

Duty-free shops to draw in tourists

Exco man: New incentive and cruise terminal expansion will spur Penang's economy

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HAVING duty-free shops at Swettenham Pier Cruise Terminal (SPCT) will be a double boost to Penang's tourism sector.

Penang Tourism Development Committee chairman Yeoh Soon Hin said the announcement by Finance Minister Lim Guan Eng when he tabled the budget last week was "icing on the cake" as the terminal would undergo a RM155mil expansion early next year.

With the expansion, he said the current berth would be able to receive two mega-sized cruise ships simultaneously on the outer berths, while the inner berths would hold two ships, one small and another medium-sized.

"The move will 'lure' tourists to spend at the duty-free shops. Cruise passengers are high-end travellers, and it will certainly spur the economy," he said.

The expansion, upon completion, will see the joint venture project between Penang Port Sdn Bhd (60%) and Royal Caribbean

Cruises Ltd (40%) handling 1.7 million passengers a year by 2021.

The terminal can take in Oasis-class cruise ships, such as the Symphony of the Seas, which is the biggest passenger liner in the world, upon completion of the expansion.

It will also be able to service 12,000 passengers at any one time. The cruise segment registered 1.2 million passengers last year.

Penang Port Sdn Bhd chief executive officer V. Sasedharan said the duty-free incentive would entice cruise operators to call on Penang more often.

On the incentive given to expand Kota Perdana Free Trade Zone in Kedah, Sasedharan said the expansion would be a boon to the North Butterworth Container Terminal.

"It will bring in bigger business as factories will need to export their goods using the port," he added.

As announced in Budget 2019, the govern-

ment will grow the Kota Perdana Special Border Economic Zone in Bukit Kayu Hitam, Kedah, as a strategic trading and logistics hub between Malaysia and Thailand.

As an initial phase of the project, RM25mil will be allocated to develop a truck depot.

On Lim's announcement that almost 36% from top government servants would comprise women, Gender Inclusiveness Committee chairman Chong Eng said Penang had taken several measures to fulfil the government's aim to have women make up 30% of the leadership as policy and decision makers in the country.

She said the first step started with Village Development and Security Committee (JKKK) members.

"We have about 300 JKKKs in Penang and they must have at least 30% women by 2021," she said.

Chong said the state was creating a women's talent pool and broaden talent and scouting programmes.

"The talent pool will provide necessary training and put women in the board pipeline.

"Scouting programmes for women talent and leaders will also be widened to reach out to those with undiscovered potential," she added.

Meanwhile, Penang Chinese Chamber of Commerce issued a statement on Saturday expressing some concern that only 17%, of RM54.7bil of the federal budget was allocated for development.

"We hope the government pays more attention to the development expenditure when its financial standing returns to normal," the chamber stated.

It added that the proposed tax adjustments including stamp duties for property transfers worth more than RM1mil, departure levies for flight passengers, real property gains tax, sugar levy on beverages and casino license fees was not expected to bring any negative impact on the overall business environment.