

Big plans ahead for Penang Port

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GEORGE TOWN: A total of RM150 million will be invested to help Penang Port resume its role as a major economic contributor to the state.

The project comprises introduction of new facilities across four parcels of coastline close to the Swettenham Pier on the island.

Work on the first parcel is expected to begin soon pending approval from the various authorities, according to Finance Minister Lim Guan Eng. The upgrading works will involve minor reclamation work.

Lim said when upgrading of the port is completed, it would also help the state resume its role as a major regional services and manufacturing hub.

The spillover effect from the increased trade will likely added another RM2.46 billion to the Penang economy over the next five years.

"The multiplier effect is going to be significant as the port grows to become a leading cruise destination for the region," he said.

The port operator, Penang Port Sdn Bhd, and cruise line operator Royal Caribbean will jointly invest the RM150 million required for the project.

Lim, who was on a working visit to the port yesterday, said once completed, two large cruise liners would be able to berth at the port at the same time.

"That means up to 7,000 passengers can disembark simultaneously when their ships are docked here," he added. There will also be a section for duty-free shopping for cruise line passengers.

Another phase of the project is a free commercial zone at the Butterworth wharf, where the North Butterworth Container Terminal is located.

Statistics reveal Malaysia is now the third most popular destination for cruise liners in Asia. Its five ports that also serve as stops for cruise liners - Port Klang, Langkawi, Malacca, Penang and Kota Kinabalu - together serve up to 4.02 million passengers a year.

Lim noted that the expansion work would be driven solely by the private sector. "The government will just facilitate the process," he told reporters.

Penang Port Commission chairman Jeffrey G.E. Chew said the authorities would ensure that any expansion work meets Unesco World Heritage requirements.

"We will liaise with George Town World Heritage Incorporated to ensure that the heritage value of the city is preserved," he said.

He envisions the port becoming a major gathering point for locals as well as tourists.