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US Ports Favour TPP Agreement

By Manik Mehta

NEW YORK, May 7 (Bernama) -- US ports favour the ratification and implementation of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) Agreement, although a big question mark hangs over its fate in view of the election year.

There is a possibility of a new President slackening or even jettisoning it completely, considering that the likely Presidential candidates, Republican Donald Trump and Democrat Hillary Clinton, both have said they were not in TPP's favour.

One such port that supports the TPP is the Port of Corpus Christi (PCC) although the Commission of the Port of Corpus Christi Authority has not yet, officially, made a formal announcement to that effect.

"We, like other ports, also support the TPP though our Port Commission has not yet taken an official stand on it.

"I have also met with several members of the US Congress and we hope to get it pushed," John P. LaRue, executive director of PCC said in an interview with Bernama at the US State Department's Foreign Press Centre, here.

PCC is located in Corpus Christi on the Texas coast lying halfway between Houston and Mexico.

The fifth largest US port in tonnage terms, PCC is a major deepwater port with growth potential in the Gulf of Mexico.

LaRue said that US ports were keen to see the TPP agreement implemented because it would open up huge opportunities for them, benefiting from the growing trade and, in effect, cargo volumes originating from or destined to Asia-Pacific ports.

He said Asia, as a promising growth region, was very important for the PCC.

Besides high-volume countries such as China, Japan, Taiwan and South Korea, there were also other promising regions and countries such as ASEAN and India.

Though the PCC does not receive container ships, it has substantial traffic connections with Asia and there is, understandably, interest on the part of the port to pursue the TPP agreement's ratification and implementation.

"Corpus Christi is still a major growing area for cotton, so we ship a lot of cotton to Europe, Central and South America, and Asia.

"So a lot of the cotton that goes over there comes back to the US in the clothes we wear, but it starts in South Texas.

"But energy is our basis, and by energy we just don't mean oil ... we're the largest wind energy import/export port in the US.

"We do a lot of industry related to natural gas because we have a lot of natural gas. Foreign direct investments are increasing dramatically from companies coming in looking to have a place where they have a steady, stable supply of natural gas," LaRue explained.

Asian companies are also eyeing infrastructure development and other areas of interest in Corpus Christi; the possibility of a TPP agreement being realised is also motivating many Asians to operate from within the market rather than just export.

One major investor is Tianjin Pipe Corporation America which is building a US\$1.3 billion (US\$1=RM4) seamless pipe mill.

The pipes, utilised by the oil and gas industry, are produced by recycling scrap steel in combination with pig iron.

LaRue, who was joined in the interview by Tommy Kurtz, vice president of the Corpus Christi Regional Economic Development Corporation, said that the PCC had allocated US\$100 million for the development of infrastructure including roads, docks and purchase of land.

Malaysian companies, which are also trying to supply wind turbines worldwide, would be interested to know that Europe supplies this product category to the US through the PCC.

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