



THE PLUS SIDE

Is the arts scene recession-proof? TODAY finds out.

PLUS 22

TODAY

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COLUMN



Agatha Koh Brazil

Our Voices Editor has Coffee With the happy artist Peter Zhou, who's better known as Peter Draw. She finds out how Mr Zhou puts the "art" in "heart" — he uses his skills as a caricaturist to raise funds for charity. Page 18

SINGAPORE



Knight on a roll

After 13 years off the roll, former CAD chief Glenn Knight says he has found complete acceptance from his peers and now returns to criminal law at Colin Ng and Partners. Page 4

SPORTS



The Monster is back

Goalkeeper Lionel Lewis endured a torrid mid-season. But he's turned things around spectacularly and is once again a key figure, as the Lions look to make Asean football history. Page 30

BUSINESS

Launches up, but ...

Private residential launches are up but the prices of high-end properties are moving down. Does this mean that the holding power of developers is beginning to wane? Page B1

Can Abhisit calm the political storm?

BANGKOK — He could be the tonic for the country's economic and political woes, as parliamentarians elected Oxford-educated economist Abhisit Vejjajiva as Thailand's next Prime Minister.

But, untested at the pinnacle of power and said to lack decisiveness, the 44-year-old could face one of the roughest rides in modern Thai history.

In sum, Democrat Party leader Abhisit — who was elected 235 to 198 over Mr Pracha Promnok, head of the Puea Paendin party — must try to neutralise supporters of exiled

former PM Thaksin Shinawatra, who have vowed to take to the streets; grapple with a dramatic economic downturn; and keep intact the fragile coalition of small parties that brought him to power.

He got a foretaste of it yesterday as some 100 angry Thaksin-backers clad in red shirts scuffled with police and threw traffic barriers outside the gates of Parliament to try to prevent lawmakers from leaving after the session.

"Abhisit is untested and that is both good and bad. He has a clean record. He is well-educated, eloquent and principled so the public

will likely give him a chance," said Mr Panithan Wattanayagorn, a political scientist at Bangkok's Chulalongkorn University.

But Mr Abhisit has yet to outline a bold solution to Thailand's manifold problems, he added. "That is his weakness and that lack of decisiveness and clear political stance could turn against him very quickly. It's going to be among Thailand's roughest premierships."

The Puea Paendin party is an offshoot of the pro-Thaksin coalition that had been forced out of office by court order earlier this month.

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PAYING FOR PERFORMANCE

FROM A SURVEY OF 75 SINGAPORE COMPANIES

Not confident of meeting 2008 business targets **21%**

No changes to short-term variable pay schemes **65.6%**

May cut/freeze, or have cut/frozen or deferred salary increase budgets **97.1%**

Increasing investments to retain high performers **13.5%**

Decreasing investments in training/development **13.5%**

No changes to healthcare benefits **83.7%**

No changes to pension plans **99.1%**

DIFFERENCE IN BASE PAY INCREASES BETWEEN HIGH-PERFORMERS AND ALL EMPLOYEES

Japan 27.7%

Global average 33.3%

Thailand 38.5%

China 45.9%

Hong Kong and Singapore 60%

Malaysia 66.7%

SOURCE HAY GROUP, ARTWORK FAIZAL



SALARY ADJUSTMENTS

Carrot for performers

One in 10 bosses invest more in talent, while two-thirds not cutting bonuses, incentives

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THE recession is not stopping some bosses from throwing cash at top talent.

While most employers are shrinking or freezing their budgets for salary increases, more than one in 10 — or 13 per cent — are investing more in their high performers, a survey by management consulting firm Hay Group has found.

This targeted allocation of resources is shown in the pay increases Singapore companies are dishing out to their workers. Star performers will see base salaries increase by 60 per cent more than the company's average this year. This is nearly twice the global average of 33 per cent, but lower than the Asian average of 67 per cent.

So, if the average Singapore employee gets a five per cent increment, the star performer would receive an eight per cent raise.

This is a reflection of the talent crunch in Singapore, said Mr Christian Vo Phuoc, country manager of Singapore for Hay Group's reward information services.

Companies know they "cannot afford to be complacent and assume their high performers will not have motive or opportunity to leave", he said.

Recruitment firm The GMP Group said sectors like biomedical sciences, and oil and gas, were the ones likely to offer higher increases for "rare talents". Employers are generally ready to offer a 20- to 30-per-cent salary hike to poach staff from other firms, said Mr Josh Goh, GMP's senior manager of corporate services.

But between employees doing the same job within a company, the salary difference is 15 per cent at most, he said.

Talents could refer to staff with good track records or with niche knowledge, or simply to employees to be groomed for leadership positions, said Mr Goh.

Done last month, Hay's Global Employee Pay and Staffing Survey covered 2,589 organisations from 91 countries, and in Singapore 75 companies, each hiring more than 1,000 employees, were polled. They belonged to various sectors including oil and gas, and financial services.

What's consolatory news for most is that the survey also found, two-thirds of Singapore companies are not cutting their bonuses, incentives and profit-sharing for this year.

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Job stats to play catch-up next year

DESPITE recent announcements of job cuts, statistics released yesterday showed unemployment holding steady in the third quarter of this year at 2.2 per cent.

If it sounds counter-intuitive, that's because labour markets generally lag behind economic growth, say economists. "The job market turns relatively late in the cycle," said Mr Thomas Kaegi, senior economist with UBS Wealth Management Research.

So, numbers by the Ministry of Manpower fully reflecting the fallout from Lehman Brothers' collapse — which occurred mid-September — will only be captured in the next few quarters. Employment in Q3 grew by 55,700, led by the services sector with 34,300 jobs. This was lower than last year's Q3 job gains of 58,600, and last quarter's 71,400.

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