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EXCLUSIVE: A port that cares about ethics

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Lee Kok Leong, our special correspondent, talks to Marco Neelsen, CEO of Port of Tanjung Pelepas (PTP), on the importance of ethical business practice and in being a good corporate citizen by taking social responsibility for the community, improving the health, livelihood of the impoverished as well as ensuring a sustainable environment.



As a business, PTP pursues initiatives and innovations to ensure the ability to maintain growth and profitability in a dynamic business environment, and in the process, making it the most technologically advanced port in Malaysia.

However, at the same time, PTP is also championing social causes by investing money and resources into taking care of the community and environment.

For example, recently, PTP collaborated with the Johor state government to deliver food packages to 300 less fortunate families at Kampung Felda Ulu Tebrau in Ulu Tiram, Johor.

This inclusive program is aimed at the indigenous people, women, children, single mothers and grandparents who are single-handedly providing for their grandchildren.

In another example, PTP gave school aids to 270 underprivileged students in Gelang Patah. This Back to School program saw primary and secondary school students receiving bags, stationery and food containers worth RM150 each.

CFTC: PTP is a port that cares about CSR. While focusing to improve profitability, PTP also care about giving back to the community. Why is this so?

Marco says that managing a port depends greatly on the ecosystem they operate in. In fact, port operations and profitability are linked to the well-being of the community.

The reasoning is that happy and motivated employees that are proud to be part of PTP are productive and are always willing to go that extra mile for the company.

"We are a company here to stay and we are part of the community. We have created 6,000 jobs over the 20 years that we have been here.

"Currently, we employ 3,500 people. The percentage of Malaysians to expats is about 99.9 percent. That is about 10 expats out of 3,500 staff.

"We also have 11,000 jobs in our free zones with 41 warehouses and factories."

As part of their social responsibility to the community, PTP has, for examples, employed a tea lady with hearing and speaking disability, and single mothers to drive trucks.

PTP is willing to give opportunities to the locals to have a better economic future as long as they are able to do the jobs.

"We also focus on the next generation of potential employees. Some of our staff here started with PTP 20 years ago and are now in their 40s and 50s. PTP, over the next five to 10 years, will embark on a big renewal program when the current staff retires and the next generation comes in.

"I need to prepare the ground now so that when it happens, we can attract all bright and talented locals.

"For example, we organize a lot of CSR programs around education, like helping students in financial need and giving motivational talks. We have partnerships with local universities and polytechnics. I myself gave a few talks to the students too because I see most of them as our future employees."

CFTC: What is your opinion on sustainability?

Marco says PTP recognizes the importance of preserving the natural environment for future generations.

As port operations depend heavily on the use of ocean and have environmental implications for the surrounding community, PTP is conscious of its responsibility in conservation and preservation.

Throughout the years, PTP has embarked on programs such as beach cleaning, tree planting and seagrass rehabilitation.

Recently, PTP has mobilized volunteers for a river cleaning program at Sungai Pendas.

Also, in a joint effort, PTP, the Johor Port Authority (JPA) and Kelab Alami Mukim Tanjung Kupang volunteers planted 600 mangrove saplings in the Tanjung Adang coastal area near Gelang Patah.

The tree-planting effort is part of a collective commitment in managing the local environment, especially around the areas where PTP and JPA operate.

Apart from the mangrove saplings planting, we also collaborated with various local agencies to clean up a local river in an effort to keep the river and its tributaries clean and to conserve the river system accordingly.

"We are also changing the mindset of our people working in the terminal to make them aware to save the environment. For example, we do not have single-use plastic bottles.

"It is not about just giving money, which is the easy part. It is about changing the behavior of people so that there is a long term and sustainable change. It is about making people be aware that if they are throwing plastics rubbish into the rivers, they are polluting their own backyards.

"That is why PTP is very close with its surrounding community.

"Via a series of engagement and community based initiatives such as the recent Ramadan's traditional savory porridge (Bubur Lambuk) distribution program and break fast event with old folk home that we had successfully organized, the message that we wanted to share is not only aim to foster good relationship and celebrate the spirit of togetherness amongst PTP staff and the surrounding community, but also for us to form the basis of a caring and responsible community.

"Another example is our plan to build a library for the local people here, the Orang Asli. With this initiative, the idea is that instead of giving the money for a contractor to build the library, we build the library ourselves.

"We pay for the materials and our people will build the library with their hands. This is so much more meaningful than just writing cheques."



CFTC: What are some key initiatives for turning PTP into a green port?

"Our rubber tyred gantry (RTG) cranes are running on electricity. We are the only port in Malaysia to be doing so. We are also in the process of changing all lightings to LED. This will reduce our lightings electricity bill by 60 to 70 percent.

"We have invested in 250 to 300 CCTVs all over the terminal. We are leveraging CCTVs for monitoring, in lieu of physically patrolling such a large area, which is not environmentally friendly. As such, we do not have to use cars and motorbikes for patrolling, like in the past, and this helps to cut down on fuel and emissions.

"All our shareholders are in agreement in spending this upfront investment. We believe it will pay back over time manyfolds."

Tags: environment ethics Lee Kok Leong Port of Tanjung Pelepas social responsibility