



Japan Tops U.S. in Per-Capita GDP

Japan's gross domestic product (GDP) averaged \$19,547 in calendar year 1987, topping the U.S. equivalent of \$18,186, according to a revised report by the Economic Planning Agency issued in December.

The Japanese figure was the highest among the Group of Seven (G-7) major industrial democracies of the U.S., Canada, Japan, Britain, West Germany, France and Italy. Japan ranks fifth in per-capita GDP among member countries of the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), however, following Switzerland, Iceland, Norway and Denmark. It is the first time that Japan's per-capita GDP has exceeded that of any other G-7 country, as the yen's rapid appreciation inflated the dollar value of the key economic indicator.

The EPA report also showed an unprecedentedly steep increase in land assets, reflecting unusually sharp rises in land prices. Land assets stood at ¥1,637.7 trillion at the end of 1987, of which ¥371 trillion represented increases in the nominal value of land holdings inflated by price hikes.

The increase in land assets far exceeded the nation's fiscal 1987 nominal GNP-GDP plus net exports—of ¥351 trillion. It is the first time since the present form of GNP accounting was introduced in 1955 that land assets have grown faster than nominal GNP. With U.S. land assets at the end of 1987 estimated roughly at ¥403 trillion, Japan's land area now has a paper value four times that of the entire United States.



Private Sector Pays 6.7% Higher Bonuses

Private-sector semiannual bonuses paid at the end of last year averaged ¥664,029 (nearly \$5,300 at the rate of ¥125/\$) per employee, up 6.7% from 1987, according to a Labor Ministry survey of more than 300 major businesses. The rate of increase was far larger than the previous year's 2.5% gain, mirroring brisk domestic business activity.

Construction was the most generous industry, paying ¥954,286. Also offering handsome bonuses were newspaper and printing companies. At the other end of the scale was the motor vehicle industry, which paid only ¥477,290. Other low rankers included shipbuilding and steel.

Despite the relatively low amount, the motor vehicle industry's bonus payments showed the fastest growth, thanks to booming domestic car sales, paying 30.1% more than a year before. Among industries which increased payments in 1988 after reducing them the previous year were steel, machinery and metals, and shipbuilding.



Investment Swindlers Claim 87,800 Victims

Some 87,800 people fell victim to fraudulent investment propositions in Japan between January and November last year, according to a report by the National Police Agency.

Their losses totaled as much as ¥55.9 billion. The figure still represented a decrease of about ¥20 billion from the preceding year, however, thanks to the revision of the law pertaining to door-to-door sales, which helped sharply cut the amount of money swindled by salesmen selling bogus health food.

In 1988, swindlers taking advantage of the stock investment boom to pose as licensed securities dealers took in five times more from their hapless victims than in the year before. Victims of fraudulent commodities transactions such as overseas futures trading comprised the largest percentage of all, yet swindlers selling undeveloped wilderness as prime real estate continued to do brisk business. One positive note was that pyramid-scheme mutual financing associations known as "nezumi-ko" were put out of business as a result of the law revision.

Most victims of fraudulent business last year were, as ever, housewives and the elderly. Many of the salesmen arrested by police, meanwhile, were seasoned swindlers with previous records. Their techniques are becoming more sophisticated and unscrupulous, the report said.



Seminars on Imports Attract Wholesalers

A traveling seminar to promote imports in Japan's distribution sector is under way in 13 cities across Japan.

The seminar, sponsored by the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) and other organizations, is the second of its kind. It started with a January 25-26 session in Tokyo and will close with a March 16 session in Kanazawa, following stops in Kitakyushu, Kagoshima, Osaka, Hiroshima, Takamatsu, Nagoya, Sapporo, Sendai, Yokohama, Shizuoka and Kobe.

Most of the participants are wholesalers eager to learn about foreign products and import procedures from officials of foreign embassies in Tokyo. The United States, Britain, Australia, France, West Germany, Spain and the Philippines are among the countries sending embassy officials to lecture at the seminar sessions.

MITI hopes the seminars will encourage Japanese distributors to import more commodities from abroad and help reduce the nation's trade surplus.




Report Stresses Science Research

Japan should make greater international contributions to the development of science and technology, according to the 1988 white paper on science and technology. The annual report suggests that Japan has yet to reverse the widely held view that the nation excels in applied science, but lags behind other industrial countries in basic research.

The report, featuring a survey of some 1,000 Japanese researchers, found that Japan, despite its economic strength, trails the U.S. and Europe in most fields of basic research.

The report gave the U.S. top ratings in the life sciences, oceanography and earth sciences, materials, information technology and electronics. Japan took second place in information technology and electronics, and was joint second with Europe in materials research.

The report said more emphasis should be put on recruiting and training able researchers. It also recommended the creation of a more liberal atmosphere at research facilities.



Death of Emperor Ends Historic Era

Emperor Hirohito died of duodenal cancer on January 7 after three months in a sickbed. He was 87.

His death brought to an end Japan's longest imperial era, spanning the most tumultuous and dramatic events in the nation's history.

A state funeral for the late emperor, posthumously renamed Emperor Showa, was held at Shinjuku-Gyoen Garden, a 60-hectare landscaped garden in downtown Tokyo, on February 24 with dignitaries from around the world in attendance. Those present included U.S. President George Bush and dozens of other political leaders and heads of state, as well as kings, queens, princes and princesses.

Crown Prince Akihito, 55, became emperor immediately on the death of his father. The formal coronation, however, will not take place until after a one-year mourning period observed by members of the imperial family.

The name of the imperial era under Emperor Akihito, which replaces his late father's era of "Showa" (Enlightenment and Harmony), is "Heisei," meaning "Achieving Peace." The name was taken from the ancient Chinese work, the *Shiji*, by Sima Qian and from one of the Chinese Five Classics, the *Shu Jing*.

Emperor Akihito gave his first audience to representatives of the nation on January 9, and in the first public pronouncement of his reign vowed to join hands with the people in abiding by the Constitution, which stipulates that the emperor is the symbol of the state and that the Japanese people renounce the right to wage war or to threaten or use force to settle international disputes.