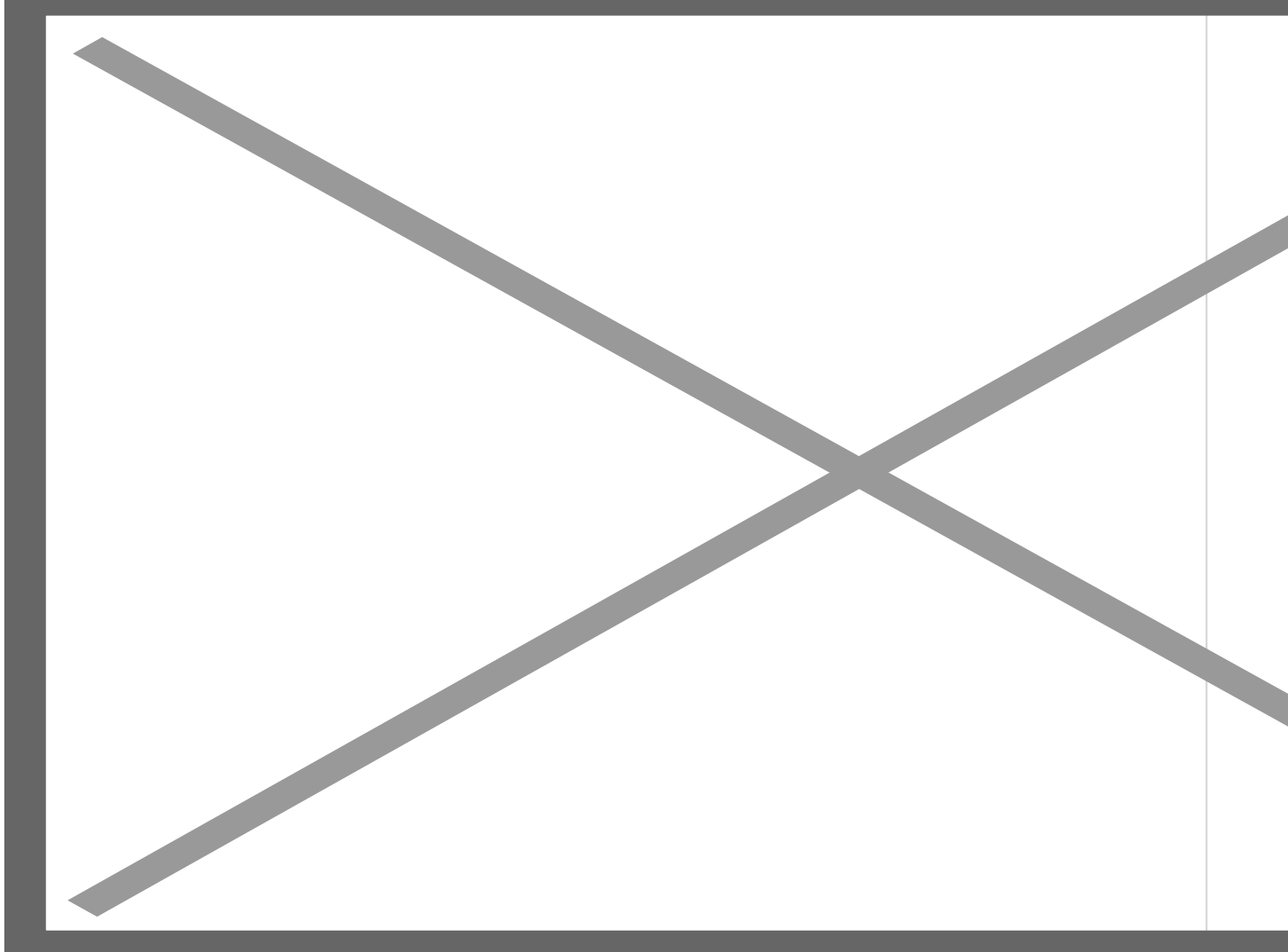


Panama Canal Authority denies claim of free passage for U.S. government vessels

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A cargo container ship transits through Agua Clara Locks at the Panama Canal, on the outskirts

of Panama City (Photo by Reuters)

Panama City, February 7 (RHC)-- The Panama Canal Authority has denied claims by Washington that United States government vessels are being given free passage, stressing that no preferential crossing rights for American vessels have been granted.

The U.S. State Department on Wednesday announced that all fees would be waived for American government vessels to transit the Panama Canal following heavy pressure from American President Donald Trump, who has threatened to take back control of the interoceanic waterway.

“U.S. government vessels can now transit the Panama Canal without charge fees, saving the U.S. government millions of dollars a year,” the State Department said in a post on X.

However, the Panama Canal Authority, an autonomous agency overseen by the Panamanian government, rejected the State Department’s claim in a statement shortly afterward, stressing that no adjustments to Canal tariffs have been made.

“In response to a publication released by the United States Department of State, the Panama Canal Authority, which is authorized to set tolls and other fees for transiting the Canal, reports that it has not made any adjustments to them,” the agency emphasized.

It added that it stood ready to establish dialogue with Washington over the canal, an artificial 82-kilometer waterway in Panama that connects the Caribbean Sea with the Pacific Ocean.

“With total responsibility, the Panama Canal Authority, as it has indicated, is willing to establish dialogue with relevant US officials regarding the transit of wartime vessels from said country,” noted the Canal Authority, whose administrator, deputy administrator and 11-member board are selected by Panama’s government but operate independently.

Panama has drawn significant attention from the Trump administration, with the president accusing the Central American nation of imposing excessive fees for access to its heavily trafficked trade route.

“If the principles, both moral and legal, of this magnanimous gesture of giving are not followed, then we will demand that the Panama Canal be returned to us, in full, and without question,” Trump said last month.

According to a statement from Panama's Embassy in Cuba, the U.S. has paid a total of \$25.4 million for the transit of warships and submarines during the past 26 years, which amounts to less than one million dollars annually.

The U.S. gained control of the failed and incomplete Panama Canal project from the French government in 1904. By 1914, the canal had been successfully completed by the Americans and opened as a major international shipping route linking the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans.

In 1977, then-U.S. President Jimmy Carter signed a deal relinquishing US control of the Panama Canal by the end of the century. On December 31, 1999, the canal was handed to Panama, which has controlled it ever since.

[SOURCE: PRESS TV and REUTERS NEWS AGENCY]



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