

Japanese research firms downgrade assessment of economy

AP, Tokyo. Two Japanese research institutes downgraded their outlook for the economy in the next fiscal year, saying a global slowdown will hurt growth more than expected.

The Sumitomo Life Research Institute said declining exports to the United States and cuts in corporate spending at home mean the economy will shrink 0.2 per cent in fiscal 2001, which begins April 1.

Its December forecast was for 1.2 per cent growth.

Citing similar factors, the Dai-ichi Life Research Institute cut its outlook to 0.8 per cent growth in fiscal 2001, far below its December forecast of 2.4 per cent growth.

Both reports were released on Friday.

The government's target is 1.7 per cent growth in the next fiscal year.

It said Friday that the mild recovery from the worst economic slowdown since World War II is stalling, and acknowledged for the first time that Japan is in a state of deflation.

Anxiety over the world's second-largest economy has contributed to jitters in stock markets around the globe, and prompted expressions of worry from Japan's largest trading partner, the United States.

Oracle shares hit lowest level since '99

REUTERS, Palo Alto. Shares of Oracle Corp. sank on Friday to their lowest price since November 1999, after the company reported earnings that met previously lowered forecasts and said it was uncertain about future results because of the weakening U.S. economy.

Shares of the world's No. 2 software maker, behind Microsoft Corp., closed at \$14, down 11/16, or 4.68 per cent, well off their year-high of \$46-7/16.

After the close of the market Thursday, Oracle reported third-quarter earnings of \$583 million, or 10 cents a share, compared with \$503 million, or 8 cents a share, a year earlier. The Redwood Shores, Calif.-based company warned on March 1 that its profits would be 10 cents per share, instead of the 12 cents a share analysts had expected.

The company said its flagship database revenues grew 6 per cent, compared with its warning that growth could be flat to slightly negative. Applications revenue growth came in at 25 per cent, less than the 50 per cent the company had guided to just weeks earlier.

Oracle Chief Financial Officer Jeff Henley said Oracle was assuming that the economy would worsen and that his best "guess" was for the company to post flat license revenue growth and earnings during the fourth quarter. Henley said he built his model by assuming flat database revenues and applications sales growth in the range of 15 to 30 per cent.

Deutsche Banc Alex. Brown Inc. analyst James Moore called the company's fourth-quarter outlook "too aggressive" and said he expects database revenues to decline 6 per cent from the previous year and applications to be up only 1 per cent.

OPEC cuts output by 1m bpd

'High gasoline prices in Europe due primarily to fuel taxes'

AP, Vienna

OPEC members agreed Saturday to cut 4 per cent from their targeted oil output, or 1 million barrels a day, in the hope of shoring up crude prices at a time of weakening global demand.

The cut, which was widely expected, is aimed at keeping prices from falling further in the face of a seasonal weakness in demand and an overall decline in global economic growth. It will take effect April 1, the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries said.

The cartel's members pump almost 40 per cent of the world's oil, and their decision will affect retail prices for gasoline and other refined products in importing countries such as the United States.

OPEC announced its decision after two days of talks in the Austrian capital.

"The present weaker world economy and the traditional sharp downturn in demand associated with the second quarter both clearly point to the need for a correction in oil supply, and the conference has taken the decision to stabilize the oil market," OPEC announced.

Unlike previous OPEC meetings in recent years, this one unfolded against a backdrop of economic fragility, with stock markets from New York to Tokyo registering steep losses in share values. Consumer confidence has suffered, and fears of a recession are growing.

These economic conditions complicated OPEC's efforts to arrive at a suitable cut in production, ministers said.

"We have to follow continuously this situation ... Of course, the slowdown in the economy was entirely present in our analysis," OPEC Secretary-General Ali Rodriguez told a news conference after the meeting.

The unusually long time it took

to reach a decision attests to the difficulty delegates faced in working out the specifics of the volume decrease.

Energy analysts had generally forecast a decrease in output of at least 500,000 barrels a day. OPEC's current output quota is 25.2 million barrels a day.

Markets were closed Saturday but had moved higher Friday on the likelihood of a cut. Contracts of light, sweet crude for April delivery were trading at \$27.15 a barrel, up 60 cents, on the New York Mercantile Exchange.

May contracts of North Sea Brent crude were 60 cents higher at \$25.61 in late trading on the International Petroleum Exchange in London.

"I think a million barrels a day is already more or less factored into the market," said Mehdi Varzi, a senior oil analyst at the investment bank Dresdner Kleinwort Benson in London.

"There may be a short-term rebound in prices," Varzi said, but he predicted that crude prices would decline over the next year or two.

Bill Edwards, an energy consultant based in Houston, expressed greater concern about the impact of the cut.

"I think OPEC will be surprised at how steeply the price rises," he said. Edwards predicted that crude prices could increase by as much as \$15 a barrel and gasoline prices by as much as 30 cents a gallon.

But others analysts said markets would react with much less alarm to OPEC's decision.

"There may be a slight rise on Monday, but I don't think it will be huge," said Lawrence Eagles, head of commodity research at London brokerage GNI Ltd.

"On a retail level, (gasoline) prices will probably firm up a little bit, but they're not going to spike as they did last year," he said by phone from his home in Northern Ireland.



OPEC President Algerian Energy Minister Chakib Khelil (L), flanked by OPEC Secretary General Ali Rodriguez-Araque (R), speaks at the 114th OPEC conference in Vienna on Friday.

Three Argentine ministers quit to protest govt austerity plan

AP, Buenos Aires

Three key Cabinet ministers have resigned from President Fernando de la Rúa's Cabinet in protest at a new austerity plan aimed at lifting the country out of a near three-year recession.

Angry over proposed cuts in education spending, Interior Minister Federico Storani was first to step down on Friday, just minutes before the austerity plan was to be announced. Hours later, two more Cabinet ministers - Social Development Minister Marcos Makon and Education Minister Hugo Juri - followed suit.

The resignations were a devastating blow to De la Rúa's Alliance government and appeared to signal a possible end to the fragile two-party coalition.

Storani was a member of De la Rúa's centrist Radical Civic Union. Makon and Juri were members of the left-leaning Frepaso party, the coalition's junior partner. Their

resignations left the Cabinet without any Frepaso representatives.

"We cannot stay in the government a second longer," said Anibal Ibarra, the mayor of Buenos Aires and a leader of Frepaso. "There are a great number of measures we don't agree on (that) will cause a great deal of conflict."

However, Ibarra said the Alliance would still remain united in the Lower House of Congress to maintain the government's majority there.

The resignations marked the second Cabinet crisis in less than a month and tarnished the president's ambitious new economic reform plan aimed at reviving South America's second-largest economy.

Storani was a key figure in de la Rúa's 15-month-old administration. As interior minister, one of the more powerful Cabinet posts, he led the country's security forces and controlled security along the borders.

Although Storani had no immediate comment, local reports said he opposed the plan's deep cuts in social spending.

In a news conference to announce the economic initiatives, new Economy Minister Ricardo Lopez Murphy made no mention of the resignation, focusing instead on calls to dramatically curb government spending.

"We are not going to be able to return to economic growth if we don't begin to examine our problems seriously," said Lopez Murphy, who took over in the top economic job after his predecessor, Jose Luis Machinea, quit under pressure on March 2.

Lopez Murphy's prescription of deeper government spending cuts and calls for greater popular sacrifice to turn around the economy have opponents bristling.

Union hard-liners said this week they will step up pressure on the government with a nationwide strike on April 5.

Bill Gates lost \$38b, but still on top of tech world

AFP, Washington

Microsoft chief Bill Gates saw his fortune plummet by 38.3 billion dollars in the past year, but remained at the top of the richest in the technology world, according to a ranking by Forbes ASAP magazine.

Gates' net worth is now a mere 54.4 billion dollars, managing to stay ahead of his arch-rival of the software world Larry Ellison of Oracle, worth an estimated 42.1 billion.

The report said Ellison weathered the storm in the dot-com world to boost his fortune by more than 29 billion dollars in the last year.

Two other Microsoft Billionaires were near the top of the list, including co-founder Paul Allen, ranked third with 24.4 billion dollars, and CEO Steve Ballmer, ranked fourth with 15.3 billion.

Amazon.com founder Jeff Bezos is down to his last 2.3 billion dollars, having fallen from seventh on the list to 16th, losing five billion dollars of net worth.

But the list contains 33 billionaires, compared with 30 a year ago, even though the combined net worth of the group - 256.6 billion dollars - was down 25.9 billion from a year earlier.

Some of the other top tech fortunes includes number five Gordon Moore a co-founder of Intel (13.2 billion), Dell Computer chief Michael Dell, ranked sixth (12.3 billion) and Sanjiv Sidhu, founder of i2 Technologies, ranked seventh (6.8 billion).

Described as "the wealthiest Indian immigrant in America", Sidhu saw his fortune jump 583 per cent following a merger with Aspect Development last year.

The magazine calculated stock holdings as of January 30, using filings of documents with the Securities and Exchange Commission. The list was limited to people associated with publicly held "information technology companies... excluding telecom and biotech companies."

Weak US industry data ups odds of rate cut

REUTERS, Washington

Output by U.S. industrial firms slumped in February while wholesale prices were tame, boosting the chances of an aggressive interest-rate cut next week.

Analysts said a batch of data released on Friday - just four days before the Federal Reserve's March 20 meeting - pointed to the likelihood that the central bank could slash rates by as much as three-quarters of a percentage point.

There was a bright spot: consumer sentiment edged up unexpectedly, according to a survey by the University of Michigan.

But many economists played down the significance of that report, noting that most of the poll participants were surveyed before this week's big slide in the U.S. stock market.

"If I were weighting the totality of the data, there could be a bias at the Fed toward a more aggressive move next week," said Paul Kasriel, economist at Northern Trust Co. in Chicago.

A poll by Reuters showed Wall Street's top bond firms were split over whether the Fed would cut interest rates on Tuesday by 50 basis points or by 75.

Of 25 primary dealers of U.S. government securities, 13 were betting on 50 basis points. But 12 thought 75 basis points was in the cards.

Worries, uncertainty That hope failed to comfort the battered stock market, which zeroed in on the consumer sentiment figures and fretted about the business outlook should the Fed fail to cut rates as sharply as investors would like.

Industrial output has fallen for the last five months, the longest string of declines since 6-month period in October 1990 to March 1991, in the heart of the last recession.

In February, industry operated at only 79.4 per cent of full capacity, the slowest since a matching rate in February 1992.

In a separate report, the Labor Department said its Producer Price Index, a gauge of wholesale inflation, increased only 0.1 per cent last month. Stripping out volatile food and energy costs, the "core" PPI fell 0.3 per cent, the steepest decline since a 1.2 per cent drop in August 1993.

Economists found those soft numbers especially heartening in light of a sharp increase the prior month when the PPI jumped 1.1 per cent overall and 0.7 per cent in the core index.

Meanwhile, the industrial output report highlighted the problems factories have suffered since late last year.

"You can date most recessions by a peak in industrial production," Kasriel said. "The peak here occurred a number of months ago."

He said the magnitude of the drop in the industrial sector and the persistence of the weakness would probably garner attention at the Fed.

The blue chip Dow Jones industrial average plunged 210.55 points, or 2.1 per cent, to 9,820.73. The technology-led Nasdaq Composite Index fell 54.09 points, or 2.79 per cent, to 1,886.62.

Stacking the odds in favor of a forceful move was the Fed's own measure of industrial output - reflecting production by the nation's mines, factories and utilities.

That measure dropped 0.6 per cent in February after a matching 0.6 per cent decline in January. Every major category of industrial activity lost ground.

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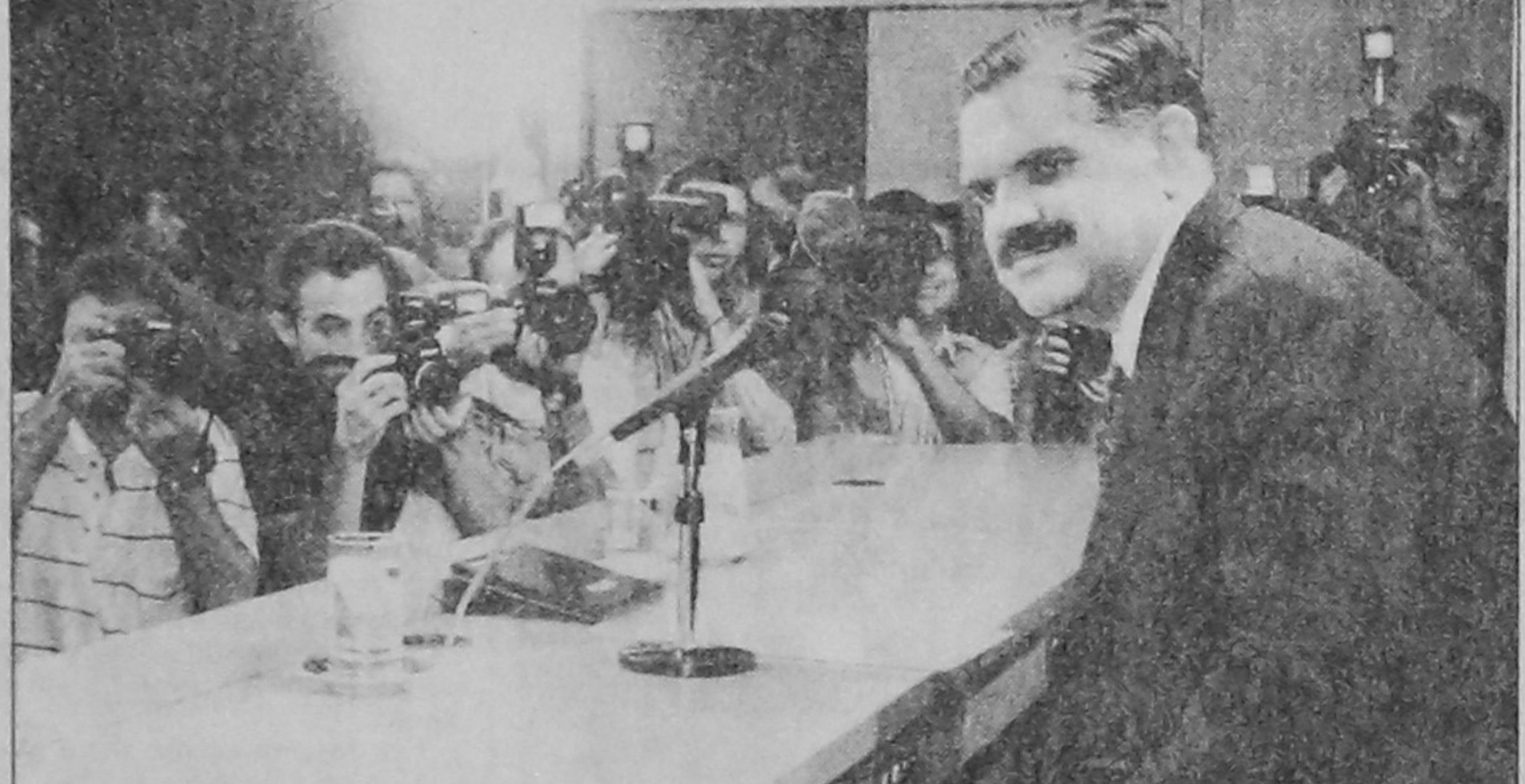
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The Economy Minister of Argentina, Ricardo Lopez Murphy (R), announces an austerity programme in Buenos Aires Friday calling for cutting back government spending by nearly eight billion USD over the next three years. According to the plan, spending will be cut by more than 1.9 billion USD this year, almost 2.5 billion USD in 2002 and by 3.5 billion USD in 2003. But the government decided to continue to peg the peso to the US dollar in order to maintain financial stability. "Abandoning convertibility would have been a mistake of unthinkable proportions," said Lopez Murphy, as he announced the measures.

American Airlines gets govt nod to buy TWA

REUTERS, Washington

American Airlines' plan to buy struggling Trans World Airlines Inc. out of bankruptcy for \$742 million cleared its last major hurdle on Friday when it won approval from U.S. antitrust enforcers.

The U.S. Justice Department's antitrust division said in a brief statement that it would not oppose the purchase by American parent AMR Corp., after a "comprehensive investigation that included consideration of TWA's bankruptcy condition."

American said it expects to close the transaction in April after finalizing labor agreements with

TWA's unions.

The deal is a further step in the consolidation of the U.S. airline industry. Regulators are still considering whether to approve plans by United Airlines parent UAL Corp. to acquire most of US Airways Group Inc.

American would buy 20 per cent of US Airways as part of that deal. If all the transactions were completed, American and United together would control about half the U.S. air travel market.

Shares of AMR closed down 75 cents or two per cent to \$33.79 on the New York Stock Exchange Friday, in line with the market's overall decline for the day.

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Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Ministry of Education
Number: 3/125/92/26 Date: 04/03/2001

Employment Notice

Applications are invited from permanent citizens of Bangladesh for filling up the undermentioned posts on purely temporary basis under terms and conditions for the planning cell of Ministry of Education under a project titled 'Strengthening Management Information and Statistics Service' under Ministry of Education:

Serial No	Name of post and pay scale	Number of post	Age limit	Educational qualification and experience
1	Senior Assistant Chief/Programmer	1(one)	27-35 years (relaxable in special case)	Masters degree in Physics/Applied Physics/ Computer Science/Mathematics/ Statistics/ Science/Commerce/ Economics/Sociology/Business Administration/BSc (Engineering) degree 4 years experience as an Assistant Programmer (for Computer Science/ masters in Engineering degree 2 years) or 5 years experience as research officer or equivalent posts including efficiency in computer programming and project preparing, monitoring and project evaluation and should be an associate member of any recognised computer professional society Relaxable for candidates with extraordinary experience.

Terms and conditions:

- Applications stating name (distinctly in capital letters) names of father-mother and name of husband for married women, permanent address, present mailing address, educational qualifications, account of experience, date of birth, religion, nationality, etc will have to reach the undersigned by 01 April, 2001 during office hours by 5.00 pm.
- Two copies of passport size photographs, certificate of educational qualifications, certificate of experience, citizenship certificate issued by the poura commissioner/union parishad chairman attested by the class I gazetted officer and character certificate issued by two class I gazetted officers will have to be enclosed with the application.
- Candidates in service will have to apply through respective employers.
- Original copies of all certificates enclosed with application must be presented before the selection committee at the time of interview.
- No allowance will be given for appearing at the test.

Chief (Planning)
Ministry of Education
&
Project Director
"Strengthening Management Information & Statistics Service"
(Planning Cell Portion of the Ministry of Education)
Room No-1707, Bhaban No-6 Bangladesh Secretariate, Dhaka

DPP-6378-12/3
G-479

NOTICE

IN THE COURT OF THIRD ARTHA RIN ADALAT, DHAKA
TITLE SUIT NO. 61 OF 1999

Pubali Bank Limited.
Local Office, P.S. Motijheel, DhakaPlaintiff.

VERSUS

- M/S. Sonali Bricks manufacturer**
Baktabali Bazar Fatullah, Naraygonj
Proprietor - Md. Abdul Jalil Bepari, Son of late Rajjab Ali, Vill - Baktabali, Gopalnagar P.S. Fatullah, District-Narayangonj.
- Mohammad Shahjahan, son of late Md. Abdul Jalil Bepari, of village Baktabali Gopalnagar, P.S. Fatullah, Dist- Narayangonj.**
- Mrs. Taslima Begum wife of Mr. Akkas Ali Bepari, of 13/95, Nawab Salimullah Road, Mission Road P.S. Narayangonj, District-Narayangonj.**
- Mr. Abdul Motalib son of Abdul Hakim Bepari, of 13/95, Nowab Salimullah Road, P.S. Narayangonj, District - Narayangonj and North Pangoan P.S. Keranigonj, Dist - Dhaka.....Defendant-Grantors.**

The above suit was filed against you on 30.9.99 by the plaintiff Bank for realisation of Tk. 10,01,835.00 (Taka Ten lac one Thousand eight hundred thirty five) only upto 24.8.99. You are notified to appear in the above suit pending before the court on 25-3-2001 at 10-30 A.M. either in person or through an authorised Advocate failing which the suit would be disposed of exparte.

by the Order of the learned court.
Mosharrof Hossain Bhuiyan
Sherestader
Sub-Judge Artha Rin Adalat No. -3, Dhaka.

Metal: Weekly Roundup

Gold prices sag heavily

AFP, London

Gold prices sagged heavily this week after an auction of the precious metal by the Bank of England met with only lukewarm interest.

Tumbling stock markets usually help gold, which has traditionally served as a safe haven in times of trouble, but support was thin this week.

Gold was fixed at 260.70 dollars an ounce on Friday afternoon, from 269.80 a week earlier.

The slump started after the Bank of England auctioned 25 tonnes of the metal at 266 dollars an ounce. The sale was only 2.2 times oversubscribed - a relatively weak showing of interest in the bullion sale compared to previous bank auctions.

Silver: Tarnished. Silver prices fell to four-year lows as the deteriorating world climate sapped demand for the metal, while speculative selling continued.

An ounce of silver was fixed at 4.35 dollars on Friday from 4.51 dollars the previous week.

"The pressure is due to both the poor economic outlook and due to technical selling pressure," said Macquarie bank precious metals expert Kamal Naqvi.

"It's also under pressure due to official-sector selling from China and India," he said. "We would expect silver to continue to struggle in the following weeks until demand starts to improve."

Palladium and Platinum: Mixed. Palladium prices fell following a report that Russia had approved exports of the metal along with its sister metal platinum.

But prices stabilised by the end of the week, as the report was neither confirmed nor denied by the authorities.

Palladium was selling for 803 dollars an ounce on Friday afternoon from 828 dollars an ounce last week.

Platinum dipped to 586 dollars an ounce from 600 dollars the previous week.

Though Russia supplies 70 per cent of the world's palladium and has a huge bearing on prices, Naqvi said many market players were discounting reports of future supplies and wanted to see the colour of the metal before making a play.

"Most of the people on the market would be pretty cynical in any case until they actually see the metal exported directly," he said.

Base Metals: Soft. Base metals softened further this week, squeezed by the global economic gloom on one side and the stronger dollar on the other.

Fears of a world slowdown nagged "at demand in general, while the strong dollar meant that the metals were more costly to international players, analysts said.

"With the Dow Jones closing at the lowest level for 12 months... traders will have to keep an eye on the equity markets until a rebounding recovery is seen," said analyst Lawrence Eagles at brokerage GNI.

"The general feeling now is that the equity markets will take a bit of a breather until the BOJ (Bank of Japan) and the Federal Reserve meet next week, but the strength of the dollar will clearly offset some of the price advantage that has been seen to non-US consumers," he wrote in a research note.

Yet selling was limited by the fact that some investment fund market players have already oversold the metals.

Three-month copper prices fell back through the 1,800-dollars-a-tonne mark to 1,755 dollars by Friday afternoon, from 1,844 a week earlier.

Nickel broke back down through 6,000 dollars a tonne to 5,990 dollars a tonne, from 6,070 dollars a week earlier, as the market expected stocks of the metal to start rising again as Canada's Falconbridge outfit resumes operations after a seven-month strike.

Three-month aluminium fell to 1,506 dollars a tonne from 1,553 a week earlier, after a report of a sharp jump in stocks at Western smelters.