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Panama Canal denies State Department claim U.S. gov't vessels can now transit for free

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- by Shipping Telegraph

The Panama Canal denied a claim made by the US Department of State on Thursday that the nation had agreed to no longer charge fees for US government ships to transit the country's famous canal.

The canal authority said in a statement that it had not made "any adjustments to them," as a direct response to the U.S. claims.

The U.S. Department of State had said earlier in the day that Panama's government had agreed to no longer charge crossing fees for U.S. government vessels, in a move that would save the U.S. millions of dollars a year.

"The government of Panama has agreed to no longer charge fees for U.S. government vessels to transit the Panama Canal," the department said in a post on X.

The response from the Panama Canal Authority came few hours later with a post in X (former twitter).

“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 authority said in a statement, adding that it stood ready to establish a dialogue with the US.

“With full responsibility, the Panama Canal Authority, as it has indicated, is ready to establish a dialogue with the relevant officials of the United States regarding the transit of warships from that country,” the Panama Canal added.

U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio met with Panamanian President José Raúl Mulino earlier this week as part of a trip to Panama, El Salvador, Costa Rica, Guatemala, and the Dominican Republic from February 1-6.

Rubio also visited the Panama Canal as part of his official trip to the region.

The Panama Canal Authority conveyed to Secretary Rubio its intention to work with the U.S. Navy to optimize transit priority of U.S. Navy vessels through the Panama Canal.

Rubio told Panama’s president that the status quo at the Panama Canal is “unacceptable” and, absent “immediate changes,” would require the United States to “take measures necessary to protect its rights under the treaty” to end what President Donald Trump sees as China’s influence and control over the Panama Canal.

This visit comes after President Donald Trump’s threat to take control of the Panama Canal.

President Trump made it clear he wants the U.S. to control the Panama Canal, a move the Panamanian government strongly opposes.

Panamanian president José Raul Mulino ruled out negotiations with Donald Trump over control of the Panama Canal, mentioning that there is “absolutely no Chinese interference.”