

Asia, EU to go for further trade liberalisation

BERLIN, Oct 10: European and Asian ministers meeting here hope to boost their economies through further trade liberalisation and investment promotion and thus underpin Asia's recent recovery from the financial crises of 1997-98, says AFP.

Economic ministers of the 15 European Union (EU) and 10 Asian states are holding a two-day cooperation forum in Berlin this weekend.

And a draft declaration was to be finalised by them Sunday pledges the ministers "strongest support" for the new round of trade liberalisation talks expected to be launched in Seattle November 30-December 3.

The draft proposes a "broad" or even "comprehensive" basis for the Seattle round, which will follow the Uruguay Round of talks to liberalise world trade in agriculture and services.

The Seattle round talks are to be held in the framework of the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

Ministers at the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) want these new WTO negotiations also to cover "trade facilitation, foreign direct investment (and) competition," among other subjects, according to the draft.

The ministers are being asked to agree that the negotiations "should be conducted and concluded as a single undertaking within three years." The Uruguay Round dragged on for eight years, from 1986 to 1994.

And they are being asked to back a call to all WTO member states to join them in a "commitment not to impose new or more restrictive trade measures for the duration of the negotiations."

Notwithstanding differences still being ironed out, a member of the Chinese delegation to the Berlin meeting told AFP Saturday it was a "realistic" text, but that it needed more Asian input.

Apparent areas of dispute include "dumping" of goods, and subsidies, as well as environmental issues and basic human rights considerations such as "core labour rights" on which a country such as China would be sensitive.

China and Vietnam are pressing to be allowed to join the WTO, but the western countries say they have to abide by the rules of free trade and not seek unwarranted special consideration.

In a clear gesture of encouragement for the candidates, however the draft declaration says it is important that "accession countries" can participate with the status of member countries (that is, rather than observers) in the new Seattle round of talks.

The conference chairman, German Economy Minister Wolfgang Mueller, said Saturday he hoped for at least "a little bit of progress" in Berlin on the application of China and Vietnam to join the WTO.

The EU's international trade commissioner, Pascal Lamy, is due to meet China's trade minister, Shi Guangsheng, for a breakfast Sunday on the sidelines of the forum, Lamy's spokesman said.

On other WTO-related issues, the ministers are expected to declare support for the growth of electronic (Internet) commerce and to back a continued tax moratorium on such transactions.

They are further expected to express support for moves to ensure transparency in government procurement.

The ministers and their staff have been studying how best to exploit the recent new Asian

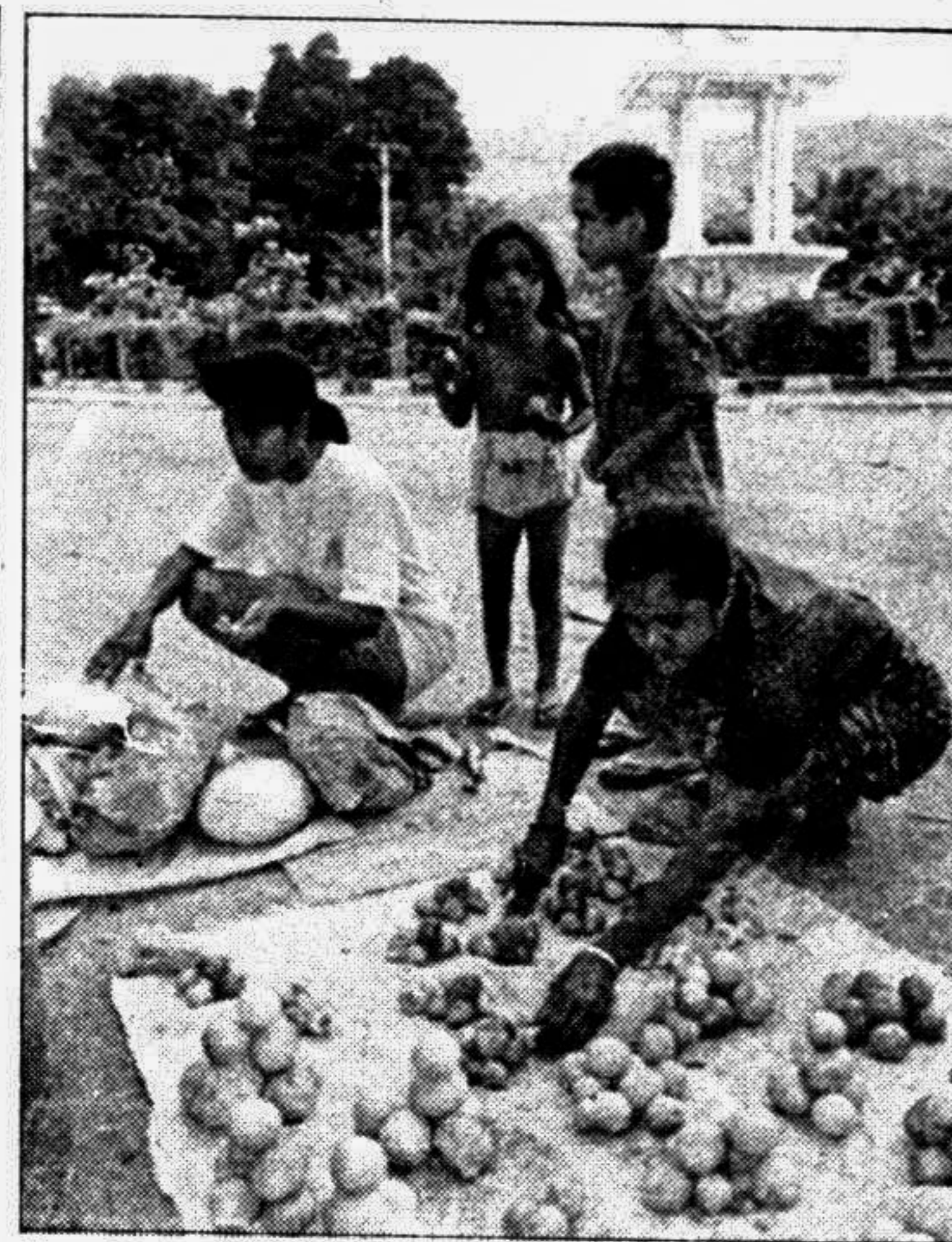
economic upturn and guard against a repeat of the chain-reaction crises of 1997-98.

Mueller said the conference was being held "under a good star." German exports to the region, for example, are back on the rise after their recent severe slump due to the Asian crises, and the outlook for 2000 is "even better," the minister said.

Mueller identified customs and excise practices, public sector procurement, and certified standards as areas to tackle. The Berlin meeting also intended to take a new initiative for the abolition of non-trade barriers, he said.

"We want here in Berlin to determine, for example, the conditions that must be fulfilled in order that Asian and European entrepreneurs devote capital and know-how to infrastructure development," said Mueller, a technocrat former businessman without party affiliation.

"It is being increasingly recognised that the development of infrastructure reduces the susceptibility to crisis, because it increases international competitiveness and attractiveness for foreign investment," he said.



East Timorese women set up their food markets on the side of road in the center of Dili yesterday. Fresh food markets are starting to return to the capital - albeit in a small way - after the economy was totally disrupted by wide spread pro-Jakarta militia violence after a vote for independence from Indonesia 30 August. — AFP photo

EU, Asia launch website this week to promote investment

BERLIN, Oct 10: An Internet website promoting Asia-Europe investment is being launched this weekend in Berlin, a European Commission statement said here Saturday, reports AFP.

Launch of the virtual information exchange has been timed to coincide with a meeting of European Union and Asian economy ministers, the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), in the German capital.

This website will provide up-to-date information on the investment regime of each ASEM partner, permitting easy on-line access to such information, the announcement said.

The aim is to complement the ASEM CONNECT site, which is primarily run by the private sector through an ASEM business forum.

The ASEM page will highlight an investment promotion action plan and provide links to national World Wide Web pages. The European Commission will contribute reports by an investment experts group.

The intention is to standardise presentation of investment protection laws and incentives, investment flows, relevant international agreements and basic macro-and micro-economic data.

US Commerce Secy in Jordan for trade talks

AMMAN, Oct 10: US Commerce Secretary William Daley kicked off his Middle East tour here on Saturday, arriving with a high-level delegation of business leaders for two days of talks with Jordanian officials, reports AFP.

Daley was met at the airport by his Jordanian counterpart Mohammad Asfur and US diplomatic sources said he would meet with Prime Minister Abdel Rauf al-Rawab on Sunday.

He said the aim of his visit was to build on the "partnership between our public and also our private sectors, that can contribute to and hopefully accelerate the economic growth, export expansion and job creation which are vital to the future of this region."

Meanwhile, 13 US business leaders, including executives from Nortel Networks, Enron Corporation, ProNetLink and New York Life International, were to go on to meetings later Saturday with Jordanian colleagues.

The meetings would be aimed at promoting US business and investment in the kingdom, the diplomat said.

The visit comes as Jordan's King Abdullah II is in the United States, where he is due to meet US President Bill Clinton in Washington on Tuesday.

The Middle East is one of the few places where America has a trade surplus, yet it is harder there to do business than in any other emerging market," Daley said in a speech in Washington this week.

He said the business environment was severely hampered by political barriers, which will only come fully down with a comprehensive peace settlement.

In the meantime, he argued, "I... believe American companies with their Middle East counterparts need to sit down together and figure out what can make business run smoother."

Daley and his delegation are also due to visit Israel, the West Bank and Gaza Strip and Egypt before Friday.

From October 15-18, Daley and 10 executives will travel to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Firms to be represented on the second mission include Lucent Technologies, Occidental Oil and Gas and Stone and Webster.

Daley will meet heads of state and other government leaders to boost the chances of US companies bidding for aerospace, energy, telecommunications, transportation,



M Aminul Islam, Managing Director of Janata Bank, opens the bills collection booth of Farashganj Branch at Gandaria in the city yesterday to offer better customer service to the clients of the locality. Md Nurul Islam Mollah, General Manager, W R Tawheed, DGM (PR), executives, valued clients, officers and employees of the bank were present on the occasion.

LatAm Internet use growing faster than US, Europe

SAN JOSE, Oct 10: Internet, the information superhighway, remains a means of communication for the few in Latin America and the Caribbean, but the number of users in the region is growing faster than in the United States and Europe, said experts gathered this week in Costa Rica, reports IPS.

Mexican sociologist Octavio Isla told the first American Congress of Internet Journalism this week in San Jose that Latin America and the Caribbean accounted for three to four per cent of the world's 200 to 250 million cybernauts.

And today's six to eight million Internet users in Latin America and the Caribbean are expected to grow to around 12.5 million by the year 2001.

Some 270 reporters and students and professors of journalism from Colombia, Chile, Mexico, Puerto Rico and the United States attended the Oct 4-6 conference organised by the private Latina University of Costa Rica and the non-governmental Omar Dengo Foundation, dedicated to promoting improvements in education.

"Although in Latin America, Internet remains a means of communication for the elite, the exponential growth of the number of users is incredible,"

said Isla, the director of the Internet project at one of Mexico's leading private colleges, the Institute of Technology and Higher Studies in Montherry (ITESM).

Isias said governments in the region should put greater emphasis on the phenomenon, due to the growing strategic importance of Internet, demonstrated by the fact that profits in the United States already equalled or outstripped those of television.

He pointed out that Internet brought enormous benefits in the field of mass communication, as a tool that continually reinvents itself, while stimulating the creation of information networks.

Isias said the governments of Latin America must invest more in education in technology, and that Latin America and the Caribbean should seek strategic alliances promoting education in those areas.

"The new generations are growing up with a heavy dose of new technologies, and universities cannot afford to lag behind," Boris Ramirez, director of the School of Journalism of Costa Rica's Latina University, told IPS.

Ramirez said that in order to keep education up to date, Uni-

versities in Latin America must be prepared for the future generations of students, who are more at home with the new technologies and will demand higher quality education in technology.

At the conference, those in charge of the Internet pages of media organs in the region like the US news channel CNN in Spanish, Radio Caracol of Colombia, and the newspapers El Universal of Caracas and La Nacion of Costa Rica described the situation in their countries.

"Sharing our experiences has enabled us to demonstrate that Internet questions are not only handled well in North America," said Walter Nepoli, journalist and editor-in-chief of La Nacion Line, the electronic edition of the Buenos Aires newspaper La Nacion.

Internet "is the leading 'intelligent' means of communication, in which the various methods of communication converge, offering its users the possibility of access to other realities," Isias told IPS.

"It is the first communication media to convert its users into emitters of information, allowing them to create their own messages and disseminate them over the network," he stressed.



Factory workers from South Korean Kia Motors Co. take a break at the factory in Asan, some 130 kilometers southwest of Seoul October 7. Kia Motors, whose insolvency propelled South Korean into economic crisis in 1997, is staging a spectacular comeback becoming the symbol of the country's remarkable economic recovery.

— AFP photo

UN-sponsored IT extravaganza begins

GENEVA, Oct 10: Technological advances that dissolve the borders between the telephone and computer top the bill at the biggest gathering yet of the "information technology" industries, says AP.

Dozens of companies large and small are to unveil their latest inventions and projects at the United Nations-sponsored Telecom 99, an eight-day forum opening for business Sunday with exhibits ranging from in-car multimedia to rockets.

The equipment and services to be demonstrated, much of which remain under wraps, are expected to foreshadow a further explosion in commerce over the Internet.

The event, held every four years, this year is subtitled interactive 99, and there is little sign of a boundary between the industries as both telephone and computer companies showcase Internet based products.

The so-called "third generation" of mobile telephones, which will offer features such as faster Internet access and video display, and should enable callers to use the same number and handset worldwide, feature prominently in developers' plans.

The new generation also should be compatible with fixed and satellite networks. Many manufacturers are demonstrating new wireless technology that allow for Internet connections over terminals half the size of a laptop as long as they are within 100 meters (yards) of a telephone relay point.

New security features and encryption are likely, as well as new methods of compression to speed up the handling of data and developments in areas such as voice-recognition technology.

Radio television and navigation innovations also come under the umbrella of the exhibition, while a European Space Agency stand promotes its satellite-launching Ariane rocket programme.

The event was officially launched Saturday at an elaborate inauguration ceremony featuring some 40 dancers by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, who called on industry leaders not to forget the world's developing countries.

The United Nations' 15-year-old goal of bringing everyone within walking distance of a telephone has yet to be achieved, conceded Yoshio Utsunomiya, head of the UN's International Telecommunication Union.

"Half the world's people have never made or received a telephone call," Annan said. "But at least the infrastructure gap is narrowing. The really troubling gap is the information gap."

The organisers promise some 1,200 exhibitors from 49 countries. The exhibition covers 99,000 square meters (1 million square feet) of the Geneva's sprawling Palexpo convention centre. They expect more than 200,000 visitors, although the event is open to the public only next Saturday and Sunday, Oct. 16-17.

Weekly Currency Roundup

Major Asian units fall against dollar

HONG KONG, Oct 10: Major currencies in the Asia-Pacific region weakened to the dollar in the week, with the yen being sold in expectation that the Bank of Japan would boost money supply to aid recovery, reports AFP.

Japanese yen: The yen fell against the dollar during the week, giving up most of its recent gains on expectations of a policy easing by the Bank of Japan, dealers said.

The Japanese yen traded at 107.45-48 to the dollar late Friday against 105.92-95 a week ago.

The yen was sold mostly in New York trading as foreign investors expected Japan's central bank to boost money supply and help the economy's recovery.

The currency opened the week easier in volatile trading, moving between 104.42 and 106.22 after the country's major business confidence survey showed a strong improvement.

The yen extended losses to the mid-107 level Wednesday on firm US share prices.

The US market then recouped losses after the US Federal Reserve decided to leave rates unchanged but adopt a tightening bias.

The yen fell close to 108 Thursday as the US stock market extended gains.

The Japanese currency fell back Friday, after bouncing back in New York on concerns about US inflationary pressure.

Australian dollar: The Australian dollar will continue to be buffeted by movements in commodity prices over the week ahead, particularly gold, dealers said, but the outlook remains good.

The local unit finished at 65.75 US cents on Friday, from 65.51 the week before.

On the Reserve Bank of Australia's Trade Weighted Index, the Australian dollar ended the week at 57.1, from 56.7 points

previously.

Singapore dollar: The Singapore dollar ended the week higher against the US dollar to 1.6815 from 1.6992 the previous week.

Hong Kong dollar: The Hong Kong dollar ended Friday at 7.768-7.769 to the US dollar compared to 7.7675-7.7685 the previous week.

Indonesian rupiah: The rupiah, strengthened during the week to close at 7.815 to the dollar on Friday compared to 8.217 to the dollar a week earlier.

Philippine peso: The peso rose 0.6 per cent week-on-week to 40.50 pesos to the dollar on Friday from 40.741 pesos to the dollar on October 1.

South Korean won: The won strengthened against the dollar to 1,203.00 from last week's close of 1,207.00 amid lingering jitters over the crisis engulfing the Daewoo Group.

Dealers say the won is fluctuating with the Daewoo debt crisis continuing to rattle the financial markets.

Taiwan dollar: The Taiwan dollar stabilised against the greenback over the past week to finish at 31.78 to one US dollar Friday up from 31.783 the week before. Dealers attributed the rise to foreign fund inflows as well as positive sentiment over Taiwan's record-high foreign exchange reserves of 101.65 billion US dollars.

Thai baht: The baht fluctuated after the Bank of Thailand (BOT) Tuesday stepped up measures to ward off potential speculative attacks against the baht.

The BOT re-issued guidelines to financial institutions, clarifying limits on baht credit facilities for non-residents without underlying trade or investment in Thailand at 50 million baht.

The baht closed Friday at 40.25-30 baht to one dollar, compared to the previous close of 40.63-83.

Exchange Rates

American Express Bank Ltd foreign exchange rates (indicative) against the Taka to major currencies.					
Currency	Selling TT & OD	Selling BC	Buying T. T Clean	Buying O/Sight Export Bill	Buying OD Transfer
US Dollar	49.7300	49.7700	49.3200	49.1570	49.0850
Pound Stg	82.6712	82.7376	80.9637	80.6961	80.5779
Deutsche Mar	27.4225	27.4446	26.4434	26.3400	26.3014
Swiss Franc	33.3579	33.3848	32.6277	32.5198	32.4722
Japanese Yen	0.4674	0.4678	0.4547	0.4532	0.4525
Dutch Guilder	24.3380	24.3575	23.4690	23.3772	23.3429
Danish Krona	7.1644	7.1701	7.0009	6.9778	6.9676
Australians	33.0705	33.0971	31.7867	31.6817	31.6353
Belgian Franc	1.3295	1.3306	1.2821	1.2771	1.2752
Canadian \$	34.1740	34.2015	33.1853	33.0756	33.0272
French Franc	8.1764	8.1830	7.8845	7.8536	7.8421
Hong Kong \$	6.4140	6.4192	6.3362	6.3153	6.3060
Italian Lira	0.0277	0.0277	0.0267	0.0266	0.0266
Norway Kroner	6.3878	6.3929	6.2826	6.2619	6.2527
Singapore \$	29.9488	29.9729	28.9862	28.8904	28.8421
Saudi Rial	13.2954	13.3061	13.1153	13.0719	13.0468
UAE Dirham	13.5774	13.5883	13.3909	13.3466	13.3271
Swedish Krona	6.0929	6.0978	6.0168	5.9970	5.9882
Qatari Riyal	13.6978	13.7089	13.5071	13.4625	13.4428
Kuwaiti Dinar	169.5245	169.6008	157.3457	156.8257	156.5959
Thai Baht	1.2360	1.2370	1.2219	1.2178	1.2160
Euro	53.6338	53.6769	51.7198	51.5165	51.4411

Bill buying rates:					
TT Doc	30 Days	60 Days	90 Days	120 Days	180 Days
49.2112	48.9090	48.4990	48.0870	47.6760	46.8540

US dollar London Interbank Offer Rate (LIBOR)					
Buying	Selling	Currency	1 Month	3 Months	6 Months
49.0850	49.7300	USD	5.40875	6.17625	6.0825
80.4601	82.6644	GBP	5.40935	6.05328	6.13438
Cash/TC	Cash/TC	Euro	2.84	3.26	3.35
				3.44375	3.55

Exchange rates of some Asian currencies against US dollars

Indian Rupee	Pak Rupee	Thai Baht	Malaysia n Ringgit	Indonesian Rupiah	Korean Won
43.35/43.55	51.825/51.84	40.25/40.35	3.7995/3.8005	7800/7850	1203/1204

Amex notes on Sunday's market

USD/BDT rates were stable at the 49.49-49.51 level. The call rates moved in the 5.70-6 level.

The euro slumped to its lowest level against the dollar in more than a week on Friday as investors took stock of the outlook for interest rates on both sides of the Atlantic. The euro tumbled nearly a full US cent and skidded to session lows against the Japanese yen in continued fallout from the European Central Bank's decision Thursday to keep monetary policy steady for now. Meanwhile, the dollar kept a firm grip on its overnight gains against the Japanese yen, muscled only briefly lower by a few large orders in thinned pre-weekend trade. By early afternoon, trading volumes had slowed to a trickle after the US bond market closed early at 1400 BDT/1800 GMT and some dealers headed home early ahead of the long Columbus Day holiday weekend. The euro traded at \$1.0612/15 at 1400 BDT/1800 GMT, down from \$1.0655/62 at the start of New York trading and \$1.0709/16 late Thursday.

Dealers said the yen was likely to remain sidelined until the outlines of new fiscal and monetary steps in Japan became clear. The government is hammering out a hefty economic stimulus package valued at least 10 trillion yen, and the ruling coalition wants to ensure that a fiscal boost will not cause the yen or interest rate yields to spike. The bank of Japan has fallen under renewed political pressure to loosen already hyper-easy monetary policy to help keep a strong yen from harming exporters and checking off a tenuous economic recovery. The bank of Japan meets next week to review policy. The British pound was barely firmer at \$1.6530/40 from \$1.6485/90 late Friday trading.

Shipping Intelligence

CHITTAGONG PORT

Berth position and performance of vessels as on 10.10.99					
Berth No.	Name of vessels	Cargo	L Port	Local agent	Date of arrival
J/1	Aya-3	G	Sing	Seacomb	1/10
J/2	Rio Express	G	P Sald	Seacomb	2/10
J/3	Kuanyin	Wheat(P)	G	Sing	14/10
J/4	Teresa-Everett(48)	G	G	Everett	14/10
J/5	Saigon-2	G	Salg	Royal	2/10
J/6	Thor Star	Wheat(P)	S Day	Angelic	26/9
J/7	Delos-1	Wheat(P)	K Dia	Lams	4/10
J/8	Banglar Gourab	Wheat(G)	K Dia	Lams	13/10
J/9	Handy Esperance	G	Sing	Prog	20/9
J/10	Trident	G	PSaid	MSA	23/9
J/11	Banglar Mookh	Wheat(G)	B Abb	MSA	29/9
J/12	Panglima	G(Bittumen)	B Abb	MSA	29/9
CCT/1	Jaya Mars	Cont	Col	Brithi	9/10
CCT/2	G/C Milair	Cont	P Kel	QCSL	8/10
CCT/3	Tiger River	Cont	Sing	Nol	9/10
RM/14	Ever Cheer	Cont	Sing	SSTL	19/10
CUJ	en Koku	C Clink	Pak	Delmure	29/9
GSJ	Ocean Pride	C Clink	Pak	Delmure	29/9

Vessels due at outer anchorage					
Name of vessels	Date of arrival	L Port	Local agent	Cargo	Loading port
DA FA (Cont) 7/9	12/10	Viz	RSL	Cont	Sing