

Los Angeles strike disrupts docks

LOS ANGELES, USA: Container ships are diverting to other ports in California and Mexico as a strike continues to disrupt docking facilities in Los Angeles, a key gateway for US trade with Asia, an official said.

As a trade group urged President Barack Obama to intervene, Port of Los Angeles head Geraldine Knatz also warned that the three-day-old strike could damage the US economy and harm the reputation of the key shipping hub.

"This dispute has impacted not only our workforce but all stakeholders who ship goods through this harbour and potentially the hundreds of thousands of jobs that are directly and indirectly related to port operations," she said.

"In today's shipping environment, we can't afford to lose cargo or our competitive advantage," she added on Thursday (29 November), saying ships were diverting notably to Oakland, up the coast near San Francisco, and to Mexico in the south.

The action by clerical staff started at a terminal in the port of Los Angeles on Tuesday (27 November) but spread to six other terminals and the nearby port of Long Beach. No progress was reported in negotiations.

The two ports handle about US\$1bn in cargo per day on average, a huge proportion of it shipments to and from Pacific nations.

The striking workers claim that the Harbor Employers Association wants to outsource jobs, but employers' spokesman Stephen Berry said the strike was over "demands that we hire people we don't need."

He added that clerks get eleven weeks holiday per year and have an absenteeism rate of 29%.

Meanwhile, the National Retail Federation (NRF) called for the White House to help unblock the negotiations.

"A prolonged strike at the nation's largest ports would have a devastating impact on the US economy," NRF's head Matthew Shay wrote in a letter to Obama.

"We call on you to use all means necessary to get the two sides back to the negotiating table," the letter read.

The port in Los Angeles and the one in neighboring Long Beach constitute the seventh busiest commercial harbour in the world, handling more than 40% of ocean-shipped US imports from Asia.

Source: *AFP* via I-Net Bridge

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