from

the plants it replaced, he noted.

The material produced can then be used to pave the surfaces of roads and aircraft runways.

Samwoh needs only seven staff to run the operation, down from 10, while the company's energy consumption has been reduced by 30 per cent.

But even more efforts to promote sustainable development will have to be made, said its director Ho Nyok Yong.

"Contractors like us are always thinking of ways to cut costs," he said. "But it's not so much for the money, it's to be a more progressive company."

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## Dim sum bond wagon on a roll

The three Singapore banks are issuing Chinese currency bonds, paving the way for other corporates to join the ride

Today in THE BUSINESS TIMES