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RM5m earmarked to develop free trade zone

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INFRASTRUCTURE, cleanliness, and security upgrades totalling over RM5 million have been earmarked for the country's oldest free trade zone at Bayan Lepas, Penang, as part of its efforts in making Malaysia's silicon island the preferred investment site for the electrical and electronics sector.

Federal government funding totalling RM3 million will soon ensure floods in the industrial park are a thing of the past, with work carried out to diversify drain water from various factories into Sungai Keluang, which flows through the area.

The Penang Island Municipal Council has also earmarked RM2.3 million this year to carry out projects ranging from improving signages, roadside kerbs, street lighting and relocation of hawkers in four phases of the industrial park.

A police base will be set up in Phase 4 of the FIZ to beef up security for the area.

"The upgrade in facilities and infrastructure is meant to serve as a pull-factor in drawing new investments and encouraging re-investments during this period where the electronics sector is undergoing a downturn," chairman of the Penang Island Industrial Park Taskforce Dr Teng Hock Nan told reporters at a briefing held at the Penang Development Corp yesterday.

Hailing the announcement to consolidate and improve infrastructure at the park, the Free Industrial Zone Penang Companies' Association (Frepenca) has described the establishment of the taskforce as "timely".

With over 100,000 Penang residents hired at the park, the association's secretary, Danny Goon, stressed the need to be "on guard" in protecting the state's future by ensuring investors were happy to re-invest in Penang.

Frepenca's membership represents some 60 companies in Penang, the majority of which are electronics-based.

For over three decades, Penang has served as an offshore base to high-technology giants like Advanced Micro Devices Products Sdn Bhd, Agilent Technologies Sdn Bhd, Clarion (M) Sdn Bhd, Fairchild Semiconductor Sdn Bhd, Hitachi Semiconductor (M) Sdn Bhd, Intel Malaysia Sdn Bhd, Osram Opto Semiconductor (M) Sdn Bhd and Robert Bosch (M) Sdn Bhd.

Penang's electrical and electronics sector is set to celebrate 30 years of success in Malaysia on August 27. Programmes lined up include a half-day seminar themed "Growing with Penang", a state recognition lunch with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, and a dinner hosted by the eight pioneer companies in Penang to recognise their long-serving employees.

Meanwhile, Dr Teng also said the Municipal Council and Frepenca would work closely to devise next year's budget so that continuous efforts are in place to ensure the industrial park was up to international standards.