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News digest

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Minister keeping eye on 'protectionist' U.S. proposal

OTTAWA - The Harper government is monitoring a possible attempt by the U.S. government to initiate what one business leader calls "protectionist" measures against Canadian ports.

International Trade Minister Ed Fast was responding Monday to complaints in the Canadian business community about U.S. Federal Maritime Commission chairman Richard Lidinsky's speech in Montreal last month.

Lidinsky said he will propose to his board later this month a study into possible unfair advantages enjoyed by the ports of Vancouver and Prince Rupert in the competition over handling of U.S.-bound containers.

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Canadian Chamber of Commerce president Perrin Beatty, in a letter to Fast, said the federal government's attention is required.

"This is a matter of concern, not only because of the potential impact on Canadian businesses and their customers, but also because this protectionist effort will be launched at the very moment our two governments are undertaking a joint effort to increase their economic and security cooperation," Beatty wrote.

Fast, speaking to reporters by telephone from Indonesia, said the federal government has just been made aware of the situation.

"This most recent development is one that's in its infancy. We are monitoring the situation," he said.

"Right now, there is no legislation, there is no action that is being proposed. All that is happening is that the U.S. Federal Maritime Commission has been asked to do a study.

"That commission hasn't even decided whether to conduct that study, so for me to speculate as to where that will go would be premature."

Canada's information laws outdated, lacking - report

Canada has ample room for improvement in terms of its access to information law, according to a recent global ranking that places this country in the middle of the pack of 89 countries with information access programs.

The Global Right to Information Ranking, released by the Halifax-based Centre for Law and Democracy and Access Info Europe, gave Canada a score of 85 out of a possible 150, placing it at the bottom of the list for North American countries.

By contrast, Mexico had 120 while the United States was closer to Canada with 89.

Seven factors figured into the score: right of access; scope; requesting procedure; exceptions and refusals; appeals; sanctions and protections; and promotional measures.






The ranking puts more weight - at a maximum of 30 points each - on scope, requesting procedures, exceptions and refusals and appeals, because they are considered the four central elements.

Air Canada apologizes for memo called racist

WINNIPEG - Air Canada has apologized for what the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs called a racist internal memo that suggests First Nations residents displaced by floods are making downtown Winnipeg dangerous.

In a widely circulating memo, Air Canada said it's pulling flight crews on Winnipeg layovers from downtown's Radisson hotel to the Sandman hotel near the airport because several downtown locations are susceptible to crimes of violence and opportunity.

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The memo connects the safety situation to the presence of approximately 1,000 displaced people from rural Manitoba in hotels near the Radisson.

The memo has already been criticized by Winnipeg Mayor Sam Katz, the downtown Winnipeg Business Improvement Zone and Air Canada's pilots association. The mayor has requested Air Canada reverse its decision.

On Monday, the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs blasted the memo as racist, requested clarification and an apology.

Source: Postmedia News

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