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Mumbai-India

## Global Maritime Trade & Transport

### Russian 'shadow fleet' tanker diverted to French port by naval forces



#### ***French prosecutors say Russia-linked tanker 'Grinch' under investigation after interception in western Mediterranean.***

The French navy has diverted an oil tanker, suspected of being part of [Russia's sanctions-busting "shadow fleet"](#), towards the port of Marseille-Fos for further investigation, according to reports. The office of the prosecutor in the southern French city of Marseille, which handles matters related to maritime law and is investigating the case, said on Friday that the ship had been diverted, but did not specify where to.

A source close to the case told the AFP news agency that the tanker is expected to arrive on Saturday morning at the port of Marseille-Fos in southern France.

The 'Grinch' tanker was intercepted by French naval forces on Thursday while on the high seas in the western Mediterranean, between the southern coast of Spain and the northern coast of Morocco, France's maritime police said in a statement. It added that navies of other countries, including Britain, supported the operation.

Video footage released by the French military of the operation showed a unit of soldiers descending from a helicopter onto the deck of the Russia-linked ship. The boarding of the vessel involved a navy boat and two navy helicopters, according to reports.

The Grinch, which was sailing under a Comoros flag, left the Russian Arctic port of Murmansk in early January and is suspected of operating under a false flag and of belonging to the [secretive fleet of ships](#) that enables Russia to export oil around the world despite international sanctions due to Moscow's war on Ukraine. ([www.aljazeera.com/news](http://www.aljazeera.com/news))

## ***Thousands of Chinese Fishing Boats Quietly Form Vast Sea Barriers***



China quietly mobilized thousands of fishing boats twice in recent weeks to form massive floating barriers of at least 200 miles long, showing a new level of coordination that could give Beijing more ways to impose control in contested seas.

The two recent operations unfolded largely unnoticed. An analysis of ship-tracking data by The New York Times reveals the scale and complexity of the maneuvers for the first time. Last week, about 1,400 Chinese vessels abruptly dropped their usual fishing activities or sailed out of their home ports and congregated in the East China Sea. By Jan. 11, they had assembled into a rectangle stretching more than 200 miles. The formation was so dense that some approaching cargo ships appeared to skirt around them or had to zigzag through, ship-tracking data showed.

### **Ship formation on Jan. 11**

Maritime and military experts said the maneuvers suggested that China was strengthening its maritime militia, which is made up of civilian fishing boats trained to join in military operations. They said the maneuvers show that Beijing can rapidly muster large numbers of the boats in disputed seas.

The Jan. 11 maneuver followed a similar operation last month, when about 2,000 Chinese fishing boats assembled in two long, parallel formations on Christmas Day in the East China Sea. Each stretched 290 miles long, about the distance from New York City to Buffalo, forming a reverse L shape, ship-position data indicates. The two gatherings, weeks apart in the same waters, suggested a coordinated effort, analysts said.

The unusual formations were spotted by Jason Wang, the chief operating officer of [ingeniSPACE](#), a company that analyzes data, and were independently confirmed by The Times using ship-location data provided by [Starboard Maritime Intelligence](#).

"I was thinking to myself, 'This is not right,'" he said, describing his response when he spotted the fishing boats on Christmas Day. "I mean I've seen like a couple hundred — let's say high hundreds," he said, referring to Chinese boats he has previously tracked, "but nothing of this scale or of this distinctive formation."

In a conflict or crisis, for instance over Taiwan, China could mobilize tens of thousands of civilian ships, including fishing boats, to clog sea lanes and complicate military and supply operations of its opponents. Chinese fishing boats would be too small to effectively enforce a blockade. But they could possibly obstruct movement by American warships, said Lonnie Henley, a former U.S. intelligence officer who has [studied China's maritime militia](#).

The masses of the smaller boats could also act "as missile and torpedo decoys, overwhelming radars or drone sensors with too many targets," said Thomas Shugart, a former U.S. naval officer now at the [Center for a New American Security](#).

**(Source: New York Times)**

# Asian Maritime Industry

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## Hainan's Yangpu Port records 50% rise in international cargo volumes



In the first month following the implementation of island-wide special customs operations in the Hainan Free Trade Port (FTP), Hainan's Yangpu Port, the largest in the island, said it has handled a total of 3,510 vessel arrivals and departures, achieving a throughput of 14.54 million tons, according to state broadcaster CCTV News.

The marked growth in business volume was due in part to the implementation of trade facilitation measures such as the international trade "single window" system, significantly improving vessel clearance efficiency, according to the port.

During the period, all port services have undergone smooth transition, with maritime transport arteries operating safely and efficiently, according to the Yangpu maritime authority.

The port recorded 492 ship international entries and exits, which is a year-on-year increase of 27.13 percent. For throughput, the volume reached 5.07 million tons, representing an annual increase of 50.71 percent.

During the period, the port also handled 403 ship entries and exits carrying hazardous materials, up by 5.77 percent year-on-year, with a volume of 4.85 million tons, an annual increase of 26.73 percent.

The port also reported 264 vessel calls by container ships, handling 329,000 TEUs (twenty-foot equivalent units). The number of port calls increased by 88.6 percent while the cargo volume saw a surge of 106.9 percent year-on-year.

In the business of bonded fuel refueling, there has been 73 ship refueling operations, during which the port supplied 40,360 tons of bonded fuel, with year-on-year rises of 35.19 percent and 82.94 percent, respectively.

The performance at the Yangpu Port, one of the major ports on the islands, came as the implementation of the special customs operations bring more vitality to the island province's economy. The number of foreign trade entities registered in Hainan FTP has surpassed 100,000, the Xinhua News Agency reported, citing customs data released on Wednesday.

From December 18, 2025 to January 10, a total of 4,709 new entities were registered, reflecting a rapid expansion, according to Xinhua. On December 18, 2025, China launched island-wide special customs operations in the Hainan FTP, allowing freer entry of overseas goods, expanding zero-tariff coverage, and introducing more business-friendly measures. **(Source: Global Times)**

## Indian Mundra Port Berths India's First Fully Laden VLCC



Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone Ltd (APSEZ) has achieved a major milestone by successfully berthing India's first fully laden Very Large Crude Carrier (VLCC) at Mundra Port. The vessel, MT New Renown, arrived at the port carrying around 3.3 lakh cubic metres of crude oil.

With this operation, Mundra became the first port in the country to directly berth a fully loaded VLCC at a jetty, placing it among a small group of ports globally with this capability.

APSEZ stated that the berthing was completed in difficult marine conditions, including strong currents, high winds and challenging sea states.

The company said the operation demonstrated the experience and coordination of the port's marine and management teams.

The direct berthing of fully laden VLCCs marks an important change in India's crude oil logistics. Due to their deep draft and large size, such vessels were earlier handled using offshore Single Point Moorings (SPMs) or lightering operations.

Mundra's dedicated VLCC jetty now allows these vessels to berth directly, making crude handling safer, faster and more cost-efficient. Mundra's VLCC jetty is connected to the HPCL Rajasthan Refinery at Barmer through a 489-kilometre crude oil pipeline.

The facility includes a 400-metre-long jetty, a berth pocket depth of 25 metres, a maximum acceptable vessel length of 333 metres, a maximum displacement of 360,000 metric tonnes, and can accommodate vessels with a maximum draft of 21.6 metres. **Marine Insite)**



## NWSA gains weekly Vietnam service via UWL, Emirates



UWL and Emirates Shipping Line will shift the Sun Chief Express from fortnightly to weekly sailings from June 2026, giving the Northwest Seaport Alliance (NWSA) stronger direct connections in response to rising demand from Vietnam and Southeast Asia.

The move strengthens direct connectivity between Vietnam and the NWSA gateway, offering transit times of 18 days from Ho Chi Minh City and 15 days from Shekou, China, to Seattle.

Weekly frequency is expected to bring **greater schedule certainty, scalable capacity, and fixed-day departures for shippers**. The NWSA has spent recent years **deepening trade** ties between the Pacific Northwest and Vietnam.

The upgraded service builds on that effort, tightening commercial links and improving **supply chain performance** on both sides of the Pacific.

For U.S. shippers, weekly sailings improve access to fast-growing **Southeast Asian markets**, supporting quicker speed-to-shelf for imports and expanding export opportunities for agricultural producers in the region. For Vietnam, the service provides a reliable, direct link to the Puget Sound and inland U.S. markets, reinforcing **supply chain resilience** and supporting continued growth.

NWSA Co-Chair and Port of Seattle Commission President, Toshiko Hasegawa, said: "UWL and ESL's decision to expand the Sun Chief Express to weekly sailings is a testament to the growing importance of Vietnam as a manufacturing hub and the strategic value of the NWSA gateway.

"This enhanced service will deliver faster, more reliable connections that benefit importers and exporters across the Pacific Northwest."

NWSA Co-Chair and Port of Tacoma Commission President, John McCarthy, added: "Strong partnerships like the one with UWL and ESL are essential to maintaining the NWSA's position as a premier West Coast gateway.

"The increased frequency and capacity of this direct Vietnam service will drive **greater trade volumes**, support US exporters reaching Southeast Asia markets, and reinforce the mutual economic benefits of this vital trade lane."

In December 2025, [Tacoma's Terminal 7 cleared two ageing ship-to-shore \(STS\) cranes, built in 1979 and 1986, marking the end of their decades-long service.](#)

## Lessons from the Baltimore Port Disaster: Insights for Asia



In a recent analysis, Chong Yang Chan, Managing Director of Qlik’s ASEAN & Greater China Region, addressed the growing vulnerabilities in the shipping industry, particularly in light of recent incidents such as the collapse of infrastructure in Baltimore. The incident raises questions about the resilience of ports, especially as ships are becoming larger while crew sizes are diminishing. For instance, container ships that previously carried around 1,000 containers in the 1970s can now transport up to 24,000 containers, often operated by significantly fewer staff members. This shift is compounded by aging port infrastructure, much of which was built decades ago, which cannot adequately support the demands of contemporary maritime trade.

Chan highlights Singapore as a benchmark for port resilience, given its strategic location along key shipping lanes and its innovations in port management. Singapore’s port, one of the world’s busiest, processed nearly 40 million containers last year. By 2040, it plans to launch a fully automated container port projected to handle 65 million containers annually. To further bolster its resilience, Singapore has implemented various protective measures, such as the Marina Barrage, which safeguards freshwater resources from potential maritime accidents. Additionally, an AI-driven vessel management system has been introduced to anticipate and manage potential collisions effectively.

The implications for Asia are significant, as it drives the global economy and stands to lose the most from disruptions at major ports. A United Nations report notes that while smaller Asian ports may lack modern resilience features, major ports, with their robust infrastructure, are better positioned against economic shocks such as those witnessed during the Suez Canal blockage in 2021.

Chan stresses the urgency for Asian port authorities to reassess their infrastructure to ensure it can handle the challenges of larger vessels and increased trade activity. Central to this reassessment is data analytics, which allows for the identification of infrastructural risks and the formulation of strategies to mitigate them. The maritime industry has begun leveraging data analytics and AI to enhance operational efficiency and security, thus creating smarter and more resilient port environments.

Efforts like the collaboration with Van Oord to develop tools for integrating flood protection with nature conservation exemplify the potential of data analytics in operational efficiency. Such tools reduce the time needed to assess critical vulnerabilities from months to mere minutes.

The Baltimore incident serves as a critical lesson for port authorities, emphasizing the necessity of breaking down data silos and adopting comprehensive analytics platforms that elucidate port operations and strengthen resilience. While physical barriers are essential, the knowledge garnered through data-driven insights is pivotal for developing infrastructure capable of withstanding unexpected challenges. Ultimately, the integration of innovative data strategies will be crucial as the shipping industry navigates an increasingly complex and risk-prone environment. **(Source: Maritime Fairtrade)**

## Asia-US shippers could see lower rates from Red Sea return

Major ocean carriers, after two years of sectarian violence that reconfigured regional shipping and the broader global supply chain, reopened services on a key Mideast route that could mean lower rates for shippers from Asia to the United States.

The announcement Thursday by Maersk ([MAERSK-B.CO](https://www.maersk-b.co)) that it is restarting scheduled services via the Red Sea and Suez Canal was a welcome sign of normalization amid years of violence and political turmoil across the region.

Maersk's reconfiguring of its MECL service connecting Asia and the U.S. was by all appearances a conservative approach and one likely to be emulated by other container carriers as they reintroduce significant capacity into an uneven environment that could further undercut weakened ocean rates.

One major carrier, CMA CGM of France, mostly continued scheduled services throughout the Houthi offensive. "Maersk has generally been the most risk averse out of the major carriers regarding a return to the Red Sea, so this is a turning point," said Xeneta analyst Peter Sand. "The services announced by Maersk as returning to the Suez Canal are smaller ships operating outside an alliance, but the fact it is Maersk making this move is highly significant."

Maersk over the past week revealed it had operated at least two vessels in the Red Sea. Sand implied that the carrier turned off satellite location equipment in order to conceal the ships' exact locations – similar to that of the 'dark fleet' of sketchy ships with questionable provenance carrying sanctioned cargoes.

Houthi rebels based in Yemen since late 2023 have attacked Red Sea shipping in a show of support for Gaza. "Xeneta data has shown Maersk testing the water in recent weeks with ships scheduled to sail around the Cape of Good Hope 'going dark' and instead sailing through the Red Sea," said Sand. "Clearly these sailings were deemed successful and the risk now low enough to announce services through the region on official schedules."



## Asian Logistics Sector

### Thailand Unveils \$28 Billion Sea Route to Connect Asia-Pacific with India and the Middle East

Thailand is advancing a significant multibillion-dollar initiative known as the Landbridge project, aimed at reducing shipping times and costs between the Indian and Pacific Oceans by circumventing the heavily trafficked Malacca Strait.

Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin shared details about the project in San Francisco, highlighting its potential to reduce shipping travel times by an average of four days and decrease costs by 15%. With projections indicating that traffic volumes may outstrip the Malacca Strait's capacity by 2030, the Landbridge is positioned as a vital solution for maintaining efficient goods flow.

The undertaking will involve an investment of approximately 1 trillion baht (around \$28 billion) to construct seaports on both sides of Thailand's southern peninsula, interconnected by extensive highway and rail networks. This 100-kilometer (62-mile) infrastructure aims to replace an older proposal for a canal through the Kra Isthmus, showcasing a shift towards more modern transportation solutions.

The Malacca Strait, a critical trade route between Malaysia and Singapore, currently accommodates about a quarter of the world's traded goods. However, Prime Minister Srettha cautioned that the strait is seeing increasing volumes, which is contributing to high shipping costs and a safety risk, as evidenced by the more than 60 maritime accidents that occur there annually. He characterized the Landbridge as a "cheaper, faster, and safer route," providing an essential alternative for global shipping networks.

The proposed ports will have substantial capabilities, with the western port set to accommodate 19.4 million twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs) and the eastern port designed for 13.8 million TEUs, collectively handling around 23% of the total cargo currently processed through the Port of Malacca. The project is expected to create around 280,000 jobs and potentially boost Thailand's annual economic growth rate to 5.5%. In comparison, Thailand's economy grew by only 2.6% last year and is projected to expand by 2.5% to 3% in 2023.

To foster foreign investment, Thailand will permit overseas investors to own more than 50% of joint ventures in building ports and associated infrastructure. The construction of deep-sea ports in Ranong (Andaman Sea) and Chumphon (Gulf of Thailand) could cost about 630 billion baht, according to Thailand's Office of Transport and Traffic Policy and Planning. The Landbridge project presents a unique opportunity for global investors, with discussions already underway with investors from China and Saudi Arabia.

The Thai government is keen to attract interest from U.S. firms as well, with companies like SSA Marine Inc., the Port of Long Beach, Oracle Corp., and Webtec expressing interest in the initiative. A presentation for potential U.S. investors is planned during the upcoming Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit, marking a proactive step toward securing the necessary funding and partnerships for this ambitious infrastructure project.

Overall, the Landbridge could redefine regional trade logistics and strengthen Thailand's economic landscape, positioning it as a central hub in global maritime trade routes.

[Source link](#)

## Intra-Asia Trade

### Vietnamese fruit and vegetable exports expand within RCEP markets

Accounting for nearly 30% of global GDP and population, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) is considered the world's largest free trade area and is creating expanded market access for Viet Nam's agricultural products. Within this framework, fruit and vegetables have emerged as one of the fastest-growing export categories.

Data from the Viet Nam Fruit and Vegetable Association show that China remains the dominant destination, accounting for around 65% of total fruit and vegetable exports. In 2025, total export turnover to China exceeded US\$5 billion. Other RCEP markets also posted strong increases, with exports to Malaysia rising by nearly 80% year on year and shipments to Australia increasing by around 30%.

According to exporters, trade with RCEP members has been supported by flexible rules of origin. Unlike other free trade agreements that require products to be wholly of Vietnamese origin to qualify for tariff preferences, RCEP allows cumulation of origin within the bloc. Under this mechanism, raw materials sourced from one or more RCEP member countries can be processed in Viet Nam and still qualify for certificates of origin, enabling preferential tariff treatment.

Despite these advantages, export performance across the RCEP region also highlights emerging constraints. Several ASEAN markets have shown signs of stagnation or reduced import demand. Nguyen Chanh Trung, Director of Hung Viet Rice Co., Ltd, said that in 2025, rice exports no longer sustained the growth seen in earlier years, as major buyers such as Indonesia and the Philippines cut back on imports, a trend expected to continue. To make better use of RCEP opportunities, he noted that companies need to redirect efforts toward markets such as China, Japan, and the Republic of Korea, with a focus on higher-quality products and further processing.

Competitive pressure within the bloc remains high due to overlapping production profiles among member countries. Viet Nam faces direct competition from Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines, Laos, and Australia in products that overlap with its export portfolio, including rice and tropical fruit.

According to the Agency of Foreign Trade under the Ministry of Industry and Trade, while Thailand and Viet Nam supply a large share of China's durian market, other suppliers such as Malaysia, Myanmar, and Laos are increasing volumes, particularly in processed products. In the pomelo category, Laos has become China's largest supplier, while Viet Nam, despite substantial production capacity, has not yet achieved a similar market position.

Across the RCEP region, which spans Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia, and Oceania, Viet Nam's agricultural exports continue to show growth potential. However, each market operates with different demand structures and regulatory requirements. China offers large volumes but intense competition, ASEAN markets are undergoing changes in demand and supply patterns, and Australia and New Zealand apply strict standards and require longer-term engagement. Source: [Nhan Dan](#)

## S Korea seizes illegal Chinese agricultural imports without quarantine

South Korea's Animal and Plant Quarantine Agency has uncovered an organised scheme involving the illegal import of agricultural products and nursery stock from China without quarantine procedures. By seized volume, the case is the largest recorded since the agency was established.

On the 12th, the agency said it had identified 12 individuals, including three intermediary importers and nine actual importers, who brought quarantinable agricultural products such as dried jujubes, raw peanuts, and dried red peppers into the country via Incheon Port between December 2023 and January 2025. Banned items, including fresh fruit and apple nursery stock, were also included. Nine suspects are to be referred to the Incheon District Prosecutors' Office this month.



The total volume seized reached 1,150 tons, with an estimated black-market value of about US\$12.2 million. In January, a regional investigation team discovered 33 tons of Chinese dried agricultural products during a warehouse search in Gimpo. Digital forensic analysis of seized mobile phones later confirmed that over roughly one year, agricultural products and nursery stock equivalent to an average of ten containers per month had been systematically imported.

Investigators found that the group colluded with Chinese exporters and used a so-called "curtain trick" to conceal the products. The imports were declared to customs as pet supplies, while agricultural products were hidden behind them in the containers.



Compiled by Dr. Sham Choughule through various sources for private circulation



**Dr. Sham Choughule.** [Shamc2001@yahoo.co.in](mailto:Shamc2001@yahoo.co.in)

**Director (International Business, Logistics, and Maritime Transport )**

**Association for Global Economic Development-India**

Corporate Office: A/111, Mittal Court, Nariman Point, Mumbai - 400 021.

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