Star Special

THE STAR, THURSDAY 7 MAY 2026

SOBA 2025

RAISING THE BAR IN BUSINESS

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CGC DIGITAL

SOBA throughout 2025 (clockwise from upper left):
> The launch of SOBA 2025 with (from left) leaders from Matrade, U Mobile, RHB Bank Bhd, SMG, PKT Logistics Group and CGC.
> In deep discussion as the SOBA LAB in session in July last year.
> GWM hosted SOBA Prestige at Malaysia International Trade and Exhibition Centre earlier this year.
> The SOBA judges holding up their plaques of appreciation at the SOBA 2025 Gala Night.
— Photos by SAMUEL ONG, IZZRAFIQ ALIAS, FAIHAN GHANI/The Star

A year of resilience, reinvention and resolve

2025 has been a challenging year, shaped by global uncertainty and rapid transformation.

Against this backdrop, the Star Outstanding Business Awards (SOBA) 2025 stands as a reminder of the qualities that define Malaysian enterprise – resilience, adaptability and unwavering resolve.

Amid ongoing geo-economic tensions, Malaysia's Asean leadership responsibilities, artificial intelligence (AI) disruption, shifting supply chains and environmental pressures, the nation's small and medium enterprises (SMEs) did not retreat. Instead, they recalibrated and rose to meet the moment.

In that sense, SOBA 2025 has evolved beyond being merely an awards platform. It has become a litmus test of how businesses across the country are navigating complexity with courage and conviction.

The journey began with the launch of SOBA 2025 at Menara Star on June 5 last year, where sponsors and partners gathered to reaffirm their support for the nation's SME community.

Led by Star Media Group (SMG) chief executive officer (CEO) Chan Seng Fatt and chief operating officer Lydia Wang, the launch brought together main sponsors Credit Guarantee Corporation Malaysia Bhd (CGC), PKT Logistics Group Sdn Bhd (PKT Logistics), RHB Bank Bhd (RHB Bank) and U Mobile Sdn Bhd (U Mobile).

The Malaysia External Trade Development Corporation (Matrade) continued its role as official trade promotion partner, while Great Wall Motor Sales Malaysia Sdn Bhd later came on board as co-sponsor. SOBA is also supported by SME Corp.

In his speech, Chan highlighted Malaysia's strategic position in the region, noting that the country's assumption of the Asean chairmanship on Jan 1 marked an important milestone.

"This leadership role serves as a powerful springboard to strengthen regional integration, enhance market diversification and advance economic diplomacy," he said.

Throughout the year, SOBA drew participation from a broad cross-section of industries, including manufacturing, logistics, technology, retail and professional services. Each submission reflected not only business growth, but also strategic clarity and operational discipline.

To support participants in their journey, SOBA organised dedicated clinics and the SOBA LAB series, which brought together past winners to share insights into the strategies and practices that contributed to their success. Topics ranged from scaling operations and embracing digitalisation to embedding sustainability into business frameworks.

Some past winners shared experiences of expanding regionally or even pursuing listings on Bursa Malaysia, offering practical inspiration to current participants. Judges also provided guidance on what constitutes a strong submission, helping businesses sharpen both their presentation and strategic thinking.

The platform further allowed participants to better understand the services and offerings provided by sponsors, equipping them with additional tools to strengthen their operations.

For many finalists and winners, the process itself proved transformative. It sharpened strategic focus, strengthened internal governance and benchmarked performance against industry peers. The credibility that accompanies SOBA recognition has opened doors to partnerships, financing opportunities and regional expansion.

Equally significant is the ecosystem underpinning SOBA. The collaboration between government agencies, financial institutions, corporate sponsors and trade bodies underscores a shared conviction that SMEs remain the backbone of Malaysia's economy.

To deepen these connections, SOBA also hosted networking events throughout the year, enabling participants to build relationships that may later evolve into alliances or joint ventures.

The Gala Night served as both celebration and statement. In a world increasingly characterised by volatility, Malaysian businesses demonstrated that disciplined leadership and clear direction remain the foundations of sustainable growth.

The winners of SOBA 2025 embodied qualities that extend beyond quarterly performance.

They showed that strong governance matters. That cost discipline and strategic patience yield results.

That investing in people and culture strengthens long-term competitiveness. That innovation, when guided by purpose, creates lasting value.

THE STAR OUTSTANDING BUSINESS AWARDS 2025

WINNERS RM25MIL AND ABOVE

MALAYSIAN BUSINESS OF THE YEAR
PLATINUM • ICE HOLIDAYS SDN BHD

ELITE ENTREPRENEUR OF THE YEAR
PLATINUM • ICE HOLIDAYS SDN BHD

MALE ENTREPRENEUR OF THE YEAR PAR EXCELLENCE ACHIEVEMENT
MITA LIM (ICE HOLIDAYS SDN BHD)

OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT
LEE MING CHIEH (ALPHA SOLAR SDN BHD)

MERITORIOUS ACHIEVEMENT
LIEW YOON POH (LAC MEDICAL SUPPLIES SDN BHD)

FEMALE ENTREPRENEUR OF THE YEAR OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT
LAW LEE KIAU (HOMLUX INTERIOR FURNISHING SDN BHD)

MERITORIOUS ACHIEVEMENT
LILLIAN TAY (VERITAS ARCHITECTS SDN BHD)

YOUNG ENTREPRENEUR OF THE YEAR MERITORIOUS ACHIEVEMENT
• ALEX LEE YIK HORNG (CREATIVE BLISS SDN BHD)
• GOH YIK HON (KOW HOCK BUILDING MATERIALS (M) SDN BHD)

RISING STAR
GRAND WINNER • SKY POWER SDN BHD
HONORARY MENTION • THE SOLAR HOUSE SDN BHD

CATEGORIES

BEST BRAND
GOLD • ICE HOLIDAYS SDN BHD
• APPLE VACATIONS SDN BHD
SILVER • IVERSON ASSOCIATES SDN BHD

BEST EMPLOYER
PLATINUM • FITLINE (M) SDN BHD
GOLD • HOMLUX INTERIOR FURNISHING SDN BHD
SILVER • ADVANTAGE MARINE SERVICES (MALAYSIA) SDN BHD

BEST GREEN INITIATIVE
SILVER • VERITAS ARCHITECTS SDN BHD

BEST IN CSR
PLATINUM • VERITAS ARCHITECTS SDN BHD
GOLD • FITLINE (M) SDN BHD
SILVER • APPLE VACATIONS SDN BHD

BEST IN CUSTOMER SERVICE
PLATINUM • KANIKA (M) SDN BHD
SILVER • HOMLUX INTERIOR FURNISHING SDN BHD
• KOW HOCK BUILDING MATERIALS (M) SDN BHD

BEST IN HALAL PRODUCT/SERVICE
PLATINUM • KANIKA (M) SDN BHD
GOLD • MY US PIZZA SDN BHD

BEST IN MARKETING
PLATINUM • LES' COPAQUE PRODUCTION SDN BHD
GOLD • ICE HOLIDAYS SDN BHD
SILVER • ALPHA SOLAR SDN BHD

BEST IN RETAIL
GOLD • MY US PIZZA SDN BHD

BEST INNOVATION
PLATINUM • KANIKA (M) SDN BHD
GOLD • LES' COPAQUE PRODUCTION SDN BHD
SILVER • PHARM-D HEALTH SCIENCE SDN BHD

BEST USE OF TECHNOLOGY
PLATINUM • NSW AUTOMATION SDN BHD
GOLD • SYSTECH DIGITAL SOLUTIONS SDN BHD
SILVER • SF TECHLOGIS SDN BHD

WINNERS BELOW RM25MIL

MALAYSIAN BUSINESS OF THE YEAR
PLATINUM • PHYTOGAIA SDN BHD

MALE ENTREPRENEUR OF THE YEAR OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT
CHEW PHAI HAU (MR ACADEMY INTERNATIONAL SDN BHD)

MERITORIOUS ACHIEVEMENT
• CHIEW OON LEONG (CERT ACADEMY SDN BHD)
• VICTOR TAN XUN PEI (BERRY GROUP SDN BHD)

FEMALE ENTREPRENEUR OF THE YEAR OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT
SURIYATI DAMAN (HEGIRA SDN BHD)

MERITORIOUS ACHIEVEMENT
• MICKY NG (ABOVE CREATIVE EVENTS (M) SDN BHD)
• LEE YIEN JU (AUTHENTIC TIMBER RESOURCES SDN BHD)

YOUNG ENTREPRENEUR OF THE YEAR MERITORIOUS ACHIEVEMENT
• JONATHAN CHAN HENG LIANG (SBK CONCEPT STORE SDN BHD)
• WONG HUAN KING (IMPACT VOLUTION TRAINING & CONSULTANCY SDN BHD)

RISING STAR
GRAND WINNER • UNITY KITCHEN (KL) SDN BHD
HONORARY MENTION • GAMBIT GROUP SDN BHD
MERITORIOUS MENTION • RENN ASIA WELLNESS (CHANGSONG NUTRIMED SDN BHD)

CATEGORIES

BEST BRAND
PLATINUM • CERT ACADEMY SDN BHD
GOLD • GALACTIC ADVANCE ENGINEERING (M) SDN BHD
SILVER • BERKAT OSH SERVICES SDN BHD

BEST EMPLOYER
PLATINUM • SBK CONCEPT STORE SDN BHD
GOLD • CERT ACADEMY SDN BHD
SILVER • BERRY GROUP SDN BHD

BEST GREEN INITIATIVE
PLATINUM • RENTALWORKS SDN BHD
SILVER • OLYMPUS MANAGEMENT & SERVICES (M) SDN BHD
• CLAIRE ORGANICS GROUP SDN BHD

BEST IN CSR
PLATINUM • SBK CONCEPT STORE SDN BHD
GOLD • SMART ONE EDUCATION GROUP SDN BHD
SILVER • ABOVE CREATIVE EVENTS (M) SDN BHD

BEST IN CUSTOMER SERVICE
PLATINUM • PRECIOUS MY SDN BHD
GOLD • MR ACADEMY INTERNATIONAL SDN BHD
SILVER • MK PORRIDGE SDN BHD

BEST IN E-RETAIL
GOLD • CLAIRE ORGANICS GROUP SDN BHD
SILVER • GOLDEN JAGUAR JEWELLERY SDN BHD

BEST IN HALAL PRODUCT/SERVICE
PLATINUM • SBK CONCEPT STORE SDN BHD
SILVER • ORANGE F&B SDN BHD

BEST IN MARKETING
PLATINUM • PHYTOGAIA SDN BHD
GOLD • BIOFIZZ MARKETING SDN BHD
SILVER • MR ACADEMY INTERNATIONAL SDN BHD

BEST IN RETAIL
GOLD • PRECIOUS MY SDN BHD
• HARPER ELITE SDN BHD
SILVER • SAN IMAGING SOLUTION SDN BHD

BEST INNOVATION
PLATINUM • PHYTOGAIA SDN BHD
GOLD • BERRY GROUP SDN BHD
SILVER • MR ACADEMY INTERNATIONAL SDN BHD

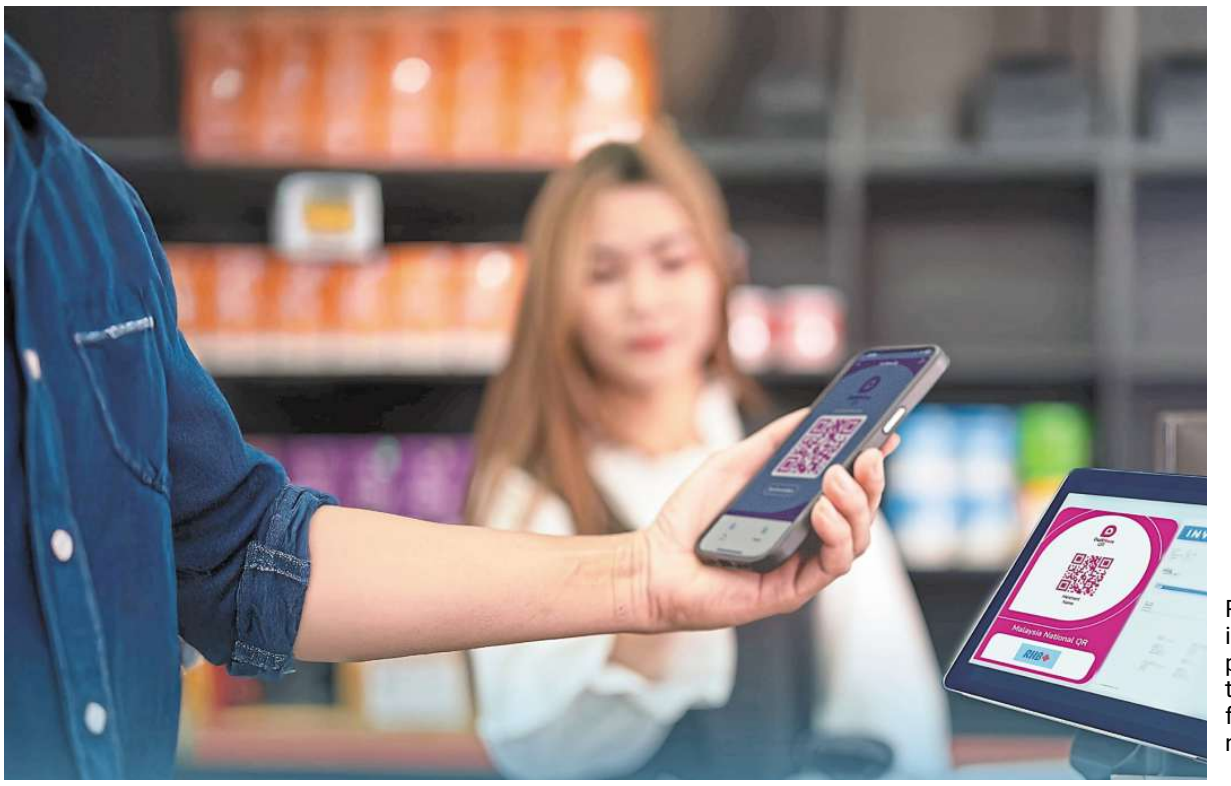
BEST USE OF TECHNOLOGY
PLATINUM • GOLDEN JAGUAR JEWELLERY SDN BHD
GOLD • SBK CONCEPT STORE SDN BHD
SILVER • BERKAT OSH SERVICES SDN BHD

MIKRO WINNERS

• TAAM AL SEHA SDN BHD • WISYMADANI RESOURCES • HOKIDO SHOP • VENDSMITH SDN BHD
• KURINJI TAILORING

Powering up the cashless surge

RHB Bank making cashless work smarter for Malaysia's entrepreneurs



RHB Bank's DuitNow QR is a single, integrated payment experience that is designed around features that SMEs need most.

MALAYSIA'S shift towards cashless payments is no longer just changing how consumers transact, it is reshaping how businesses operate.

From kopitiams and night markets to major retail chains, tap-and-go cards, QR codes and mobile wallets have become commonplace.

Once viewed as a convenience, cashless payments are now fast becoming an expectation across the retail landscape. While this shift is not uniquely a Malaysian experience, the pace locally has been striking.

According to a Mastercard report cited by *The Asian Banker* in July 2024, almost 63% of Malaysian consumers now prefer newer payment methods, which include contactless cards, biometrics, QR codes and mobile wallets over cash or manual card entry.

For Malaysia's SMEs, which form more than 97% of businesses in the country, this evolution goes beyond payment preferences. It reflects a broader shift towards operational efficiency, scalability and business resilience in an increasingly digital economy.

Although convenience is expected, the speed and security of such transactions have reshaped consumer behaviour, forcing businesses to rethink operational efficiency at the point-of-sale.

As businesses navigate rising operating costs, staffing constraints and growing consumer expectations, financial institutions are also evolving from payment providers into operational enablers, helping SMEs simplify workflows, improve visibility and scale more efficiently.

And while customers readily accept this advancement with open arms, businesses – particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) often face a more complex operational reality.

The gap behind the counter

For the everyday customer, accepting a QR code looks straightforward – it is simply a matter of opening an e-wallet or banking app, scanning the QR code displayed at the counter, approving the payment amount and completing the transaction.

In reality, many SMEs initially adopted cashless payments in a fragmented manner, from placing multiple QR stands at the counter to using standalone terminals or relying on manual confirmation of transfers. Over time, the cracks began to show.

Many realised using manual reconciliation took up valuable hours. Staff had to cross-check transactions across devices and bank statements, while business owners often spent additional time reconciling records after operational hours.

During peak business periods, even short delays at checkout counters could create longer queues, slower service and missed sales opportunities.

For multi-outlet operators, fragmented payment systems also limited visibility across locations and increased dependency on manual reporting processes.

Furthermore, fake payment screenshots became an increasing concern, especially during busy periods when verification was rushed.

For business owners already juggling staffing challenges and rising operating costs, going cashless was not just about offering QR payments: it required integration.

Perception, the biggest hurdle

While consumers embrace new payment methods almost instinctively, SMEs often hesitate. Transaction fees, cybersecurity concerns and the learning curve associated with new systems can create resistance.

Some business owners who are accustomed to the tangible visibility of cash worry about losing control in a fully digital environment.

Yet the reality is that remaining reliant on cash or loosely integrated QR codes can be more costly in the long run. Cash handling carries risks of miscounts, leakages and theft. Manual processes increase the likelihood of human error, limiting visibility into real-time sales and cash flow.

In a rapidly digitising retail landscape, such gaps quickly affect competitiveness and customer experience.

The Malaysian government's push towards a digital, frictionless economy has further accelerated this trend. As digital banking and e-wallet ecosystems mature, expectations for seamless checkout experiences continue to rise.

Businesses that lag risk not only operational inefficiencies but also reputational setbacks among increasingly tech-savvy consumers.

Integration as turning point

Recognising that SMEs require more than just payment acceptance tools, RHB Bank Bhd has been working with leading POS solution providers to help business integrate digital payments into their day-to-day operations.

Rather than requiring separate QR stands or additional devices, embed DuitNow QR (DNQR) transactions can be embedded directly within the POS platform itself. While the shift may appear subtle on the surface, operationally it can be transformative for businesses.

First, checkout becomes simpler as staff no longer need to toggle between screens or verify payments on separate devices. The transaction is recorded automatically within the POS system, shortening queues and enabling faster service, particularly during peak hours.

Second, payment confirmation and reconciliation happen in real time. Every DNQR transaction is instantly reflected in the POS system, streamlining end-of-day closing procedures. For SMEs, this means clearer daily sales visibility and more accurate cash flow tracking.

Third, fraud risks are reduced as only verified DuitNow QR payments are accepted within the integrated system, eliminating disputes over incorrect amounts or fake screenshots. This protects revenue and business owners can transact with greater confidence knowing funds are channelled correctly into their bank accounts.

Together, these improvements extend beyond back-office efficiency. They reshape daily workflows, freeing staff to focus on customer service rather than administrative tasks.

Unlocking smarter operations

The benefits of an integrated POS system go further than processing transactions. Modern systems provide consolidated sales data, enabling owners to identify best-selling products, peak traffic hours and inventory trends.

For multi-outlet operators or aspiring franchise brands, centralised reporting becomes invaluable. Businesses can manage inventory more accurately when sales are automatically synchronised with inventory records while monitoring outlet performance in real time.

This level of operational visibility enables SMEs to make faster, more informed business decisions while strengthening their ability to scale sustainably.

Accounting processes also become smoother when digital records are readily exportable or integrated with accounting software. Audit trails are clearer, compliance becomes less cumbersome and financial reporting gains accuracy.

For SMEs operating on tight margins, even small efficiency gains can compound significantly over time.

An advantage in a digital economy

Cashless readiness is no longer simply about keeping up with trends. It is increasingly tied to competitiveness and long-term business sustainability.

By providing seamless transactions, smoother payment experiences can improve conversion rates and customer satisfaction. Digital transaction records can also open doors to additional services such as loyalty programmes, data-driven promotions and targeted marketing initiatives.

As financial services become more embedded within business platforms, POS systems are evolving into strategic tools rather than basic cash registers.

For financial institutions, this also reflects a broader role in enabling Malaysia's digital economy by helping SMEs modernise operations, strengthen resilience and participate more confidently in an increasingly connected marketplace.

RHB Bank's efforts to simplify payments and operational processes for Malaysian SMEs align with its broader PROGRESS27 aspirations of delivering service excellence and responsible financial solutions that support long-term business growth.

The bank's digital payment infrastructure and innovation capabilities have also earned industry recognition, including being named Best e-Payments Bank at the Malaysian e-Payments Excellence Awards 2025, reinforcing its growing role in supporting Malaysia's evolving digital commerce ecosystem.

The path forward

For SMEs relying heavily on cash or standalone QR systems, digital integration is increasingly becoming less of an option and more of a business necessity.

While the initial transition may require adjustments in processes and mindset, the long-term gains from reduced fraud risk and faster reconciliation to improved operational visibility and scalability can position businesses more strongly for future growth.

As Malaysia's digital economy continues to mature, the next phase of SME growth will depend not only on adopting digital payments, but on how intelligently those systems are integrated into daily business operations.

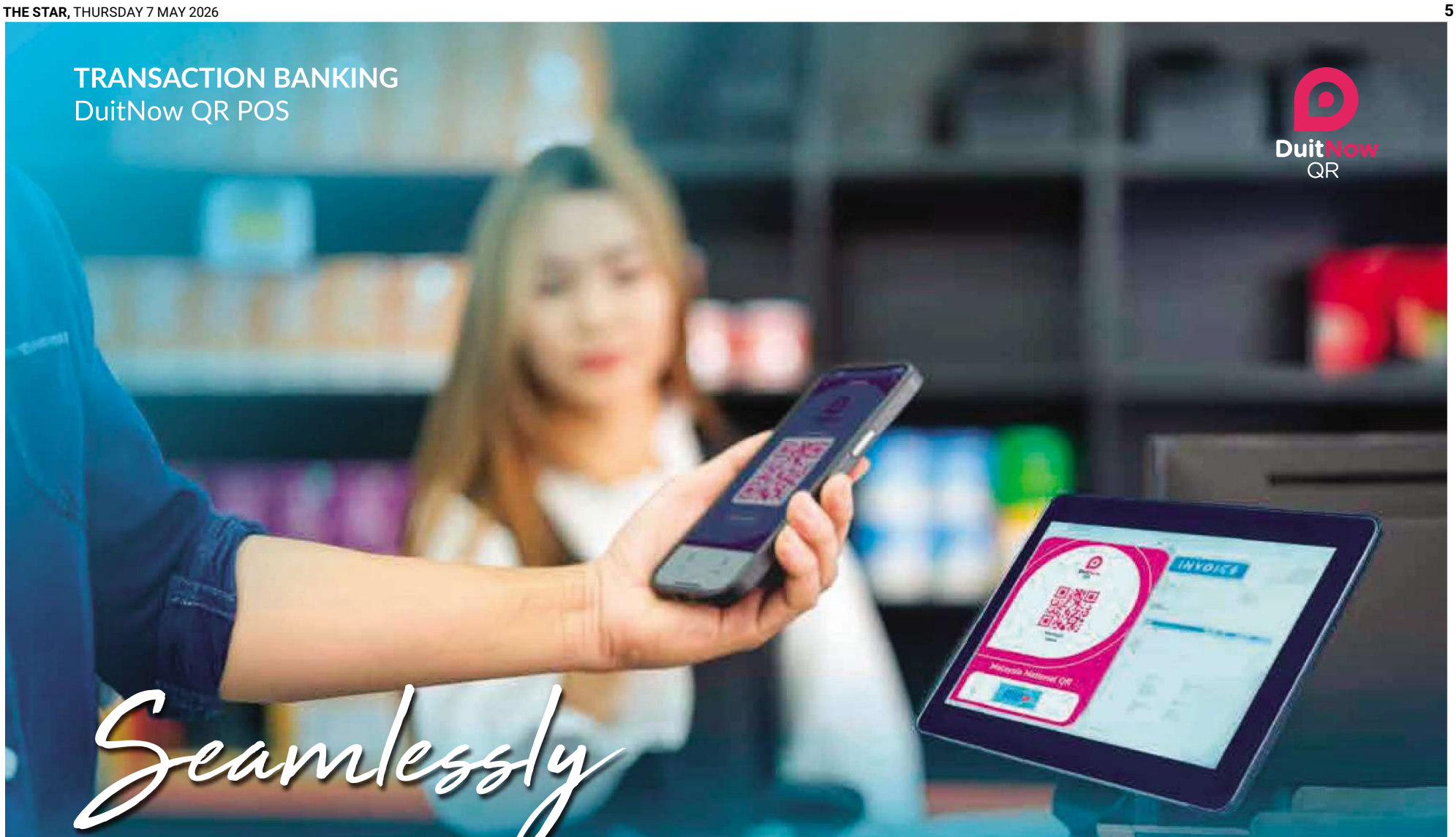
Financial institutions that can simplify this transition and help businesses operate more efficiently will play an increasingly important role in strengthening the country's economic resilience and competitiveness.

POS systems are no longer just tools for processing payments, but platforms enabling efficiency, transparency and smarter decision-making for businesses navigating a rapidly evolving marketplace.

■ Scan the QR code to visit RHB Bank's DuitNow QR payments to learn more or get started.

TRANSACTION BANKING
DuitNow QR POS

DuitNow QR



Seamlessly
integrated into your business

Process your DuitNow QR payments through our Point of Sale (POS) integrated solution.

With DuitNow QR payments integrated into our Point-of-Sale (POS) solution, payment processing will be the easiest part of your day. Instant automatic confirmation lets you focus on what truly matters so your business can flourish.

Simplify your checkout with a single screen during checkout.

Instant payment updates reflected directly in your POS system.

Fast & easy onboarding seamlessly integrated for your convenience.

Actively combat fraud with only verified DuitNow QR payments coming through.

Scan the QR code to get started with RHB POS solutions.

RHB

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A VIP lane for stable connectivity

U Business's ULTRA5G Reserve offers enterprise-grade connectivity through dedicated network priority

FROM cloud applications and virtual meetings to digital payments and real-time collaboration, a fast, stable and secure connectivity is imperative to power businesses today.

However, many organisations – be they multinational corporations or small or medium-sized enterprises – still face inconsistent speeds, network congestion during peak hours and limited flexibility for a mobile workforce. Such challenges can disrupt operations, slow productivity and affect customer experience.

To address these issues, Malaysia's latest 5G network provider U Mobile has introduced its U Business ULTRA Business mobile plans, designed to deliver stronger performance and greater reliability.

Built for the demands of today's digital economy, the plans aim to provide businesses with more consistent connectivity and better control over their network experience.

One standout feature is its ULTRA5G Reserve, which offers enterprise-grade connectivity through dedicated network priority.

By prioritising business traffic, it helps reduce the effect from network saturation and ensures smoother access to critical tools and platforms, especially during high-demand periods.

Suitable for organisations of all sizes, U Business supports hybrid work, field operations and digital transformation initiatives.

In a landscape where downtime can mean lost revenue and missed opportunities, the ULTRA Business plans enable companies to stay connected, competitive and confident in their growth journey.

Prioritised connectivity for business continuity

U Business's ULTRA5G Reserve offers businesses a dedicated VIP lane on the network, prioritising their data and communications over standard traffic, especially during peak hours when mobile networks are crowded.

Businesses can expect better performance of up to four times the speed, and more reliable services especially during large events or conferences, such as trade expos, summits or exhibitions.

The amount of traffic in such events can strain mobile networks causing failure to those that even run such events.

Such congestion will affect video calls, live presentations, ticketing apps or even cloud tools, causing delays, failed connections or poor user experience.

With ULTRA5G Reserve, business traffic is prioritised so operations stay smooth even when demand spikes.

In transportation hubs such as airports and train stations, business travellers often experience slow data speeds due to heavy usage within that area.

With ULTRA5G Reserve, important connections, secure access to corporate systems and communication tools remain responsive, eliminating frustrating delays.

Industries that necessitate speed such as logistics, emergency services, healthcare and finance rely on dependable, low-latency connections that allow for real-time tracking, remote diagnostics and secure data exchange.

By prioritising network access ULTRA5G Reserve helps reduce downtime and improves productivity when it matters most.

Seamless connectivity across borders

Premier Roaming is U Business's global roaming feature that ensures reliable connectivity in over 60 destinations without complicated setups or extra gear.

It enhances the business traveller's confidence overseas by connecting to the strongest, fastest and most reliable partnered network that are considered Tier-1 in any country automatically.

Such service allows them to stay reachable, responsive and online wherever they go, making it a crucial component when they embark on international sales and partnership trips, and trade missions.

> "U Business's ULTRA Business mobile plans are designed to deliver stronger performance and greater reliability."

When they are moving between offices or airports internationally, the support of continuous, stable data connection makes it easier to join video calls, respond to client messages, or access cloud systems.

This will also save them spending extra for costly local SIM swaps or unpredictable roaming data.

For consultancy, IT support and installation teams that travel abroad, U Business's Premier Roaming helps keep them connected to tools, dashboards and communication platforms based in their headquarters.

The high performance connection also reduces delays in problem resolution and enhances service reliability.

For companies that embrace hybrid work models, their employees are still expected to participate in meetings, collaborate on shared documents or access business apps while they travel or work at remote locations. Having an integrated roaming service removes one barrier to mobile productivity.

A merged network protection

Thanks to the rise in cybersecurity crimes and scams, online security has become an indispensable requirement for all devices, not to mention corporate entities that have any Ethernet connection.

U Business's Intelligent Security is powered by artificial intelligence (AI) and incorporates enterprise-grade threat protection into the mobile network itself, covering malware, phishing, scam calls, fraudulent SMS and dangerous sites.

Furthermore, it protects against cyberscams and works without requiring businesses to install separate security apps on every device.

Malicious SMS and phishing are growing risks for businesses: a compromised device can lead to data breaches or credential theft.

This security feature helps block these threats at the network level before they reach the device, protecting employees and company data.

The Intelligent Security can ensure safer Internet access for remote teams who are working on the go, at cafes, co-working spaces or transportation hubs.

These open spaces are at higher risk from unsafe websites or malware downloads.

With network-level protections always on, there's less chance of compromised browsing or unwanted intrusions.

Traditional security often requires on-device software with ongoing updates.

Using network-embedded security helps cut complexity and reduces deployment and management efforts for IT departments.

Using the already available Intelligent Security from U Business reduces the burden on businesses' IT teams, allowing them to look into more operational matters, such as overseeing the running of the company's data frame or overseeing the enterprise resource planning system.

More than just an Internet connection

These features will ensure that connectivity goes beyond simply meaning a fast Internet service.

To persevere and succeed in today's digital economy requires reliable performance, secure data handling and seamless mobility that match how businesses operate across teams, locations and borders.

U Business's ULTRA Business Reserve are tailored to address those exact needs.

■ For more information, visit U Business's ULTRA Business Reserve by scanning the QR code.

ULTRA BUSINESS RESERVE

NO.1 5G | U business

UNRIVALLED EXPERIENCE. RESERVED FOR YOUR BUSINESS.

A network built to keep your business connected, protected and ahead. Always-on reserved VIP connectivity, premier roaming, and intelligent security built for enterprise performance.

Your Business, Priority Reserved.

SWITCH ON YOUR ULTRA5G RESERVE

ULTRA5G RESERVE
Dedicated business connectivity with always-on reserved capacity, **up to 4X faster** performance during peak periods.

PREMIER ROAMING
First-class connectivity beyond borders. Seamless global roaming in **over 60 destinations**.

INTELLIGENT SECURITY
Built-in AI-powered network security with **always-on protection** and no device installation required.

BUSINESS MOBILE | BUSINESS BROADBAND | BUSINESS SOLUTIONS

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ICE Holidays bags five awards

ICE Holidays Sdn Bhd marked a historic milestone at the Star Outstanding Business Awards 2025 (SOBA), emerging as one of the biggest winners of the night with five prestigious awards, including Malaysia Business of the Year and Elite Entrepreneur of the Year awarded to managing director Mita Lim.

From its humble beginnings 35 years ago, ICE Holidays has grown into a public-listed company, reflecting a journey defined by resilience, innovation and disciplined growth.

At the heart of this transformation, Lim's visionary leadership and unwavering commitment have been instrumental in shaping the company into a trusted name in the travel industry.

Under his leadership, the company has continuously evolved – expanding its market reach, strengthening its brand positioning, and embracing digital transformation to stay ahead in a competitive and ever-changing environment.

Through his leadership philosophy, which is centred on purpose, people and long-term value creation, the organisation is able to scale sustainably, while maintaining strong partnerships and customer trust.

Lim: 'This recognition reflects the collective effort of our team, partners and customers who have journeyed with us over the years.'

During a recent interview after winning the SOBA awards, Lim explained that the past few years have shown the company that change is constant, whether it is global uncertainty, currency movements, or shifting travel trends.

"Instead of trying to predict everything, we focus on being prepared," he said.

"We make sure our business is not dependent on just one market or one type of product, so diversification is something we take seriously. We've also been strengthening our digital systems to improve how we respond and support our partners."

Lim added that the company places confidence in its strong network of travel agents across the country.

"This allows us to stay flexible and adapt quickly when the market changes. At the end of the day, it's about staying practical, staying close to the ground, and moving forward step by step."

He added that when facing the current dynamic environment, ICE Holidays has strengthened its business resilience by diversifying its products and markets, enhancing digital capabilities and maintaining strong partnerships.

At the same time, the company remains agile in its planning to quickly respond to changes and ensure sustainable growth.

At SOBA 2025, ICE Holidays received recognitions for Best Brand (Gold award), Best in Marketing (Gold award), Male Entrepreneur of the Year (Par Excellence Achievement for Mita Lim), Elite Entrepreneur of the Year (for Mita Lim) and the Malaysia Business of the Year award (ICE Holidays Sdn Bhd).

Lim (second from right) holds the Malaysian Business of the Year award in triumph as Entrepreneur Development and Cooperatives Minister Steven Sim (second from left), SMG chairman Tan Sri Wong Foon Meng (far left) and chief executive officer Chan Seng Fatt (far right) look on.

Organised by Star Media Group (SMG), SOBA recognises enterprises that drive responsible business growth, innovation and quality employment – key pillars for sustainable economic development.

"This recognition reflects the collective effort of our team, partners and customers who have journeyed with us over the years," said Lim.

"We remain committed to building a future-ready organisation, strengthening our brand, and delivering meaningful travel experiences."

As ICE Holidays looks ahead, the company remains focused on sustainable growth, innovation and creating long-term value for stakeholders – continuing its journey of excellence in the years to come.

Fitline Malaysia powers ahead with science

AS one of the region's fastest growing direct-selling companies, Malaysian company Fitline (M) Sdn Bhd combines German scientific innovation – courtesy of its roots to its mother company PM-International AG – with strong local leadership.

PM-International AG was founded in Germany in 1993, and has built a global reputation for its premium FitLine brand of health, fitness and beauty products. The brand has been in Malaysia for 22 years, accelerating under the current management of its chief executive officer Paul Yung.

Today, Malaysia stands as the only wholly owned subsidiary globally under Yung's leadership, reflecting both corporate confidence and the market's strategic importance. The country has also become one of the top 10 performing markets within the global PM-International network, underscoring its rapid rise.

At the heart of Fitline Malaysia's appeal is its science-driven approach to supplementation. Backed by more than 30 years of research and its own scientific advisory board, the company's exclusive nutrient transport concept (NTC) is designed to deliver nutrients precisely where and when they are needed at the cellular level, both internally and externally.

Supported by over 70 patents and independent testing by ELAB Analytics GmbH, the products adhere to rigorous standards of quality, safety and efficacy.

Simple. Successful.

All Fitline Malaysia supplements are listed on the Cologne List – an anti-doping, sports initiative – which ensures they are safe for both amateur and professional athletes.

Globally, the brand is trusted by over 1,000 top athletes across 85 sports disciplines in 40 countries. PM-International has surpassed the milestone of one billion products sold worldwide, a testament to sustained consumer confidence and product performance.

The company's global footprint now spans more than 45 subsidiaries, generating over US$4bil (RM15.8bil) in annual sales and achieving 32 consecutive years of growth. Its consistent performance has propelled it to the fifth spot in the DSN Global 100 ranking, placing it among the world's top direct-selling enterprises.

Further cementing its reputation, PM-International received the Bravo International Growth Award 2026 for the fastest-growing direct selling company for an unprecedented six consecutive years.

Fitline Malaysia has recorded exceptional expansion under Yung's leadership.

Within Malaysia, Fitline Malaysia's achievements are equally compelling. The company ranks among the top 30 under the Direct Selling Association of Malaysia, signalling strong credibility in a competitive industry.

Its business model has also translated into tangible success for its distributors, with 150 sponsored distributor cars currently on the road – a visible symbol of income potential and performance recognition.

In 2024, the company added another accolade to its portfolio with the Super Golden Bull Award.

Under Yung's leadership, Fitline Malaysia has recorded exceptional expansion. Its local customer base has surged from 1,650 to over 30,000, while the business has grown 6.5 times over the past seven years.

Maintaining an average annual growth rate of 32%, the company has generated RM500mil in accumulated revenue since 2017, highlighting both market strength and operational sustainability.

The Fitline Malaysia team, showing their strength, with Yung (front row, centre).

Yet beyond financial metrics, Fitline Malaysia places strong emphasis on corporate social responsibility.

The company has contributed more than RM1.5mil to local charitable causes, forging long-term partnerships with organisations such as the National Cancer Society Malaysia and Cheshire Home Selangor.

Internally, Fitline Malaysia fosters what it describes as a family-oriented, entrepreneurial culture.

Individuals are offered opportunities to build sustainable income with flexibility, supported by structured training, leadership development programmes and performance-based incentives such as travel rewards.

This ecosystem aims not only to drive sales but to empower people to take greater control of their financial futures and personal health.

Looking ahead, Fitline Malaysia has set an ambitious target: to empower one million Malaysians by 2035 to achieve better health, fitness, beauty and overall quality of life.

Anchored by continuous innovation, sustainability initiatives and community engagement, the company seeks to balance commercial success with meaningful social impact.

As global consumers place increasing value on wellness and preventive health, the company appears well positioned to ride the next wave of growth, combining scientific credibility, entrepreneurial opportunity and a clear vision for long-term impact.

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SOBA 2025 gala night winners together with (front row, from left) Malaysian Retail Chain Association vice president and SOBA judge Datuk Vincent Choo, Jai Shankar, Rizal, Ng, RHB Group Corporate Business Banking managing director Wendy Ting, a winner, Wong, Sim, Chan, PKT Logistics Group Sdn Bhd group chief executive officer and managing director Datuk Seri Dr Michael Tio, U Mobile chief business officer How Lih Ren, GWM Malaysia marketing director Lim Ee Lenn, SMG chief operating officer Lydia Wang and CGC president and CEO Mohamed Nazri Omar posing with the winners. — FAIHAN GHANI/The Star

Mohamed Nazri Omar (centre) with his team from CGC. — AZHAR MAHFOF/The Star

Tio (sixth from left) and the team from PKT Logistics Group. — AZMAN GHANI/The Star

In his address, Sim emphasises the continued success of local enterprises being vital to Malaysia's long-term economic sustainability.— LEONG WAI YEE/ The Star

Celebrating resilience, success at SOBA 2025 Gala Night

THE spirit of perseverance and ambition was on full display at One World Hotel on April 8 as more than 800 guests gathered for the Star Outstanding Business Awards (SOBA) 2025 Gala Night.

Amid rising geo-economic tensions, rapid artificial intelligence (AI) disruption and mounting environmental uncertainties, Malaysia's small and medium enterprises (SMEs) demonstrated that resilience remains their defining strength.

The event was attended by Entrepreneur Development and Cooperatives Minister Steven Sim, alongside main sponsors Credit Guarantee Corporation Malaysia Bhd, PKT Logistics Group Sdn Bhd, RHB Bank Bhd and U Mobile Sdn Bhd. Great Wall Motor Sales Malaysia Sdn Bhd joined as co-sponsor, with the Malaysia External Trade Development Corporation serving as official trade promotion partner and SME Corp Malaysia as supporter.

In his address, Sim emphasised that the continued success of local enterprises is vital to Malaysia's long-term economic sustainability.

"Strong collaboration within the business community is essential to help us weather these pressures together," he added.

He assured that his ministry remains committed to supporting SMEs by easing bureaucratic processes and creating a more enabling environment for growth.

Star Media Group (SMG) group chief executive officer Chan Seng Fatt noted that SOBA's significance extends far beyond trophies and titles.

"What makes SOBA meaningful is not only the recognition, but the rigorous process behind it," he said, while praising this year's winners for demonstrating vision, discipline and leadership – qualities he described as crucial in an increasingly complex global landscape.

SEE PAGE 11 >

RHB Bank Bhd's Ting (fifth from right) and her team showcasing some of the bank's services to attendees. — FAIHAN GHANI/The Star

The U Mobile team capturing a moment at the SOBA 2025 Gala Night event for posterity. — IZZRAFIQ ALIAS/The Star

The Matrade booth at the event offers insights into services that support Malaysian businesses in global trade. — AZMAN GHANI/The Star

Lim (in floral dress) with her GWM team as they present the brand's GWM WEY G9 PHEV model. — AZMAN GHANI/The Star

Chan (left) and Wang (right) with How (middle) admiring the U Mobile booth. — GLENN GUAN/ The Star

> FROM PAGE 10

Thriving against all odds

"We are operating in a world where geopolitical conflicts are intensifying, supply chains are being reshaped and economic alliances are constantly shifting," he said.

Against such backdrop, he said, SOBA 2025 awardees stood out for building strong operational foundations.

"They have shown disciplined cost management, strategic clarity and the resilience to keep moving forward despite uncertainty," he said.

"You are benchmarks for the wider MSME community – proof that Malaysian businesses can compete, adapt and lead."

He also encouraged entrepreneurs to remain steadfast in pursuing long-term growth for both their companies and the nation.

Also present at the gala were key figures from Malaysia's economic and trade ecosystem, including Matrade Export Acceleration deputy chief executive officer S. Jai Shankar and SME Corporation Malaysia chief executive officer Rizal Datuk Nainy.

They were joined by SMG chairman Tan Sri Wong Foon Meng, chief operating officer Lydia Wang and chief content officer Datin Paduka Esther Ng, underscoring the strong institutional support behind the awards.

As the evening concluded, the message that the world is defined by disruption and uncertainty, resilience, innovation and collaboration resonated among the SME community.

Winners of Malaysian Business of the Year awards for both above RM25mil and RM25mil and below, Mita Lim (centre, holding two trophies), with PhytoGaia advisor W.H. Leong (second from right) and vice president Bryan See (far right) respectively, with (from left) Wong, Sim and Chan. — AZHAR MAHFOF/The Star

The glitz of SOBA at the One World Hotel on April 8, where over 800 attendees were present.-AZMAN GHANI/The Star

The roar of achievement just as ICE Holidays Sdn Bhd was announced winner of Malaysian Business of the Year. — AZMAN GHANI/The Star

Fitline (M) Sdn Bhd chief executive officer Paul Yung is proud to win the platinum for Best Employer. — IZZRAFIQ ALIAS/The Star

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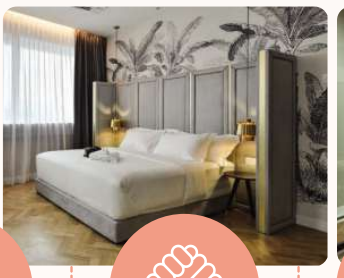

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