Panama Canal widening project in full swing

Thursday, 30 Apr, 2009

It is reported that the excavation and dredging works to enlarge the Panama Canal are being carried out in different levels of execution, as part of a process that should conclude in 2014. The first dry excavation stage has been fulfilled by almost 90%. The second part of the contract, work has been executed by 60% and the third is still in its initial stage.

According to available reports the value of the already agreed contracts reached about USD 339.4 million in December. The program consists of the construction of two lock complexes, with three levels each, together with the widening and deepening of the existing navigation channels in the Gatun Lake and the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.

Another dry digging of approximately four miles will be performed to join the Pacific and Corte Culebra locks. Three consortiums presented their respective proposals to design and build the new locks of the Canal. The Panama Canal widening will cost USD 5.2 billion, of which USD 3.2 billion will be spent in the locks.

The Panama Canal is a man made canal which joins the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. One of the largest and most difficult engineering projects ever undertaken, it had an enormous impact on shipping between the two oceans, replacing the long and treacherous route via the Drake Passage and Cape Horn at the southernmost tip of South America.

Since opening, the canal has been enormously successful, and continues to be a key conduit for international maritime trade. The canal can accommodate vessels from small private yachts up to large commercial vessels. The maximum size of vessel that can use the canal is known as Panamax, an increasing number of modern ships exceed this limit, and are known as post Panamax or super Panamax vessels. A typical passage through the canal by a cargo ship takes approximately 8 to 10 hours.

(Sourced from Sunday Observer)

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