

Core sector growth 3.4% in Jan vs 5.7% year-ago mth

NEW DELHI, FEB 28 /- The growth of eight core sectors slowed down to a five-month low of 3.4 per cent in January mainly due to contraction in output of refinery products, fertiliser and cement.

The growth rate of eight infrastructure sectors of coal, crude oil, natural gas, refinery products, fertilisers, steel, cement and electricity was 5.7 per cent in January 2016.

Infrastructure sectors' expansion in January this year is the lowest since August 2016, when the segments had recorded a growth of 9.2 per cent. It is also lower than that of 5.6 per cent seen in December 2016.

The core sectors, which contribute 38 per cent to the total industrial production, expanded 4.8 per cent in April. January this fiscal compared to 2.9 per cent growth in the

same period previous financial year, according to the data released by the commerce and industry ministry today.

The output of refinery products, fertiliser and cement contracted by 1.5 per cent, 1.6 per cent and 13.9 per cent, respectively during the month under review.

Both coal and electricity expanded at 4.8 per cent in January as against 7.9 per cent and 11.6 per cent expansion respectively in January 2016. However, crude oil, natural gas and steel output recorded positive growth.

Crude oil output grew by 1.3 per cent in January 2017 against 4.7 per cent contraction in the same month of previous year.

Similarly, natural gas and steel output rose by 11.9 per cent and 11.4 per cent respectively during the month under review.

Agri & allied sector grows 4.4% vs 0.8% of '15-16

NEW DELHI, FEB 28 /- India's economy expanded by 7 per cent in the third quarter of this financial year, but analysts fear that note ban would have severely impacted economic activity.

The Central Statistics Office (CSO) has retained the growth projection for the current fiscal at 7.1 per cent, as projected in the first advance estimate in January.

Meanwhile, the CSO has also marginally revised upwards the GDP estimates for the first and second quarters to 7.2 per cent and 7.4

per cent.

It was feared that demonetisation effected in the middle of last quarter (November 9, 2016) would have adverse bearing on various segments of the economy.

Agriculture and allied sector growth is projected at 4.4 per cent in 2016-17, up from 0.8 per cent last fiscal.

In a statement, the CSO said Real GDP or Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at constant 2011-12 prices in 2016-17 is likely to attain a level of Rs 121.65 lakh crore, as against the first revised estimate of GDP for 2015-16 of Rs 113.58 lakh crore, released in January 2017.

The growth in GDP during 2016-17 is estimated at 7.1 per cent as compared to the growth rate of 7.9 per cent in 2015-16, it said.

Real GVA (Gross Value Added) is anticipated to increase from Rs 104.70 lakh crore in 2015-16 to Rs 111.68 lakh crore in 2016-17.

"Anticipated growth of real GVA at basic prices in 2016-17 is 6.7 per cent against 7.8 per cent in 2015-16," the release said. (PTI)

PSU bank's a day-long strike, operations hit

NEW DELHI, FEB 28 /- Banking operations were hit on Tuesday as a nation-wide strike called by employees of public sector banks, with ATMs running dry at various places across the country.

The All India Bank Employees' Association (AIBE) claimed that saying all the branches kept their shutters down.

"People could not go to banks to transact anything, deposit money, withdraw money or do any other transaction. Government treasury transactions could not be done, import and export transactions and money market operations were not possible," AIBE General Secretary C H Venkatachalam told PTI. Money transfer and cash remittances were also hit.

Venkatachalam said clearing operations have been paralysed in a big way despite the Reserve Bank keeping its operations open because employees were not available. Some private sector banks are also part of the strike called under the aegis of the United Forum of Bank Unions (UFBU) which demands including fixing accountability of top officers over increasing bad loans, opposing labour reforms as well as outsourcing permanent jobs. Karur Vysya Bank and Federal Bank said their branches and Offices Association of Bank Unions (IBA) Chairman Rajeev Rishi said banks were advised to inform their customers about Tuesday's strike so that they could do their urgent and large banking related transactions in advance.

"The banks made sure that alternative banking transaction channels like ATMs are filled up with cash. By and large banks have made all efforts to minimise inconvenience to the customers," Rishi said.

Banks' ATMs and digital channels will function to meet customer needs," Federal Bank said. Private sector banks including ICICI, HDFC, Axis were not part of the strike.

ATMs have gone dry in various places, Venkatachalam said, adding that some banks had limited cash to keep the machines going.

UFBU is an umbrella body of 9 unions. However two of Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh affiliates—the National Organisation of Bank Workers and the National Organisation of Bank Officers—are not part of the strike.

The demands include compensation to employees and officers for extra hours they have put in following demonetisation in November and early initiation of next wage revision. Even as a majority of PSU bank branches remained closed on Monday, on Tuesday, the leaders said they made alternative arrangements, like opening a few branches and filling cash in ATMs, to minimise inconvenience for customers.

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Services affected in Bengal

KOLKATA: Normal banking operations across the state were disrupted by the all-India strike called by seven trade unions and Officers Association for various demands pertaining to the industry.

Branches of all public sector, foreign and private banks, including their ATMs, remained closed during the day. Offices of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI)

remained open but clearing of cheques did not take place as banks were closed.

The general secretary of the umbrella body of the banking trade unions United Forum of Bank Unions (UFBU), West Bengal unit, Gautam Banerjee, claimed that the strike was totally successful.

He said that the government had been trying to

Country's first integrated heliport inaugurated in Delhi

NEW DELHI, FEB 28 /- The country's first integrated heliport was inaugurated in the national capital today, with Civil Aviation Minister A Gajapathi Raju saying it is the first of its kind facility in South Asia.

Built by state-owned Pawan Hans Ltd, the heliport consists of a terminal building, having a capacity of 150 passengers, four hangars with parking capacity for 16 helicopters and nine parking bays.

"This is the first of its kind facility in South Asia, which has been built by Pawan Hans Ltd here," Raju said after inaugurating the heliport, located in Rohini area of North Delhi. The heliport also has a maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO) facility for the upkeep of Pawan Hans fleet as well as for the third-party maintenance work. "The helicopter and cargo are still at minus level in the

country. If we have to take them to the higher level, it needs training (training in skill development)," the Minister said.

While stating that domestic air passenger traffic in India is seeing the fastest growth in the world, he also said, "we need to pull our socks" in January, domestic air traffic growth was more than 25 per cent.

The commencement of services from the heliport is also expected to reduce congestion at the Delhi airport, which currently handles about 40 helicopter arrivals and departures on an average per day besides the large-scale fixed-wing operations.

Minister of State for Civil Aviation Jayant Sinha, Delhi Lieutenant Governor Anil Bajjal and Pawan Hans CMD B P Sharma, among others, were present at the ceremony. (PTI)

Biotech chief bats for regulatory body for medical devices

HYDERABAD, FEB 28 /- Biotech entrepreneur Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw has called for establishing a standard-setting regulatory body for medical devices, as non-certified ones put patients at serious risk.

On the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority's recent decision fixing prices caps on coronary stents, Mazumdar-Shaw said price pressure on patients needs to be taken into account in the design and man-

ufacture of their construction.

"Stents are generic. NPPA needs to understand," she said.

"NPPA is an important pharma pricing regulator. However, they need to negotiate with patients and not in an ad hoc manner after launch," Mazumdar-Shaw commented when asked about its functioning and scope for improvement.

According to her, a credible regulatory and quality compliance system that benchmarks to internationally acceptable standards is needed to promote medical devices sector, including exports.

Earlier this month, NPPA cut prices of life-saving coronary stents by up to 85 per cent by capping them at Rs 7,200 for bare metal ones and Rs 29,600 for drug eluting variety.

Tatas agree to pay NTT Docomo \$1.18b subject to court nod

NEW DELHI, FEB 28 /- Tata Sons Tuesday said it has agreed to pay Japanese telecom firm NTT Docomo USD 1.18 billion to settle the 2-year old dispute over their Indian venture joint venture.

In a statement, Tata Sons said it has reached an agreement with NTT Docomo "on a joint approach to enable enforcement" of June 22, 2016, compensation award granted by the London Court of International Arbitration (LCIA) in favour of the Japanese company.

"As a gesture of good faith and in accordance with the Tata Group's long-standing

contract of adherence to contractual commitments that it has always enjoyed both in India and abroad, the board of Tata Sons has decided to withdraw its objections to the enforcement of the award in India," it said.

The parties have jointly applied to the Delhi High Court, requesting that it accept their agreed terms of settlement, subject to such further orders as the court sees fit, it said.

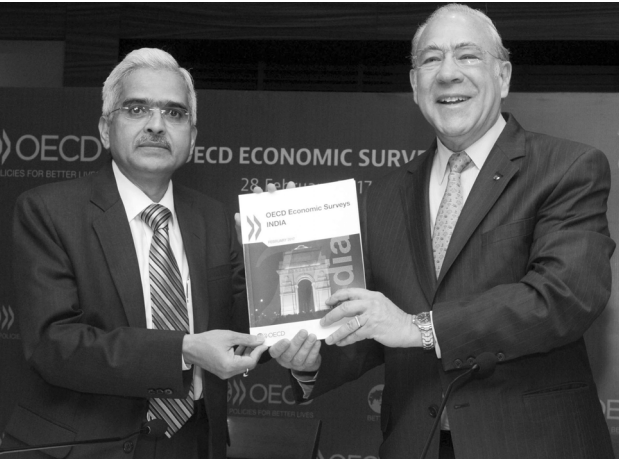
In September last year, Tata Sons had filed an objection in the high court seeking to prevent enforcement of the arbitration award of USD 1.17 billion. Tata Sons said

that as per the agreement, the settlement terms, if approved, "clear the way for the USD 1.18 billion already deposited by Tata Sons with the court to be paid to Docomo and would allow Docomo to transfer its shares in Tata Teleservices Ltd."

"As part of this joint application, and in anticipation of the matter being finally resolved in India, Docomo has agreed to suspend its related enforcement proceedings in the United Kingdom and the United States for a period of time," it added.

Tata Sons further said: "This agreement between the parties is a significant step towards resolution of this dispute, and both Tata Sons and Docomo are hopeful that they will continue to work together constructively to achieve a resolution of this case as well as will look to further collaboration in future." The promoter of the major operating Tata companies further said it took the decision in the interest of putting an end to the dispute and also "in the larger national interest of preserving a fair investment environment in India."

The handling of the dispute with Docomo was one of the major issues between



The Secretary, Department of Economic Affairs Shaktikanta Das and the Secretary-General, OECD Angel Gurría jointly launching the OECD Economic Survey of India, in New Delhi.

Jio tariff very aggressive, unsustainable: Mittal

BARCELONA, FEB 28 /- India's largest mobile operator Bharti Airtel has said the new tariff announced by Reliance Jio is very aggressive and unsustainable, and the industry will respond to it with more competitive plans and additional data offerings.

Airtel had on Monday waived roaming charges to compete with free voice calls and roaming offered by Jio. The Mukesh Ambani-controlled company has not only promised to match the best mobile data usage plan in the market but add 20 per cent more data to it. "Tariffs that

they (Jio) have announced are still very aggressive, which means you got to respond."

"You got to do more packages... you have to throw in more data. All those things need to be done," Bharti Airtel Chairman Sunil Mittal told reporters here.

Jio, which has spent USD 25 billion on its 4G wireless data network, will terminate free data plans from April 1 but has offered customers the option of signing up for a Jio Prime membership for Rs 99 to continue using unlimited services for a year by paying Rs 303 every month.

In a free-wheeling chat on the sidelines of the Mobile World Congress, Mittal, who is also the Chairman of global industry body GSMA, strongly advocated consolidation for the Indian telecom industry to "get the economics back," pitched for affordability in spectrum pricing that has gone "out of control" in the last few years, and said the spectrum surplus industry will not need an airwave auction, at least in 2017-18.

The Indian telecom czar said Bharti Airtel's balance sheet remains "healthy and strong," and that he does not think Bharti will go into losses under competitive pressure although one can "never say never."

Mittal categorically ruled out an exit from Africa operations, but said Bharti will explore merger and consolidation in certain African markets where it is not amongst the top two players.

Admitting that Jio's decision to start charging customers from April 1 was "good news" for operators, he said it however, would not signal the end to tariff war. "First of all good news is that eventually they have announced that they will charge from April 1. But yes, still to our mind, it is the pricing which

India takes issue of defaulters very seriously: Jaitley

LONDON, FEB 28 /- India takes the issue of defaulters very seriously, Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley has said, indicating that he may raise the matter of liquor baron Vijay Malviya with his British counterpart.

"Certainly when the opportunity does come, I do take that opportunity to mention the issue of defaulters based in Britain) to my counterparts here, 'hetro-reporters here when asked if the issue of defaulters based in the UK will feature on the agenda of his discussions with British ministers."

The Union Minister for Finance and Corporate Affairs is set to meet his UK counterpart, the Chancellor of Exchequer today.

"As far as the government of India is concerned, we take this issue of defaulters against the financial system in India very seriously, and we have already sent a strong signal that if you [dupe the exchequer or dupe the banking system, the government of India will lead its full support to all financial institutions to recover up to their last pie," Jaitley told reporters at a media briefing here yesterday.

"It is obvious that because of this strong position the government has taken, that some defaulters are on the run."

Being on the run, they find refuge in certain other jurisdictions, exploiting the systems in other parts of the world," the minister added.

He said Indian investigating agencies are utilising every provision of the law available to them to recover amounts and attach assets in India to "get these people back and held responsible as per law."

Earlier this month, Jaitley had said that the UK's democracy was "liberal enough to permit defaulters to stay here," in an apparent reference to liquor baron Malviya, who is wanted in India for loan default and other cases.

Malviya, the chief of the now defunct Kingfisher Airlines, had moved to Britain in March last year after banks sued him to recover around USD 1.4 billion owed by the airline.

Refering to a major drop in students coming to study at the UK universities over the last few years, he highlighted that there were other countries that were more welcoming. "They (the UK) have to realise that when international students come here (Britain), they subsidise the educational costs here," he told PTI.

Tata Steel's Odisha ferro-chrome plant starts production

NEW DELHI, FEB 28 /- Tata Steel's Rs 542-crore ferro-chrome plant in Odisha has started production.

"The recently commissioned ferro-chrome plant of Tata Steel at Gopalpur Industrial Park in Ganjam district of Odisha, has achieved a major milestone with the first ever production of ferro-chrome on February 25, 2017, in compliance with all technical parameters," the company said on Tuesday. As part of the anchor investment in Tata Steel's Gopalpur Industrial Park, the Rs 542-crore ferro-chrome plant has an installed capacity of 55,000 tonne per annum (tpa).

The plant was inaugurated on November 30, 2016, by Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik.

"This marks the completion of the commissioning of the ferro-chrome plant. It also goes a long way in consolidating our footprint in Odisha and the long-standing partnership with the state towards industrial progress of the region," said D B Sundara Ramam, Tata Steel Executive-in-Charge, Ferro Alloys and Minerals Division. It is a unique environment-friendly plant with state-of-the-art pollution control equipment and technology such as ETP (effluent treatment plant) and STP (sewage treatment plant). It has a 100 per cent water harvesting facility that caters to most of the water requirements of the plant. It has an indigenously built semi-closed hybrid furnace. Also, it is the first plant in India to use briquetting method of chrome ore fines agglomeration.

Snippets

Sony may set up plant in NE
GUWAHATI, FEB 28 /- Electronics major Sony India Tuesday said it may set up a manufacturing facility in North East as it looks for more than 20 per cent sales growth in the country in 2017-18. The wholly-owned subsidiary of Japanese major Sony is also looking to enter the 'super-premium' mobile handset category by launching products in the range of Rs 50,000-Rs 1,00,000 before Deepavali this year.

Sriram Life launch
MUMBAI, FEB 28 /- Shiram Life Insurance Company (SLIC), a part of Shiram Group, Tuesday launched a new plan mainly aimed at for young parents. Genius Assured Benefit Plan is a non-linked, non-participating, special insurance plan that provides assured payouts for financing a child's education and securing his/her future, the company said.

IFCI debt instruments downgraded
MUMBAI, FEB 28 /- Rating agency Ica today downgraded various debt instruments of Industrial Finance Corporation of India (IFCI) due to sharp deterioration in its asset quality. The rating agency has downgraded the long-term rating assigned to the Rs 10,000 crore long-term bank borrowings, the Rs 8,000 crore long-term bond programme and the Rs 2,000 crore NCD programme of IFCI from A+ to A.

RGU signs MOU with IIE
ITANAGAR, FEB 28 /- The Rajiv Gandhi University (RGU) has inked a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Guwahati-based Indian Institute of Entrepreneurship (IIE) to mutually work for developing entrepreneurship culture among the youth of the north eastern region. The MoU signed on Monday at Guwahati, both the institutions agreed to work in the areas of entrepreneurship education, capacity building, conducting seminars, workshops, and help identify avenues for entrepreneurs in the region, with special focus to Arunachal Pradesh, a press release said here on Tuesday. (PTI)