

Costa Rica delays ratification of trade pact

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SAN JOSE, July 6 (AFP) -

Costa Rican President Abel Pacheco said Tuesday he will delay ratification of the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) with the United States since Washington's approval will likely be held up by the US presidential election.

"I do not think that before the elections, in an election year, the people of the United States will send the FTA (free trade agreement) to their Congress for consideration," Pacheco said.

The United States signed the trade pact in May with Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador and Costa Rica. It must be approved by the US Congress.

Since it is unclear when the United States will consider the agreement, Pacheco said he will delay sending it to the Costa Rican Congress.

The outcome of the US presidential election could also affect the trade agreement, since Democratic presidential hopeful John Kerry has voiced opposition to the pact. Kerry is the likely Democratic candidate to face Republican President George W. Bush in the November 2 election.

Kerry decried CAFTA as "a disappointing and unnecessary step backwards in our nation's efforts to ensure that opening markets results in higher living standards on all sides and not a race to the bottom on worker rights and environmental protection."