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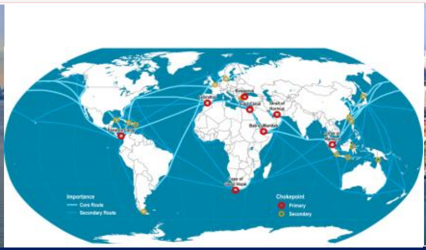
Asian Maritime News Express



29th July 26 Mumbai-India

Global Maritime Trade & Transport

War sends Asia-US ocean rates soaring 234% since February

Far East container shipping rates are gradually softening and expected to decline further in August, though they are falling significantly slower than they spiked.

"Spot rates on the major ocean container shipping trades out of the Far East continue to soften, edging down 1% into the U.S. West Coast, North Europe and Mediterranean while remaining flat into the U.S. East Coast," said Emily Stausboll, Xeneta senior shipping analyst, in an update. "There are likely to be further declines at the start of August, but the gradual softening shows how rates fall far slower than they increase during a market spike."

The effects of the Iran war on trade routes far from the conflict's epicenter were drastic and immediate, and were further empowered by a surge in frontloading as importers raced to beat the Trump administration's new tariffs implemented this week.

Since the start of the Iran crisis Feb. 28, spot rates have surged 231% to $6,225 per forty foot equivalent for Far East to U.S. West Coast transit, and 234% to $8,846 per FEU to the East Coast. By comparison, Far East to North Europe prices are up 135%, and Far East to Mediterranean ports, 96%, in that time.

"Some blank sailings [postponements and cancellations by carriers] are beginning to appear on trades from Asia to North America," Stausboll said, "but even if rates are starting to soften they are still at a very healthy level for carriers who will want to make sure they have capacity available to take advantage for as long as possible.

"No individual carrier wants to be the first to pull significant capacity when competitors can step in and take their volumes, which limits the scope for capacity management to reverse the spot rate decline."

The demand decline follows a seeming early conclusion to the peak shipping season, which historically ran as late as October. That contrasts with 2025, when Trump's chaotic tariff policies led to a late peak as cargo owners tried to wait out higher costs. At the same time, liner rate hikes and peak season surcharges set for mid-July failed to take hold amid the demand pullback.

"Carriers will use the renewed conflict between Iran and the United States – and the associated rise in bunker costs – as justification to slow the decline in rates through surcharges," said Stausboll. "But operationally, nothing has changed for container shipping this week because the vast majority of vessels were not transiting the Strait of Hormuz or the Red Sea before the latest escalation and they are not doing so now.

Maersk (OTC: AMKBY) and CMA CGM have restarted rotations on the Suez Canal-Red Sea route. But there are concerns that renewed attacks by Yemen's Houthi on tankers this week – the first since September – may curtail those operations.(**Source: Freight Waves.com)**

Captain missing after tour boat sinks off Central Sulawesi, Indonesia

Officials in Indonesia said that one person has gone missing after a boat carrying foreign tourists sank off Central Sulawesi province late last week.

The vessel, which had 11 passengers and two crewmembers at the time, had departed a dive resort in Central Sulawesi's Tojo Una-Una Regency and was en route to Marisa Port in Gorontalo province via the Gulf of Tomini when it sank on Friday, July 24.

The boat was originally scheduled to arrive at Marisa at around 11:00 local time on Friday after a voyage lasting just over three hours. However, authorities learned that it had not yet reached its destination by 15:00, prompting them to initiate a search and rescue (SAR) operation.

National SAR agency Basarnas deployed one of its boats while the Indonesian Navy sent a patrol vessel to assist in the search over an area of around 100 square nautical miles.The boat's 11 passengers and one of the crew have been found alive, officials said on Saturday, July 25. However, no trace of the captain has yet been found.(**Source: Baird News)**

Rescuers scour South China Sea for survivors after Vietnamese ship sinks

A multinational rescue operation is underway in the South China Sea after the Vietnamese general cargo ship Khoi Nguyen 18 sank in severe weather near Fiery Cross Reef.

Chinese maritime authorities said 47 Vietnamese nationals had been rescued by Chinese units by Monday morning, with one more picked up by the Vietnamese side. The latest two survivors were found late on Sunday by the China Coast Guard ships.

Vietnam's foreign ministry had earlier put the number rescued at 45 from the 62 people onboard, leaving 17 missing as of midday on Sunday. Hanoi said the ship went down while operating in bad weather.

The first large group of survivors was found after the Chinese rescue ship Nanhai Jiu 115 detected a distress signal and approached a life raft, recovering 29 people. Forty-one survivors were later transferred to the Vietnamese naval vessel Truong Sa-01.

Chinese rescue ships and a helicopter, Vietnamese vessels and fishing boats have been involved in the operation. The Philippine Coast Guard also deployed the patrol ship BRP Malapascua and an aircraft from Palawan following a request from Vietnam.

The 2017-built Khoi Nguyen 18 was a 69.9 m, 1,911 dwt general cargo ship registered in Vietnam. Authorities have not disclosed its cargo or destination, or explained why 62 people were onboard the small coastal vessel. The cause of the sinking has not been established beyond the severe weather reported by Vietnam.(**Source: Splash247.com)**

Sabang Port Project: A Strategic Opportunity for India & Indonesia

India and Indonesia signed an agreement to jointly develop the Sabang Port on Weh Island, Indonesia. Strategically located near the Strait of Malacca, the project aims to establish a regional transshipment hub, boost marine tourism, and foster maritime connectivity with India's nearby Great Nicobar

When Prime Minister Modi visited Indonesia in July, interest in developing the Sabang port in Sumatra reached a crescendo.

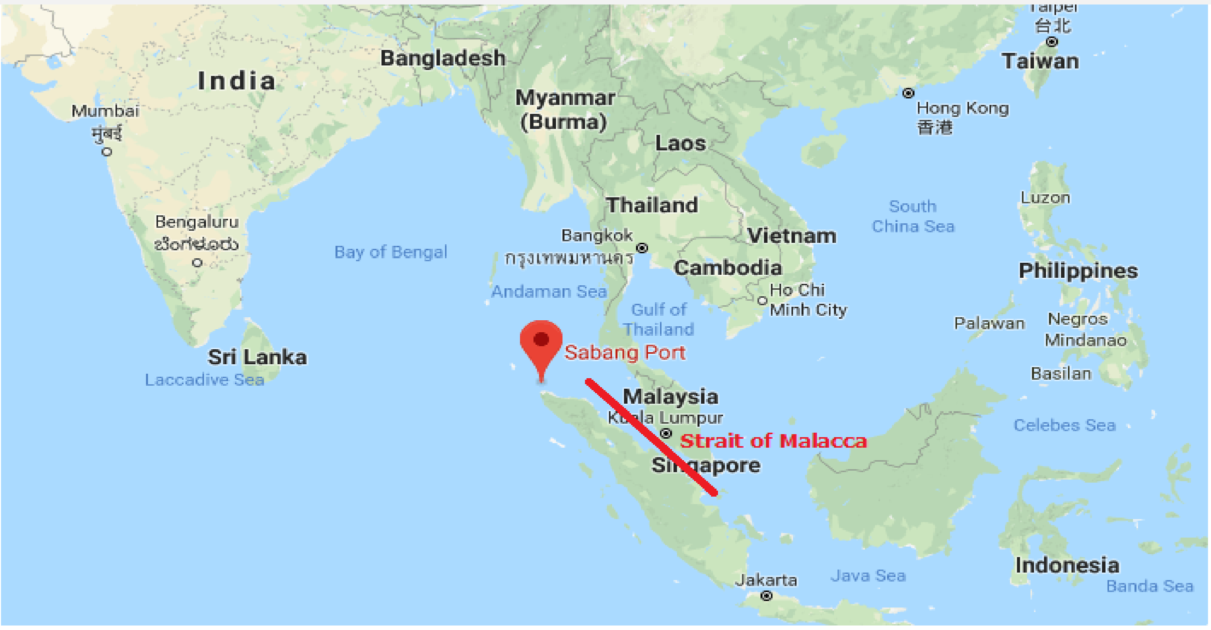
Analysts believe the revived discussion of this strategic port comes as the strategic importance of the eastern Indian Ocean is receiving attention. Given the discussions, it is evident that Indonesia is keen for India to play a leading role in developing Sabang, even as India has announced the development of the Great Nicobar Island Project.

Given these parallel interests, does Sabang still have the geostrategic significance that made it the subject of discussion in 2018, when India and Indonesia upgraded their relationship to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership?

Sabang is a small port town, mainly undertaking dhow-type local trade between southern Myanmar, Western Thailand and the Indonesian province of Aceh, which has only a limited hinterland.

Its value has grown, not because it is viewed as a major strategic port or a container competitor to Singapore, but because it could become an important location if maritime infrastructure in the region develops to support economic security, maritime domain awareness (MDA), humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, and resilient supply chains.

At present, other than its location, Sabang is not in a position to offer substantial support in these areas. Its geographical advantage lies in its location on Weh Island at the northern edge of Aceh Province, beyond the western entrance to the Strait of Malacca, one of the world's busiest sea lanes. Nearly one-quarter of global maritime commerce and a significant proportion of East Asia's energy supplies transit these waters.



Sabang therefore remains a silent witness to any disruption in the region. It overlooks maritime traffic before and after ships transit the Malacca Strait and could provide logistics support, repair and refueling facilities, and maritime surveillance.From the Indian perspective, Sabang could become the western counterpart to India's strategic plans in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. India's presence at Port Blair, Campbell Bay, and elsewhere in the islands already overlooks the eastern approaches to the Strait of Malacca.

As the Great Nicobar Project develops, with its transshipment port, airport and related infrastructure, it will significantly enhance India's strategic capacity in the area.

Located in the same maritime neighborhood, Sabang can either be viewed as a competing outpost or as a complementary development supporting the Great Nicobar Project.

Indonesian analysts opine that Sabang has greater relevance precisely because of India's plans for Great Nicobar. The idea of collaborative maritime governance across both approaches to the Strait of Malacca could well reflect the maritime vision that India and Indonesia shared in 2018, when the Sabang project was first highlighted.

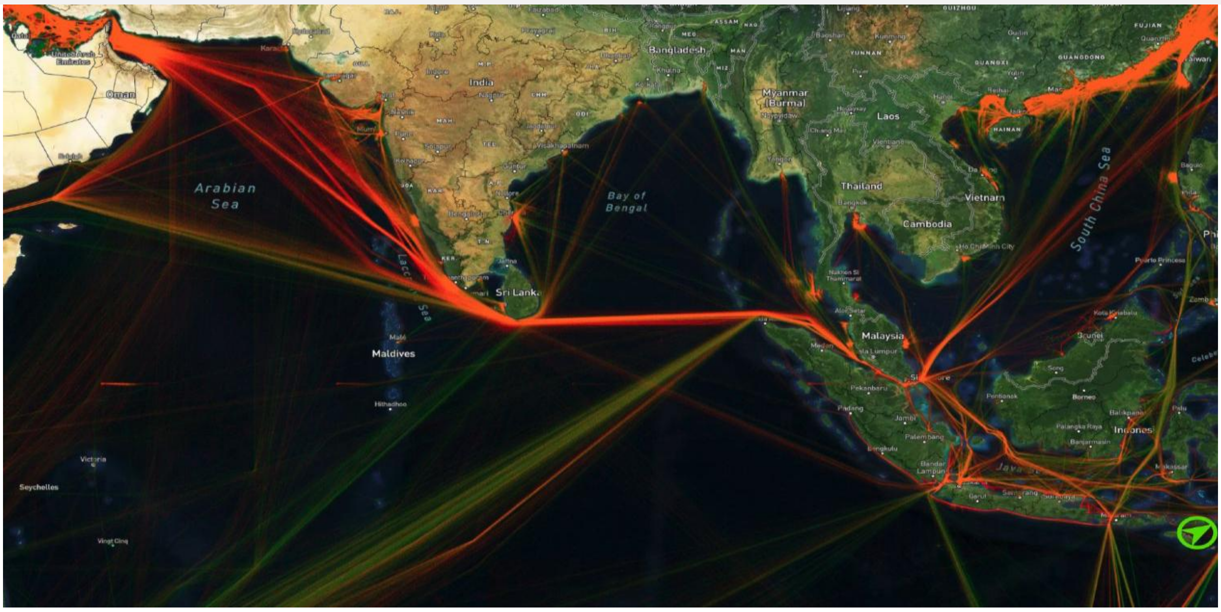
If Sabang is developed, significant opportunities could emerge for the region. International investment in the port would be consistent with Indonesia's efforts to improve connectivity across its vast archipelago.

Indonesia remains resistant to foreign military bases. Accordingly, Sabang has never been offered as a naval base. Instead, Jakarta wishes India to invest in the port's commercial development so that the region derives economic benefits. Indonesia also believes that, having already permitted Chinese participation in the development and operation of other ports in Sumatra, an Indian role in Sabang would contribute to its strategic autonomy.

India understands and respects this Indonesian approach. However, despite two meetings of the Joint Task Force and a Detailed Project Report, there have been few concrete takers for investment in Sabang. Investment in port infrastructure, coastal connectivity, HADR facilities and maritime services could strengthen regional resilience without becoming part of superpower rivalry. The question remains: who will bear the cost?

Sabang has the potential to become an important logistics node supporting commercial shipping through maintenance facilities, storage capacity and emergency diversion options.

An important question frequently raised is this: if India is already investing heavily in the Great Nicobar Project, why should it also invest in Sabang, located barely 90 nautical miles away? Is the objective to deny China strategic access, or to create complementary infrastructure that strengthens the utility of Great Nicobar?



File Image: China's trading zone via Malacca Strait

India and Indonesia broadly share similar approaches to the Indian Ocean, although their perspectives on Sabang differ. India sees Sabang as a facility that could complement the Great Nicobar Project and would prefer Indonesia, supported by friendly partners, to develop it. Indonesia, however, expects India itself to become a major investor in the port. As the Great Nicobar Project progresses, this difference in expectations will need to be resolved.

The relationship between the Great Nicobar and Sabang projects also requires greater clarity. Some analysts regard them as competitors, while others see them as complementary ports serving different functions.

The Great Nicobar Project is essentially an Indian initiative designed to improve connectivity, logistics, defense preparedness and economic security within India's own island territories. Sabang, by contrast, is a modest commercial port serving Indonesia's remote Aceh Province.

After nearly eight years of limited progress, the Sabang project has once again attracted Indonesian attention, largely as a complement to the Great Nicobar Project rather than as an attempt to replicate it.

Would other countries have an interest in the project?

Japan, for instance, is already a major investor in infrastructure throughout ASEAN and could emerge as a valuable long-term partner. Australia shares similar strategic concerns in the region and could also participate. However, neither country currently appears willing to lead the project, nor has Indonesia actively sought such involvement.

Many analysts also place Sabang within the broader context of China's expanding naval and commercial presence in the Indian Ocean. Beijing's investments in ports across Asia and Africa have generated considerable discussion regarding dual-use infrastructure.

Indonesia, however, seeks to present Sabang as a different model: cooperative, commercially driven, and consistent with ASEAN centrality. Jakarta does not wish either China or the United States to dominate the project. Rather, it believes that cooperation with neighboring India would strengthen regional infrastructure while contributing to economic development in Aceh.

If Sabang becomes commercially viable, investment in the region could increase. At present, however, economic activity remains concentrated elsewhere in Sumatra rather than in Aceh itself.

The challenges remain considerable. Since the 2018 India–Indonesia announcement, progress has been slow. Financing, commercial viability, environmental clearances and coordination among multiple stakeholders have all delayed implementation.

Sabang's traditional dhow-based trading pattern would need to evolve substantially through larger investments, well-defined business plans, integration with regional shipping networks, and stronger economic links with southern Myanmar, southern Thailand and India's Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

For Jakarta, it is important that Sabang is not perceived as a naval base or a militarised port. Indonesia wishes to develop it as commercial infrastructure that contributes to regional development, maritime security, HADR and logistics.

Therein lies Sabang's greatest value, not as a military outpost, but as an infrastructure and commercial bridge between India and Indonesia. Like the coordinated patrols already undertaken by the two countries, cooperation at Sabang could strengthen regional security without provoking confrontation.

Sabang therefore has the potential to become an important anchor for a cooperative maritime architecture in the eastern Indian Ocean and at the approaches to the Strait of Malacca. (Source: The Eurasiantimes/By **Ambassador Gurjit Singh**)

Gurjit Singh is a former Ambassador to Germany, Indonesia, and Ethiopia; ASEAN; and the African Union Chair; a member of the CII Task Force on Trilateral Cooperation in Africa; and author of The Durian Flavour **Trilateral Cooperation in Africa; and author of The Durian Flavour**

SITC restructures China-Vietnam-Malaysia service network

SITC has revised three services connecting China, Vietnam and Eastern Malaysia, introducing new port calls and changing existing rotations.

The carrier added Qinzhou to the CVM service. It also removed Qinzhou from the CVM2 service, while moving Ho Chi Minh City and Bintulu to the CMI2 service.

The updated CVM rotation will be: Nansha – Shenzhen (Shekou) – Ho Chi Minh City – Batam – Kuching – Phuoc An – Qinzhou – Nansha.

The revised CVM2 service will call at:

Nansha – Shenzhen (Shekou) – Kota Kinabalu – Muara – Nansha.

The new CMI2 rotation will cover:

Yangpu – Qinzhou – Phuoc An – Jakarta – Bintulu – Ho Chi Minh City – Yangpu.

The changes are designed to optimise SITC's regional network across Southeast Asia.

Sri Lanka's Hambantota port cargo volumes rise amid global shipping shifts

Colombo– Sri Lanka's Hambantota International Port (HIP) has recorded its highest-ever monthly throughput for both roll-on/roll-off (RoRo) and container operations in June 2026, driven by regional shipping disruptions and capacity expansions.

The port handled 90,219 vehicles and 80,325 twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs) during the month, Hambantota International Port Group said.

"June's performance demonstrates the importance of anticipating change and being ready when customers need alternatives," Wilson Qu, Chief Executive, Hambantota International Port Group (HIPG) said.

Officials attributed the volume surge to early operational planning triggered by rising security uncertainties around the Strait of Hormuz in West Asia.

Shipping lines seeking alternative networks shifted cargo to the southern Sri Lankan port, which sits 10 nautical miles off the main East-West sea lane.

The June milestone follows expansion at the facility. In 2025, HIP's total cargo throughput rose 175 percent year-on-year to 8.24 million metric tonnes.

Container volumes grew to 428,036 TEUs in 2025, up from 53,169 TEUs in 2024.

To accommodate the shifting trade flows, the port recently doubled its RoRo yard capacity and expanded its container yard space by 30 percent. HIPG has also committed 108 million USD for new container handling equipment, aiming to lift its annual container terminal capacity to 2 million TEUs.

The port's container segment has seen consecutive volume spikes this year. In April 2026, HIP recorded its highest single-vessel container throughput, handling 13,260 TEUs on the MSC Marie Leslie.

Operated as a public-private partnership, HIP manages diversified marine operations including RoRo, containers, bulk cargo, energy, and ancillary marine services. (Source: ECONOMYNEXT)

Malaysia detains tanker for lack of anchoring permit in Selangor Port

A tanker was detained by the Malaysian authorities for allegedly anchoring without permission in Selangor waters during an enforcement operation carried out by MMEA.

The Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency (MMEA) reported that the ship in question was detained about 8.8 nautical miles southwest of Sekinchan during a routine patrol.

The investigation revealed that the tanker was operated by a 60-year-old Vietnamese captain along with 13 crew members, consisting of 12 Vietnamese and one Myanmar national aged between 20 and 51 years. All of them were found to have valid travel documents.

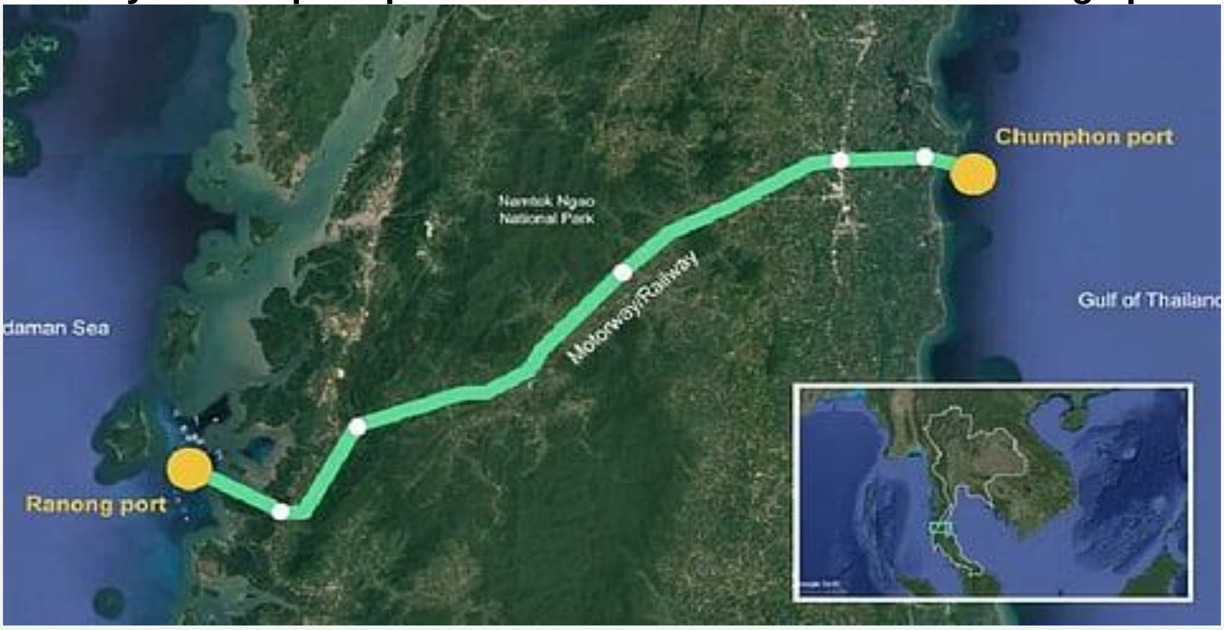
An official said the ship's captain failed to produce an anchoring permit document issued by the Malaysian Marine Department and is suspected of committing an offence under the Merchant Shipping Ordinance 1952 for anchoring without permission.

A detention order has been issued for the tanker, while the captain and chief engineer are assisting with the investigation.

The official stressed that the Malaysian authorities will not compromise on any violation of maritime laws and will continue to strengthen enforcement operations to ensure that safety, order and compliance with the law in the country's waters are always maintained.

He also reminded all operators and shipowners to obtain permission from the Malaysian Marine Department before carrying out any anchoring activities in the country's waters to avoid legal action.

Viability doubts prompt Thailand to downsize $30b land bridge plan



Thailand's government will revise and scale down an ambitious $30 billion plan to build a coast-to-coast "land bridge" after a review cast doubt on the megaproject's viability.It will instead pursue the expansion of a port in southern Ranong province and related rail links, the government said in a statement.

The original land bridge proposal envisioned THB1 trillion ($30.45 billion) logistics corridor offering an alternative route to the congested Strait of Malacca.

The proposal involved the connection of two new deep-sea ports: Chumphon, on the Gulf of Thailand in the east, and Ranong, along the country's western Andaman coast.

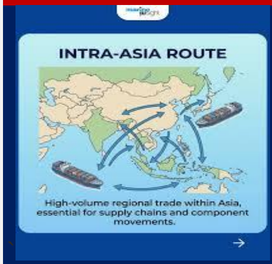
The updated review said the project could create future fiscal burdens and contingent liabilities for the government. It found the project's net present value had fallen from THB637.7 billion to negative THB10.3 billion.

The project is highly sensitive to changes in global economic conditions, trade volumes and shipping demand, it said. The project panel also raised concerns over the environmental impact of the project, including risks to Ranong's mangrove forests, marine ecosystems, fisheries, tourism and coastal communities.

The panel recommended upgrading the existing Ranong port and improving rail links to strengthen logistics connections. There is no immediate need for a new Gulf of Thailand port due to limited commercial justification, and existing port capacity.

Environmental concerns remain unresolved and existing environmental impact assessments are outdated, the review said, adding that public consultation also needs to be strengthened, with more comprehensive engagement.

Thailand still needs to improve transport infrastructure, including increasing freight demand linked to the Thailand-Laos-China railway, it said.(**Source: Reuters/Baird News)**



Intra- Asia Trade

Durian imports from Thailand to Malaysia decline 36.67% in 2026

Malaysia imported 4,184.58 tons of durian from Thailand between January and June 2026, down 36.67 per cent from 6,606.86 tons in the same period last year.

Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Food Security Datuk Chan Foong Hin said the figures do not support claims that imported Thai durian is being dumped on the local market. Based on Certificate of Compliance data from the Federal Agricultural Marketing Authority (FAMA) e3P System, imported durian accounted for about two per cent of total domestic production.

"The main challenge now stems from domestic production during the peak season from June to August, which has an impact on the excess supply," he said during a question-and-answer session in the Dewan Negara.

Chan said the ministry, through FAMA, is addressing the market with a two-pronged approach consisting of market regulation and the 2026 Seasonal Fruits Intervention Plan.

FAMA is targeting purchases of 1,000 tons of seasonal fruit, including durian, this year, with a budget of about US$1.65 million (RM7 million). As of 12 July, FAMA had purchased 468.94 tons of seasonal fruit directly, worth about US$676,000 (RM2.87 million), while indirect purchases through its network of mentored entrepreneurs totalled 1,550.73 tons, worth about US$1.64 million (RM6.98 million).

Responding to a question on long-term marketing, Chan said the ministry is exploring exports of fresh Malaysian durian to China by land and sea, in addition to air freight. The proposal requires negotiations on a new protocol with the General Administration of Customs of the People's Republic of China (GACC), as well as post-harvest studies by the Malaysian Agricultural Research and Development Institute (MARDI) and the Department of Agriculture. (Source: Fresh Plaza)

Vietnam looks to expand produce exports in the Middle East

Vietnam's agricultural exports to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) declined during the first half of 2026, although the market continues to offer opportunities due to its reliance on imported food.

According to the Vietnam Trade Office in the UAE, fruit and vegetable exports totaled nearly US$35 million, down 41.88% year on year. Cashew nut exports exceeded US$25.1 million, down 70.71%, while pepper exports reached nearly US$6.2 million, down 50.16%.

The UAE produces only 10 to 15% of its domestic food requirements, leaving continued demand for imported agricultural products. Israel is also identified as a market with growth potential for Vietnamese agricultural exports.

The Vietnam-UAE Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), which entered into force on February 3, 2026, and the Vietnam-Israel Free Trade Agreement (VIFTA), effective since November 17, 2024, are expected to improve market access for products including fruit and vegetables, cashew nuts and pepper.

Industry representatives said exporters must meet requirements for Halal certification, traceability and sustainability while complying with rules of origin. They also pointed to rising logistics costs and increased competition from **Brazil, Indonesia, and China.**

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