



Infomat

A Weekly Review

Friday, May 24, 1996

OVERVIEW

◆ Foreigners continue to buy Canadian securities

In March, foreigners continued buying federal treasury bills and stocks, and selling Canadian bonds. Meanwhile, Canadians bought large amounts of foreign stocks and sold similarly large quantities of bonds.

◆ Retail sales inch up in March

Consumer spending on goods inched up in March for a second consecutive month. During the first quarter, the rise in retail sales offset the decline in the previous quarter.

◆ Wholesalers start recouping 1995 losses

In March, wholesale merchants started recovering the ground they lost in early 1995 as sales increased for the third straight month.

◆ Composite index maintains its growth

The composite index continued to grow by 0.7% in April, the same rate as in March.

◆ Transportation prices remain behind increase in CPI

In April, as in March, a large part of the annual rise in the consumer price index came from higher transportation charges.

◆ Brake-plant strike dampens exports

In March, reduced shipments of automotive products, due to a U.S.-based brake manufacturer's strike, led the drop in exports.

Foreigners continue to buy Canadian securities

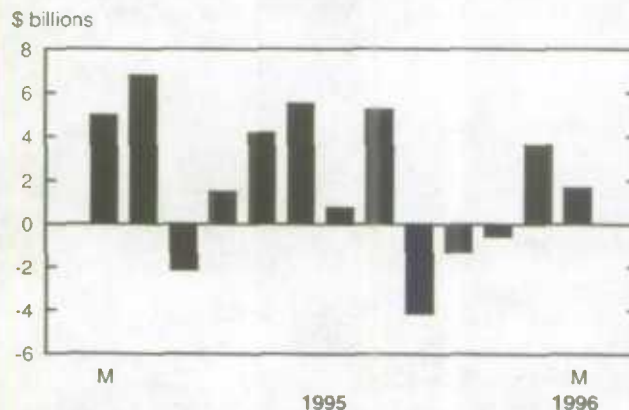
In March, foreigners bought a further \$1.6 billion of Canadian securities after the significant \$3.6 billion in February. Like in February, they bought federal treasury bills and stocks, and sold Canadian bonds. Meanwhile, Canadians continued their heavy buying of foreign stocks (\$1.5 billion), while selling similarly large quantities of foreign bonds. Year-to-date (January to March), Canadians' investment in foreign stocks at \$4.1 billion is fast approaching the \$4.5 billion for all of 1995.

Foreigners pumped a further \$2.5 billion into Canadian money market paper in March. This occurred despite the fact that Canadian interest rates declined in March, while their U.S. counterparts rose. March's investment was split between federal treasury bills and money market paper of federal enterprises. U.S. investors accounted for the bulk of March's investment.

After being consistent sellers for over a year, non-residents purchased Canadian stocks for the third consecutive month, adding \$0.3 billion in March. This brought the three-month accumulation to \$1.6 billion. March's investment came from U.S. inves-

(continued on page 2)

Foreign investment in Canadian securities*



* Includes bonds, stocks and money market paper.



... Foreigners continue to buy Canadian securities

tors. Trading activity with non-residents shrunk 25% to \$8.5 billion, after jumping 40% in February. Canadian share prices, as measured by the TSE 300 index, moved up marginally in March.

Canadians invested a further \$1.5 billion in foreign stocks, while selling \$1.6 billion of foreign bonds. The pattern of recent years continued, as some 80% of the investment in foreign

stocks went to overseas stocks (excluding the United States). The selling of foreign bonds was entirely made up of U.S. government bonds.

For further information, order *Canada's international transactions in securities* (catalogue 67-002-XPB) or contact Don Granger, Balance of Payments Division at (613) 951-1864.

Retail sales inch up in March

Consumer spending on goods inched up in March for a second consecutive month. The sales trend has turned slightly upward since December 1995. During the first quarter, the rise in retail sales offset the decline in the previous quarter.

Retail sales pushed ahead by 0.1% to \$17.9 billion in March. Retailers recorded higher sales in four sectors, accounting for about 80% of total sales. The automotive sector (which includes new and used car dealers; gasoline service stations; and parts, accessories and services outlets) and the food sector advanced the most in dollar terms. The 0.5% gain in the automotive sector was due to increased sales by gasoline service stations, as the price of gas rose for the first time in five months. Spending in the food sector increased 0.2% after falling in each of the two preceding months. The gain came entirely from higher sales by supermarkets and grocery stores. Partly offsetting these advances were declines in the clothing, furniture and general merchandise sectors.

During the first quarter of 1996, sales rose 1.1% compared with the last quarter of 1995, due mostly to a strong advance in January 1996 and a large decline in October 1995. Compared with the third quarter of 1995, however, retail sales were only up 0.4%. Rising employment through the first two months of 1996, a recently improved housing market, and recovering consumer confidence may have drawn more people to retail stores.

Sales in the automotive sector increased 3.1% in the first quarter, after a 0.3% decline in the preceding quarter. All three of the sector's components reported higher sales, with the most gain coming from gasoline service stations. Higher sales in the general merchandise sector (+1.3%) also contributed to the overall quarterly sales increase. Sales by department stores advanced for the fifth consecutive quarter. In contrast, food retailers recorded lower sales — their fourth straight quarterly drop. Grocery stores suffered the largest sales decline in two years, while speciality food retailers saw their largest rise in a year.

Retail sales



¹ Trend represents smoothed seasonally adjusted data.

Across Canada, all provinces, except Quebec, recorded growth in the first quarter of 1996. Retailers in British Columbia and Ontario showed the largest increases in dollar terms. Sales in Quebec dropped for the first time in three quarters. British Columbia's 2.1% advance offset declines in the third and fourth quarters of 1995. In Ontario, the first quarter's gain occurred despite a public service strike that lasted from the end of February through March.

Early indications of March sales point to a decline. Estimates show a drop in the number of new motor vehicles sold. Employment in trade showed a drop of 1.0% in April. In the United States, retail sales fell 0.3% in April, after rising 0.5% in March.

For further information order *Retail trade* (catalogue 63-005-XPB) or contact Louise G  n  reux, Industry Division at (613) 951-3549.

Wholesalers start recouping 1995 losses

Wholesale merchants' sales were up substantially (+1.6%) in March over the preceding month's figures. The increase followed gains of 1.0% in February and 0.3% in January. After slumping in early 1995 and remaining flat for the rest of the year, wholesalers' sales have been gaining strength in the past few months. Nevertheless, sales were 1.9% lower in the first quarter of 1996 than in the first quarter of 1995.

Inventories climbed 0.9% to \$31.8 billion. Since sales outpaced inventories, the inventories-to-sales ratio slipped to 1.55 in March. This is the fourth consecutive decline, which confirms wholesalers' desire to continue reducing their inventories.

Sales were up in 8 of the 11 trade groups. The largest gains were reported by wholesalers of farm machinery, equipment and supplies; household goods; and metals, hardware, plumbing and heating equipment and supplies.

(continued on page 3)

... Wholesalers start recouping 1995 losses

In the wake of increased shipments by lumber producers, sales by wholesalers of lumber and building materials rose 2.2%, after climbing 1.8% in February. This is an encouraging sign, contrasting with the steep decline throughout 1995. Inventories grew by 2.5% after falling in five of the previous six months.

An increase in the value of residential building permits in Canada and the sharp upswing in housing starts in the United States since the beginning of 1996 are partly related to the improved sales by lumber and building materials wholesalers. An improvement in the housing resale market suggests that repeated cuts in interest rates have finally stimulated the demand for housing.

After climbing since November 1995, sales by wholesalers of motor vehicles, parts and accessories edged down 0.4% in March. This decline is associated with the weak demand by new car dealers. Wholesalers of motor vehicles, parts and accessories reduced their inventories (-1.1%) for the fourth straight month. This decrease is partly due to a substantial drop in shipments by auto makers. Sales by wholesalers of other products were unchanged.

Retail and wholesale trade, March 1996 Seasonally adjusted

	Retail sales		Wholesale sales	
	\$ million	% change, previous month	\$ millions	% change, previous month
Canada	17,853	0.1	20,565	1.6
Newfoundland	287	-1.0	194	2.1
Prince Edward Island	81	1.2	48	5.9
Nova Scotia	564	-0.9	497	1.9
New Brunswick	442	0.1	302	2.4
Quebec	4,166	-0.5	4,604	1.4
Ontario	6,498	1.0	9,006	2.1
Manitoba	638	2.6	740	0.0
Saskatchewan	578	1.2	588	1.4
Alberta	1,901	-1.6	1,932	3.2
British Columbia	2,636	-0.5	2,629	-0.6
Yukon	21	9.6	11	16.8
Northwest Territories	41	-0.8	15	-12.1

For further information, order *Wholesale trade* (catalogue 63-008-XPB) or contact Catherine Mamay, Industry Division at (613) 951-9683.

Composite index maintains its growth

The composite index continued to grow by 0.7% in April, the same rate as in March. Of the 10 components, nine were rising — one more than in March and five more than at the start of the year; one component was unchanged. A broader increase in final demand in April accompanied continued strong growth in the financial market and services components.

Household demand continued to rise. Personal services led the 0.7% growth in services employment, its largest advance since the summer of 1994. Furniture and appliance sales posted their best increase in a year, while demand for other durable goods also improved. However, the housing market weakened after a large gain in March, partly because of labour disputes in the construction industry in Ontario and Quebec.

Manufacturing was propped up by producers of investment goods, notably machinery, as autos and paper products weakened markedly. Nevertheless, employment in April recouped all of its decline related to strikes in the auto industry in March, promising a more general recovery in manufacturing.

The U.S. leading indicator posted its first gain in 14 months, led by an upturn in consumer confidence and commodity prices. This gain has already been reflected in a quickening pace of the U.S. economy, which is a good sign for a rebound in Canadian exports in the second quarter.

For further information, order *Canadian economic observer* (catalogue 11-010-XPB) or contact Francine Roy, Current Economic Analysis Group at (613) 951-3627. (See also "Current trends" on page 6.)

Transportation prices remain behind increase in CPI

In April, consumers across Canada paid 1.4% more than they did in April 1995 for goods and services, as measured by the consumer price index (CPI). As in March, a large part of the annual rise came from increased transportation charges, particularly for new automobiles, gasoline and auto insurance. Consumers also faced higher prices for paper supplies, telephone services, restaurant food, rental accommodation and tuition fees. Prices, however, declined from April 1995 for fresh vegetables, women's clothing, household furniture and textiles, new houses and mortgage interest charges.

Between March and April, consumer prices advanced 0.3%. Much of this increase resulted from higher prices for gasoline and food. Prices also rose for new cars, dental care and electric-

ity, and fell for clothing, household furniture and textiles, and shelter.

Gasoline prices rose 3.9% in April, following a 3.5% increase in March. This mirrors an increase in crude oil prices, which in April reached their highest levels since the period leading up to the Persian Gulf War. Low inventories, caused partly by the long cold winter, were a factor in the latest increase.

Food prices rose by 0.9%. This was mainly the result of a jump in fresh vegetable prices. A shortage of tomatoes due to adverse weather conditions in the primary growing regions, along with a failure of other sources to fill the supply gap, was the main reason. Prices also rose for fresh fruit, beef, cereal products, sugar and confectionery, and restaurant meals, while they declined for dairy products and soft drinks.

(continued on page 4)

... Transportation prices remain behind increase in CPI

New vehicle prices rose slightly as several manufacturers increased prices on selected models, though another offered higher rebates on some of its models. Dental-care charges rose as the new schedules of suggested fees published by the various provincial dental associations were implemented. Electricity rates rose in Alberta (where a rebate was removed) and in Manitoba.

Between April 1995 and April 1996, increases in provincial CPIs ranged from 1.0% in Newfoundland to 2.3% in Alberta. Newfoundland's rate was kept low by declines in the food, and health and personal care indexes, and a steeper-than-average drop in the clothing and footwear index. Alberta experienced larger-than-average increases in six of its major component indexes.

From March to April, increases in provincial CPIs ranged from 0.1% in British Columbia (due to larger-than-average drops in shelter and household operations and furnishings charges) to 0.6% in Nova Scotia (due to a larger-than-average rise in transportation charges, and higher prices for shelter, household operation and furnishings, and clothing and footwear).

The Consumer price index, April 1996

% change, previous year*

Province/territory	All-items	Food	Energy	Housing	Transportation
Canada	1.4	0.5	2.8	0.5	4.2
Newfoundland	1.0	-0.1	1.1	0.5	4.0
Prince Edward Island	2.1	1.5	0.9	1.1	3.7
Nova Scotia	1.2	0.4	0.2	1.9	0.6
New Brunswick	1.2	-2.4	4.0	1.8	3.2
Quebec	1.4	1.0	1.6	0.9	2.7
Ontario	1.4	0.3	3.0	0.1	5.1
Manitoba	2.1	1.6	1.0	0.6	5.9
Saskatchewan	1.5	0.7	3.8	2.9	3.2
Alberta	2.3	1.3	4.1	1.8	4.6
British Columbia	1.2	0.1	5.2	-0.6	4.6
Whitehorse	1.2	-0.6	2.1	-0.5	5.1
Yellowknife	1.7	-0.7	3.6	1.7	5.3

* Data are not seasonally adjusted.

For further information, order *The consumer price index* (catalogue 62-001-XPB) or contact Sandra Shadlock, Prices Division at (613) 951-9606. (See also "Current trends" on page 6.)

Brake-plant strike dampens exports

Reduced shipments of automotive products, due to the U.S.-based brake manufacturers' strike, led the March decline in exports (-0.6% to \$21.2 billion). This drop was partly offset by higher exports of industrial goods and energy products. Reduced shipments to the United States, Japan, and the European Union more than offset increases to all other trading partners.

Imports dipped 4.8% to \$18.6 billion. More than half the decrease occurred in imports of automotive products, reflecting the U.S. brake-parts strike. Shipments were down from all trading partners except the European Union. The relatively large drop in imports compared with exports boosted the trade surplus to \$2.5 billion.

Exports of automotive products fell 8.2%. The number of vehicles available for export dropped, as a strike-induced shortage of auto parts led to temporary closures at four Canadian assembly plants. Parts exports also fell. Forestry exports, on a downward trend since September, fell 4.0% in March. Strong lumber sales were overshadowed by weaker exports of pulp and newsprint.

Machinery and equipment exports fell 2.3%. Declines in telecommunications-related exports, special equipment and tools, aircraft, and office materials were offset somewhat by advances in transportation equipment (excluding automobiles and aircraft), and industrial machinery. Meanwhile, industrial goods (+5.9%), energy (+5.0%) and agricultural products (+3.6%) all experienced higher exports.

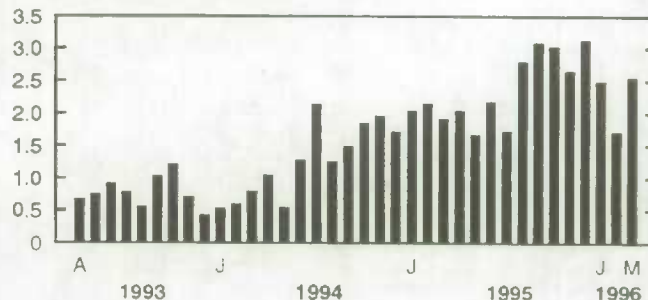
Imports of automotive products fell 13.9%. Car imports were at their lowest level since September 1995 as new motor vehicle sales lost ground. Energy product imports slipped 24.7%, led by declines in crude petroleum. After an unusually cold winter, demand for energy products eased back from its February peak.

Note to readers

Merchandise trade is only one component of the current account of Canada's balance of payments, which also includes trade in services. In the fourth quarter of 1995, the overall merchandise trade surplus of \$8.8 billion contrasted with a current account deficit of \$1.3 billion.

Trade balance

\$ billions, seasonally adjusted



Falling industrial goods imports (-3.6%) were chiefly the result of lower imports of iron and steel products, and of animal products. The drop was tempered by slight increases in non-metallic minerals and organic chemicals.

For further information, order *Canada's balance of international payments* (catalogue 65-001-XPB) or contact Suzie Carpentier, International Trade Division at (613) 951-9647 or 1-800-294-5583. (See also "Current trends" on page 6.)

New from Statistics Canada



Canadian economic observer

May 1996

The May issue of *Canadian economic observer*, Statistics Canada's flagship publication for economic statistics, presents a monthly summary of the economy, the major current economic events in April, and a feature article on technology and competitiveness in Canadian manufacturing. A statistical summary contains a wide range of tables and graphs on the principal economic indicators for Canada, the provinces and the major industrial nations.

The May 1996 issue of *Canadian economic observer* (catalogue 11-010-XPB, \$22/\$220) is now available. For further information, contact Cyndi Bloskie, Current Analysis Group at (613) 951-3634, the Internet: ceo@statcan.ca.

Youth in official language minorities

1971-1991

The situation of youth in official language minorities changed considerably between 1971 and 1991. This special report documents many of these changes — from the population size and its concentration in various parts of the country, to changes in bilingualism, language use, education, employment, and the families of minority youth. An indispensable tool for anyone interested in the language situation in Canada, this report provides many insights into this important population. It features more than 40 tables, along with graphs and easy-to-read text.

Youth in official language minorities (catalogue 91-545-XPB, \$18) is now available. For further information on this release, contact Brian Harrison, Demography Division at (613) 951-3776.



Small area business and labour database (SABAL)

Small area business and labour database (SABAL) is a compendium CD-ROM that combines a wide variety of statistics from 19 business and social sources with access at a subprovincial geographic level. In addition to Canadian and provincial detail, you now have geographic coverage which includes approximately 140 urban areas and 72 economic regions.

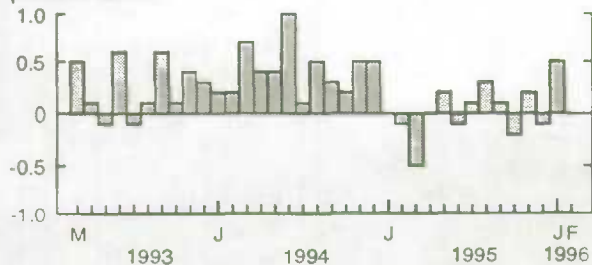
SABAL is a collection of data from a large range of survey and administrative sources whose common characteristic is small-area data availability. Until now, many of these databases have not been available in "off-the shelf" electronic form, and certainly not under a single convenient cover. SABAL is your opportunity for one-stop shopping.

SABAL (catalogue 61F0056XCB, Canada: \$2,500; United States and other countries: US\$2,500) is now available. To arrange a demonstration, or to order, contact a Statistics Canada Regional Reference Centre. For further information, contact Debi Soucy, Small Business and Special Surveys Division at (613) 951-4949, fax: (613) 951-1527, the Internet: soucdeb@statcan.ca.

Current trends

Gross domestic product

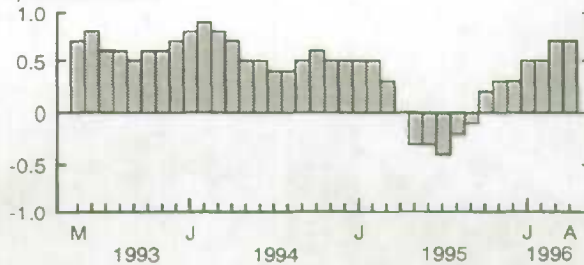
% change,
previous month



Real gross domestic product at factor cost stayed unchanged in February.

Composite index

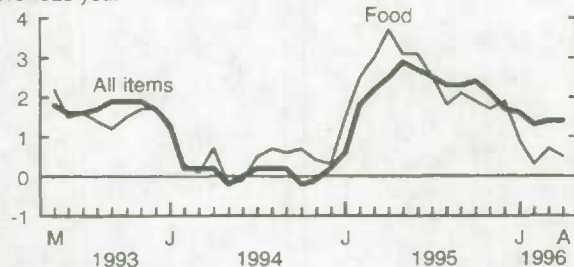
% change,
previous month



The composite index continued to grow by 0.7% in April, the same rate as in March.

Consumer price index

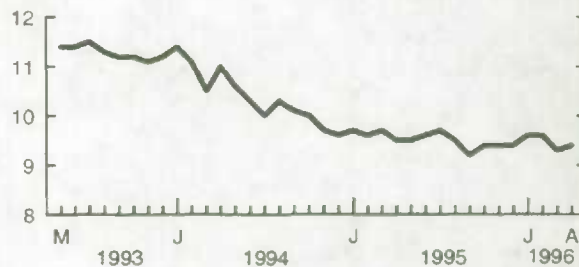
% change,
previous year



Consumers paid 1.4% more for goods and services in April 1996 than the year before. Food prices rose by 0.5%.

Unemployment rate

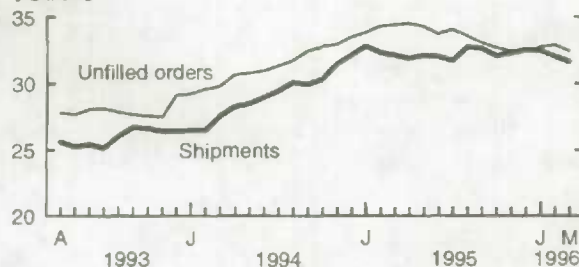
%



In April, the unemployment rate rose 0.1 percentage points to 9.4%.

Manufacturing

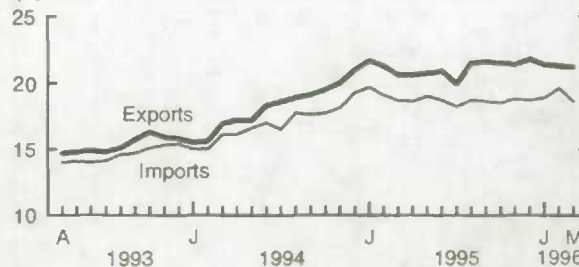
\$ billions



Manufacturers' shipments fell 1.2% to \$31.7 billion in March. The level of unfilled orders dropped 1.4% to \$32.5 billion.

Merchandise trade

\$ billions



In March, the value of merchandise exports fell 0.6% from February to \$21.2 billion. Imports dipped by 4.8% to \$18.6 billion.

Note: All series are seasonally adjusted except the consumer price index.

Latest monthly statistics

	Period	Level	Change, previous period	Change, previous year
GENERAL				
Gross domestic product (\$ billion, 1986)	February	545.5	-0.0%	0.4%
Composite index (1981=100)	April*	176.7	0.7%	1.7%
Operating profits of enterprises (\$ billion)	4th quarter	23.7	0.5%	0.8%
Capacity utilization (%)	4th quarter	82.9	-0.7†	-2.8†
DOMESTIC DEMAND				
Retail trade (\$ billion)	March*	17.9	0.1%	2.3%
New motor vehicle sales ('000 units)	March	97.2	-1.1%	-0.5%
LABOUR				
Employment (millions)	April	13.7	0.3%	1.5%
Unemployment rate (%)	April	9.4	0.1†	-0.1†
Participation rate (%)	April	64.9	0.1†	0.0†
Labour income (\$ billion)	January	35.7	1.1%	3.1%
Average weekly earnings (\$)	February	577.27	0.9%	0.7%
INTERNATIONAL TRADE				
Merchandise exports (\$ billion)	March*	21.2	-0.6%	2.6%
Merchandise imports (\$ billion)	March*	18.6	-4.8%	-0.4%
Merchandise trade balance (all figures in \$ billion)	March*	2.5	0.8	0.6
MANUFACTURING				
Shipments (\$ billion)	March	31.7	-1.2%	-1.5%
New orders (\$ billion)	March	31.2	-3.1%	-3.2%
Unfilled orders (\$ billion)	March	32.5	-1.4%	-5.7%
Inventory/shipments ratio	March	1.43	0.03	0.10
PRICES				
Consumer price index (1986=100)	April	135.3	0.3%	1.4%
Industrial product price index (1986=100)	March	128.9	-0.6%	0.6%
Raw materials price index (1986=100)	March	135.1	3.4%	1.4%
New housing price index (1986=100)	March	132.2	-0.2%	-2.3%

Note: All series are seasonally adjusted with the exception of the price indexes.

* new this week.

† percentage point.

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			US\$		
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CURRENT ECONOMIC ANALYSIS					
Canadian economic observer	May 1996	11-010-XPB	22/220	27/264	31/308
DEMOGRAPHY					
Youth in official language minorities	1971-1991	91-545-XPE	18	22	26
EDUCATION, CULTURE AND TOURISM					
Touriscope - International travel, advance information	March 1996	66-001-PPB	7/70	9/84	10/98
HEALTH STATISTICS					
Divorces					
Microfiche version	1994	84-213-XMB	25	30	35
Paper version	1994	84-213-XPB	30	36	42
INDUSTRY					
Department store sales and stocks	February 1996	63-002-XPB	16/160	20/192	23/224
Footwear statistics	1st quarter 1996	33-002-XPB	8/24	9/29	11/34
Monthly survey of manufacturing	March 1996	31-001-XPB	19/190	23/228	27/266
Particleboard, oriented strandboard and fibreboard	March 1996	36-003-XPB	6/60	8/72	9/84
Primary iron and steel	March 1996	41-001-XPB	6/60	8/72	9/84
Refined Petroleum Products	February 1996	45-004-XPB	20/200	24/240	28/280
Retail trade	February 1996	63-005-XPB	20/200	24/240	28/280
INTERNATIONAL TRADE					
Exports by commodity					
Microfiche version	February 1996	65-004-XMB	35/350	42/420	49/490
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