

### Chuan, 2 ex-PMs may face charges over gas pipeline

**BANGKOK, Aug 2:** A prominent social critic says he will sue three past and present Thai prime ministers over human rights violations and environmental damage involving a gas pipeline from Myanmar, newspapers said Sunday, reports AP.

The Yadana pipeline, due to be officially opened this month, has been dogged by criticism and lawsuits by democracy and environmental activists.

They variously charge that Myanmar's military used forced labour in its construction and that Thai authorities destroyed prime forest and endangered wildlife.

The companies involved deny all the charges, and the Thai government has defended the project as economically viable and beneficial.

Sulak Sivaraksa said he would take court action within seven days against Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai and ex-prime ministers Chavalit Yongchaiyudh and Banharn Silpa-archa, according to the daily Bangkok Post.

The 1.2 billion dollars project, owned by Total of France, Unocal of the United States, the Petroleum Authority of Thailand and Myanmar's military government, will carry gas from the coastal waters of Myanmar, also known as Burma, to a power plant in Ratchaburi, Thailand.

Sulak, who earlier staged a sit-in protest at the pipeline, reportedly accused the three leaders and the Thai petroleum authority of lying to the public about the project and violating the law by producing an incomplete environmental impact assessment.

### Economists see leeway for yuan fluctuation

**BEIJING, August 2:** Chinese economists said there was a certain leeway for fluctuation in the rate of the Chinese currency, the yuan, official media reported today, says AFP.

"We should not stick to a rigid, fixed rate," Zuo Dapei, economist at a government think-tank told the China Daily.

The Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) economist told the paper there was a certain leeway to adjust the yuan's value in response to "certain factors."

But while devaluation was the only way China could boost economic growth in theory, China's decision not to devalue was correct, he said.

"This is especially important for boosting public confidence in the Chinese, and even the global economy," Zuo said.

China, which registered 7.0 per cent growth in gross domestic product (GDP) in the six months to June, has been buffeted by fallout from the Asian financial crisis, which has hurt its exports and dampened foreign investment.

But Chinese authorities are sticking to their objective of 8.0 per cent growth for the full year.

### \$ 800m 3-year loan An IMF lifeline for Bulgaria

**SOFIA, Aug 2:** The International Monetary Fund yesterday threw Bulgaria a lifeline in the form of an 800 million dollar three-year loan accompanied by a pledge to help it get a similar sum from other global lenders, reports Reuters.

"The approximate (overall foreign) funding will be 1.6 billion dollars for the three-year period and the fund will cover half of this amount," IMF mission chief for Bulgaria Anne McGuirk told a news conference.

"And other creditors are to cover the other half," she said adding a meeting with potential lenders would be held shortly.

Finance Minister Muravei Radev said the lenders included the World Bank, the European Union and individual countries.

The funding should cover the basic needs of the heavily indebted country and allow the government to proceed with reforms.

The amount corresponds to the expectations of the cabinet which had been hoping for 1.55 billion dollars in balance of payments support from the IMF and other international lenders over the next three years.

The amount is also roughly equivalent to Bulgaria's foreign debt dues in the same period. The government's debt now stands at over 9 billion dollars including 1.041 billion dollars owed to the IMF.

McGuirk said the cabinet's priorities were to complete the privatisation process, liberalise the economy, and create better conditions — which she called an important aspect — to attract substantial private sector and foreign investment.

With 1.25 billion dollars cumulative foreign investment at the beginning of the year, the country of 8.5 million people bordering Turkey, Greece, Macedonia, Romania and Yugoslavia still suffers one of the lowest investment levels in the region.

Privatisation is slow and sometimes murky and structural reforms have just begun.

The new IMF loan follows on from a 14-month, 510 million dollar IMF stand-by agreement which expired in May. The new funding is expected to be approved by the IMF board in September.

## Monsanto to go ahead alone, targets long-term profit

### Grameen Bank says 'no' to joint venture biotechnology project with US co

**NEW YORK, Aug 2:** Following an international outcry against Grameen Bank's proposed collaboration with the US-based Monsanto Company, the bank has decided to withdraw support for the biotechnology giant's project in Bangladesh, reports UNB.

In an electronic message, circulated throughout the world by environmental groups in Dhaka, Grameen Bank founder and managing director Prof Mohammad Yunus assured that he was no longer interested in the project.

Earlier, environmental groups in Bangladesh and abroad launched a campaign to stop the collaboration. Well-known environmentalists, including India's Vandana Shiva, appealed to Prof Yunus, asking him to stop the project.

Yunus's reversal came largely as a result of the protest

campaign by the environmentalists who claimed the project could threaten the livelihood of hundreds of thousands of farmers.

Under a deal reached earlier, the bank had agreed to collaborate with Monsanto to commercialise bio-tech crops in South Asia. It was to set up a for-profit "Grameen-Monsanto Centre for Environment-Friendly Technologies" in Dhaka.

Despite Grameen's withdrawal, it is learned that the company would anyway go ahead with the project.

In a statement released July 30 (Thursday), Monsanto's spokeswoman Diane Herndon said her company would set up the centre, with or without Grameen Bank.

Herndon admitted the request for withdrawal had come from Yunus himself. However, "we're still looking at where and

how we can continue to work together," she said.

Monsanto plans to initially invest \$ 150,000 to operate "demonstration farms", which will display the newly-developed conservation and irrigation technologies. It will also familiarise farmers with hybrid varieties of cotton, rice and maize developed by Monsanto.

Originally, Yunus had agreed to extend micro-loans to those farmers who would buy Monsanto's technologies and seeds.

Monsanto, a multi-billion dollar multinational company, specialises in agrochemical technologies. In the past, its operation had been criticised for being "environmentally unsafe"

In a front-page story, the New York-based IPS Daily Journal reported Friday (July 31) that though hybrid use was expanding worldwide, the results had been mixed.

In India, for example, experience with hybrid crops has been disastrous. Farmers reportedly committed suicide after failed harvests left them financially ruined.

The Journal notes that the government of India is now seeking to bar imports of genetically-engineered seeds containing "terminator", a gene which self-destructs and renders seeds sterile. As a result, farmers must buy new stocks every season.

Herndon told IPS that she was aware of the criticism against Monsanto. While it was set to start the proposed centre in Bangladesh, it might actually drop the company's name from it.

"We are not looking for quick profits from Bangladesh, we'll look for a long-term return", she said.

### Iranian industrial exports suffer slump

**TEHRAN, Aug 2:** Iranian industrial exports fell 25 per cent in the first quarter of the fiscal year which began March 21, compared to the same period in 1997, the official IRNA news agency reported here, says AFP.

Ahmad Gassemi director of the centre for promotion of industrial exports, told IRNA that 573 million dollars in industrial goods had been exported from March 21 to June 20, the goods amounted to 2.3 million tonnes.

Chemical products, clothes, shoes, foodstuff and plastics are the main industrial goods exported by Iran.

Export of handicrafts and agricultural products have also dropped.

Iran exported 572 million dollars in other non-oil products during the same period of which carpets accounted for 36 per cent and pistachios for 32 per cent.

On the imports front, the country imported 4.1 billion dollars worth of goods and raw materials in the first three months of the fiscal year.

## Bid to raise ceiling for high-tech visas shelved in US

**WASHINGTON, Aug 2:** Republican lawmakers have shelved attempts to raise the ceiling for visas for foreign workers with skills in high technology until after the summer recess, according to USIS.

The House of Representatives and the Senate agreed on a compromise bill Thursday that would raise the annual ceiling of visas for high technology workers from 65,000 to 85,000 for the remainder of this fiscal year that ends September 30.

Under the bill, the ceiling would be progressively raised each year so that by 2001, a total of 115,000 H-1B visas would be issued to foreign workers that had the high technology skills. Information technology companies are pleading for higher quotas because of a critical shortage of programmers, systems analysts and computer engineers among US workers.

After the House and Senate reconciled their bills, Republican leaders promptly scheduled votes and hoped to put a bill on President Clinton's desk during

the weekend. But after the administration read the 34-page compromise, White House spokesman Jake Siewert said, "Unfortunately, this Republican agreement falls to provide adequate training and protections for US workers. In its current form, the president would have no choice but to veto it. We are working on proposed revisions."

With members of Congress leaving Washington for the summer recess, the earliest that lawmakers could schedule a vote would be September.

In mid-July, the administration said the key to solving the shortage of high-tech workers is to increase the skills of US workers and ensure that employers seek US workers first. The administration and congressional Democrats want guarantees that companies do not lay off US workers in order to hire foreign workers at lower wages.

Most of the high-tech foreign workers come from India and China.



Opening ceremony of the 18th branch of Prime Bank Limited at Jubilee Road in Chittagong on Thursday. — Prime Bank photo

### Computer programme to study impact of Asian meltdown

**WASHINGTON, Aug 2:** A group of US economists have designed a computer programme to study the economic impact of a possible Asian economic meltdown of catastrophic proportions, reports AFP.

Economists at Standard and Poor's DRI, a Lexington, Massachusetts economic forecasting firm, said that the United States and Europe could largely absorb the impact of a "worst-case" Asian economic meltdown, the Washington Post reported Saturday.

The doomsday scenario looks at the effects of Japan's economy shrinking by 10 per cent, with large banks going bankrupt and the yen trading at 200 or more to the dollar, weakened from its current rate of 144.

— Indonesia defaulting on its foreign debts.

— China's economic growth slowing from eight to one per cent and a 40 per cent devaluation of the yuan and the Hong Kong dollar.

— A regional currency devaluation precipitated by China's devaluation.

The effect on the United States is, surprisingly, only a mild recession, the researchers told the Post.

US exports to Asia represent only 2.4 per cent of the US

### 5 lakh tourists visit Myanmar

**YANGON, Aug 2:** A total of 490,923 tourists visited Myanmar in the 1997-98 fiscal which ended in March, the official New Light of Myanmar newspaper reported today, says Xinhua.

Of the tourists who visited Myanmar in 1997-98, 64.1 per cent were from Asia, mostly from Japan, 26.2 per cent from West Europe, 5.8 per cent from North America and 3.9 per cent from other regions, the report said.

As of the end of April 1998, licenses had been issued to 449 hotels, motels and inns, of which 20 hotels are run with foreign investment.

Meanwhile, Myanmar is planning to organise a travel show later this month in Thailand to attract more tourists from there following its tourism promotion campaign launched in Singapore last month.

Official statistics show that foreign investment in Myanmar's hotels and tourism sector exceeded one billion US dollars in March.

The DRI economist who directed the study, Nariman Behavesh, told the newspaper they are not trying to engage in scare-mongering.

"The reality is that every time we think we see a light at the end of the tunnel in Asia, it has turned out to be another train coming at us," Behavesh said.

### US stocks stumble

**NEW YORK, Aug 2:** Stocks stumbled yesterday as investors fretted about the American economy. The White House sex scandal and Japanese troubles pushed the dollar higher against the yen.

Treasury bonds were mostly higher.

The Dow Jones industrial average tumbled 143.66 points, or 1.6 per cent, to 8,883.29 for the week, it was off 54.07 points.

In the broad market, declining issues swamped advances 2,214 to 775 on active volume of 640 million shares on the New York stock exchange.

The Nasdaq composite index plunged 47.19 points, or 2.4 per cent, to 1,872.39. It was the largest daily drop since March 5 for the technology-laced index.

Stronger-than-expected gross domestic product growth of 1.4 per cent — economists had been expecting no growth — did little to offset worries about a slowing economy in the second half of the year.

The Dow, hammered by several sell programmes late session, was down almost 200 points before hauling itself off the lows.

"People are nervous and they don't want to carry too many positions going into the weekend with a lot of stuff going on," Jim Benning, a trader at Bt Brokerage, said.

"They are worried that the economy slowed dramatically from the first to the second quarter, and wonder if this is just a one-quarter phenomenon or the start of a recession," he said.

Sentiment was shaken before the open by a sharp slide in

### Exchange Rates

**American Express Bank Ltd** foreign exchange rates (indicative) against the Taka to clients.

Currency	Selling TT & OD	Buying TT Clean	Selling BC	Buying OD Sight	Buying TT & OD
USD	47.3050	46.9100	47.3450	46.7570	46.6850
GBP	77.7789	76.4258	77.8446	76.1765	76.0592
DEM	26.6582	26.2140	26.6808	26.1285	26.0883
JPY	0.3309	0.3248	0.3311	0.3237	0.3232
FRF	7.9995	7.7711	8.0063	7.7457	7.7338
SAR	12.6460	12.4731	12.6567	12.4324	12.4133
MYR	11.4263	11.3309	11.4359	11.2939	11.2766
AED	12.9146	12.7366	12.9256	12.6950	12.6755
KWD	159.5716	148.1213	159.7065	147.6381	147.4108
QAR	13.0310	12.8478	13.0420	12.8059	12.7862
USD usance export bill buying rates:					
TT Doc	30 Days	60 Days	90 Days	120 Days	180 Days
46.8112	46.5191	46.1282	45.7373	45.3463	44.9545

### US dollar London Interbank Offered Rate (LIBOR) as of July 28 1998

	Buying	Selling	Currency	1 Month	3 Months	6 Months	9 Months	12 Months
Cash	46.6850	47.3050	USD	5.6625	5.6675	5.75	5.7825	5.8125
T.C	46.6850	47.3050	GBP	7.625	7.75	7.8125	7.8125	7.8125

### Exchange rates of some Asian currencies against US dollars

Indian Rupee	Pak Rupee	Thai Baht	Malaysian Ringgit	Indonesian Rupiah	Korean Won
42.500/42.600	52.750/53.000	40.700/40.900	4.140/4.1500	13000/13000	1229/1232

**Amex notes on Sunday's market**  
USD/BDT market was very sluggish. USD rates continued to fall and was mostly traded in the 46.95-46.98 range. This bearish trend is likely to continue for some time to come.

The call money rates stayed at the 6-7% level for the most part of the day. The market had enough liquidity.

In the international market on Friday, the US dollar was higher against the Japanese Yen ending near 6-weeks high level. It extended Thursday's gain amid concerns over Japan's new government, in lieu of aggressive economic reform to stimulate growth.

The dollar rose to 144.80 yen, its highest since hitting an eight-year top on July 16.

Mark/yen was at 5-3/4 year peak, which indirectly pressured dollar/mark. The dollar ended at 144.60/63 yen, up from 144.35/45 at the open. It fell to 1.7760/70 against German mark from 1.7797/02.

The dollar got support from US data showing that the economy slowed less than expected in the second quarter. Dollar/mark jumped to 1.7843 after the data.

Among other majors, the pound fell to \$1.6333/38 from \$1.6370/80 and the dollar fell to 1.4885/90 Swiss franc from 1.4920/30.

In New York, the majors closed on Friday against the USD at 1.7760/70 DEM, 144.70/80 JPY, 5.9535/65 FRF, 1.4885/95 CHF, and GBP at 1.6330/40 USD.



A delegation of Bangladesh Employers' Association led by its President, Rokia A Rahman met Dr S A Malek, Political Adviser to the Prime Minister at his office yesterday to discuss the problems facing Chittagong Port. — BEA photo

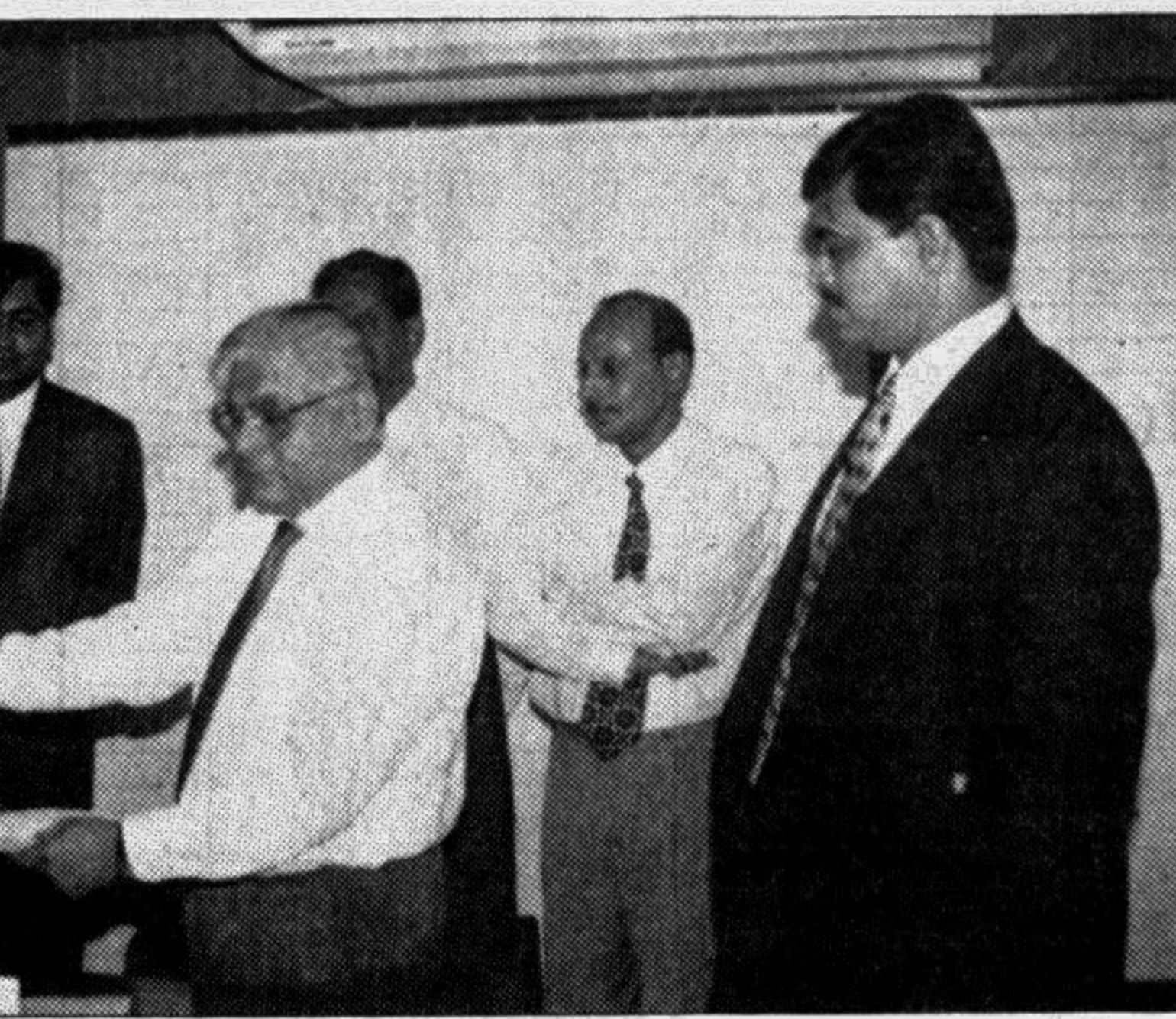
### ANZ Link installed at CSE

**Star Business Report**  
ANZ Grindlays Bank's electronic banking service, ANZ Link, has been installed at the Chittagong Stock Exchange (CSE) recently.

The ANZ Link will allow CSE to access its account statements on-line and also to electronically transmit various remittance and LC instructions to ANZ Grindlays Bank, said the bank in a press statement.

Analysts believe that the service will significantly speed up and improve CSE's banking affairs and particularly facilitate its payments systems.

CSE, the most modern stock exchange in the country with fully automated dealing and settlement systems, has already installed a sophisticated communication network.



AGM Shamsul Kamal, Chief Executive of Chittagong Stock Exchange and Anis A Khan, Senior Manager, Corporate Banking of ANZ Grindlays Bank Ltd, exchange the documents of ANZ Link agreement at the CSE recently. Selim Hussain, head of International Services of the bank, is also seen. — ANZ photo

### Shipping Intelligence

**CHITTAGONG PORT**  
Berth position and performance of vessels as on 2.8.98

Berth No	Name of vessels	Cargo	L port call	Local agent	Date of arrival	Date of Leaving	
J/1	Macho	Gr	Sing	Litmond	19/7	13/8	
J/2	Golden Y1	Gr	Kaus	Prog	16/7	8/8	
J/3	George	Sugar (G)	Sing	Seacom	20/6	7/8	
J/4	Bel Air	Rice (G)	Kaki	ANCL	19/7	3/8	
J/5	Eastin Mars	Gr	Busa	Prog	26/7	8/8	
J/6	Bnglar Gourab	Gr	Mom	BSC	20/7	2/8	
J/7	Winner	Wheat (P)	Odes	AASS	7/7	10/8	
J/8	Rong Jiang	Gr	Kaki	OML	14/5	10/8	
J/9	Song Ling	Gr	Tian	BDSHIP	21/7	12/8	
J/10	Elang-II	Cement	Tanj	PSAL	9/7	2/8	
J/11	QC Pintail	Cement	Sing	QCSL	26/7	8/8	
J/12	QC Teal	Cont	Sing	QCSL	29/7	4/8	
J/13	Kota Berjaya	Cont	Sing	PI(BD)	28/7	5/8	
CCT/1	Bangabiraj	Cont	Sing	BDSHIP	30/7	4/8	
CCT/2	Ahuja	Cont	Col	Baridig	25/7	2/8	
CCT/3	Mild Lin	Cont	Sing	Nol	29/7	4/8	
RM/14	Ryomyong	Cement	Sing	Delmure	21/5	6/8	
GSJ	Adhiguna N ugraha-1	Cement	Tanj	Jaycee	8/7	5/8	
TSP	Sukarawan	Gr	Phos	Hama	Seacom	18/7	4/8
RM/6	Elang-III	Cement	Kar	USTC	20/6	3/8	
DOJ	Shourabh	C O il	-	BSC	R/A	3/8	
DD	Banglar Jyoti	Repair	-	BSC	R/A	3/8	
DDJ/1	Tanary Star	Idle	Para	PSAL	-	-	
DDJ/2	Seabull	Command	-	Sing	2/8	2/8	
RM/8	Joste	Idle	Kaki	USTC	28/4	10/8	
RM/9	Banglar kakoli	Repair	-	BSC	R/A	7/8	
CUFLJ	Zi Jun	Urea	-	USTC	R28/7	7/8	
Kafco(U)	Yong Jiang	Urea	-	-	R/A	12/8	

### Vessels due at outer anchorage

Name of vessels	Date of arrival	Port call	Local agent	Cargo	Loading port
Penta Pongawa	5/8	-	MHCSL	Cement	-
Good Faith	2/8	-	Litmond	Sugar(G)	-
Karia Sentosa	2/8	-	USTC	Rice (G)	-
Pan Noble	2/8	-	Oil	Gr	-
Trono (48)26/07	3/8	-	Everett	Ci	-
Product Queen	3/8	Sing	JF	Scraping	-
Xpress Resolve	-	-	-	-	-
(Cont)27/07	5/8	Sing	RSL	Cont	Sing
Manastu(Cont)23/6					