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PM set to address WSC meet

Ports World

THE Washington-based World Shipping Council (WSC), a trade association representing more than 40 liner shipping companies serving the US international trade, will for the first time hold its annual meeting in Malaysia next month.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is expected to address the meeting of the world's top liner leaders who make up the Box Club.

Malaysia International Shipping Corp Bhd, a member of the elite club, will host the meeting that is expected to discuss recent developments in liner shipping, especially initiatives on global maritime security, safety and standards.

Major current initiatives led by the US to enhance global maritime security include the Container Security Initiatives (CSI), the US Customs-backed Customs Trade Partnership Against Terrorism (C-TPAT), the requirement that all US-bound ships must provide cargo manifest 24 hours before a container is loaded in a foreign port, finger printing of seafarers as part of new visa and shipboard security, and the right of US Navy to board any suspect merchant ship in territorial waters.

The C-TPAT is aimed at improving security along the whole maritime transportation chain.

All parties along the chain - manufacturers, warehouse operators, logistics service providers, cargo brokers and shipping lines - are required to sign up the agreement to improve the security of US international trade.

Parallel to the C-TPAT is the contentious CSI which gives the right to the US Government, under an agreement, to station its Customs service officials at any of the foreign ports.

Under the initiative, 20 major ports which generate large volume of trade with the US ports have been approached.

Leading European ports such as Rotterdam, Le Harve, Antwerp as well as Singapore, Japan and China ports have agreed to station US Customs inspectors.

In July this year, the US Customs announced the second phase of the CSI under which Muslim countries, including Malaysia, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates were included as participating countries following their agreement to place its Customs service officials at their ports as part of its global maritime security programme.

Meanwhile, the council's goal is to provide a coordinated voice for the liner shipping industry in its work with policymakers and other industry groups interested in international transportation issues.

Matters that capture the interest of the council include maritime security, regulatory policy, tax issues, safety, environment, harbour

dredging and upgrading the infrastructure needed to handle US booming trade.

The council acknowledges liner shipping industry is a vital and contributing partner in US foreign trade and economic growth. The council reports that over the past 10 years, US international trade in goods had doubled and rapid growth is expected in the next decade as well.

Last year, US ocean borne trade amounted to more than US\$700 billion (US\$1 = RM3.80).