Find ways to ride on China growth: SM

Making a start, young graduates head for internships in China

By CASSANDRA CHEW

NEXT month, engineer Steven Goh will step into China for the first time, to work as a management trainee.

It is a dream come true for the 26-year-old, who sees it as a springboard for enterprising young professionals.

"I was looking for a chance to work in China because everyone knows it is booming and I want to start a business there one day," said the civil engineering graduate from Nanyang Technological University.

"I hope working with Yanlord Land will help me explore the business opportunities," he added, referring to the Singapore-based property giant that is offering him a six-month internship in Zhuhai in Guangdong province.

He is among three young Singaporeans picked to intern with Singapore companies in China, under a new initiative of networking group Business China.

Called the Young Leaders Programme, it was applauded by Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong yesterday for helping "spread our wings in China".

Singapore must find opportunities to ride on China's economic expansion in order to continue growing, he said in a speech that highlighted China's potential and the importance of leveraging on its prosperity.

He made the point at a Business China reception to celebrate Chinese New Year.

About 220 entrepreneurs, leaders and students attended the event, including Minister of State for Trade and Industry Lee Yi Shyan and MP Josephine Teo, who is also chief executive of Business China.

In his speech, SM Goh underlined the need for Singapore to look abroad to grow its economy as the country nears its constraints of land and labour.

"Many of our businessmen, especially in the early years, have had to learn hard lessons on the importance of guanxi (connections) and the challenge of finding reliable partners," he said.

The Suzhou Industrial Park venture provided practical lessons to the Singapore Government and civil servants on "how best to have a productive relationship with China", he added.

Since then, both public and private sectors have moved forward to build stronger bilateral ties and Mr Goh said the Government will continue to play an active facilitative role.

He highlighted three areas, including China's free trade agreements with Singapore and Asean plus the opportunities for students to deepen their learning of the Chinese language and culture.

Mr Goh said he was also encouraged by initiatives in the people's sector in grooming talent for the China market.

"It complements the efforts of the public sector in cultivating more bilingual and bicultural talents to spread our wings in China," he said.

The programme, launched yesterday, is a tie-up between Business China and International Enterprise Singapore, which is also funding it.

Another beneficiary is Ms Genie Quek, a Singapore Management University graduate in information systems management.

Unlike Mr Steven Goh, the 24-year-old is taking up her third internship in China. In May, she will head to ST Electronics in Shenzhen, to be a management trainee for almost six months.

"I hope to interact with the Chinese, by providing management skills while picking up more hardware knowledge, like technical skills," she said.