

Business

# India's economic contraction slows as vaccines boost recovery hopes

Economy contracts 7.5% in Sept quarter vs 23.9% in June quarter

**NEW DELHI:** The contraction of the Indian economy eased off in the three months to September amid signs of a pickup in manufacturing, and economists expect a steady recovery next year if progress on coronavirus vaccines feeds consumer demand.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, whose party won elections this month in the eastern state of Bihar, expects the recent easing of farm and labor laws, along with tax incentives, to bolster manufacturing and lure more foreign investment. India's gross domestic product in July-September quarter contracted 7.5 percent on year, data released by the National Statistical Office on Friday showed, compared to a decline of 23.9 percent in the previous three months.

Analysts in a Reuters poll had forecast an 8.8 percent contraction in the latest period. Annual growth of 3.4 percent in farm sector and 0.6 percent in manufacturing during September quarter raised hopes of an early recovery as the government gears up to distribute coronavirus vaccines to a country with about 1.4 billion people. "The Q2 GDP numbers are encouraging," said Krishnamurthy Subramanian, chief economic adviser at the ministry of finance, after the release of the data.

Citing growth in manufacturing and farm sectors, he said there were signs of a "V" shaped recovery helped by a pickup in demand for consumer and investment goods. "Overall, while the

recovery provides optimism, caution on the pandemic and therefore on the economy is still warranted."

Consumer spending - the main driver of the economy - dropped 11.3 percent year-on-year in July-September compared to a revised 26.7 percent fall in the previous quarter, data showed, while capital investments were down 7.3 percent compared to a 47.1 percent fall in the previous quarter.

The Reserve Bank of India, which has slashed its benchmark repo rate by a total of 115 basis points since March to cushion the shock from the crisis, is expected to keep rates on hold at its policy review meeting next week due to growing concerns about inflation. India - the world's fastest-growing major economy until a few years ago - now looks to be headed for its first full-year contraction this fiscal year since 1979, according

to a Reuters poll which predicted gross domestic product would take over a year to return to pre-COVID-19 levels.

**Risks of second wave**

Private economists, who have marginally raised growth forecasts this month, said the recovery would depend on the wider distribution of vaccines amid risks of a second wave of infections spreading to remote areas limiting the broader gains. Businesses fear new restrictions imposed by some states this week could delay a recovery while con-



**AHMEDABAD:** An employee works inside the KHS Machinery Pvt. Ltd, a manufacturer of filling and packing equipment for beverage, food and non-food industries at Hirapur village on the outskirts of Ahmedabad on Friday. —AFP

sumer demand could slow down after the festivals. India's tally of COVID-19 infections crossed 9.3 million to stand as the world's second highest after the United States, with 135,715 deaths in the south Asian nation. "The resurgence of COVID cases in many geographies poses a risk to economic revival

in the coming quarters," said Anagha Deodhar, economist at ICICI Securities, Mumbai. Deodhar like many other economists expected growth to remain negative in the December quarter and post a small positive growth in March quarter. —Reuters



**Manufacturing grows 0.6% in Sept quarter**

## stc is now offering Apple's iPhone 12 series through its postpaid plans

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Telecommunications Company - stc, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers, enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, announced that it is now offering the iconic Apple iPhone 12 series under its Always ON postpaid plans with offers on the most wanted smartphone of the year. Equipped with ultra-fast 5G connectivity, both new stc customers and those renewing their subscriptions can take advantage of the new iPhone 12 series' high internet speeds supported by stc's 5G network, the #1 network in Kuwait.

stc will offer the new iPhone 12 line up, including iPhone 12, iPhone 12 Pro, iPhone 12 Pro Max, and

iPhone 12 mini, introducing a powerful 5G experience. With a beautiful all-new design, iPhone 12 models feature unparalleled new camera systems, edge-to-edge Super Retina XDR displays for a more immersive viewing experience, the biggest jump in durability with the Ceramic Shield front cover, and Apple-designed A14 Bionic chip, the fastest chip in a smartphone.

stc also launched its Trade-In program, which enables customers to exchange older iPhone or iPad models for credit towards the new iPhone 12 series. In order to receive the credit, customers are only required to visit any of stc's designated branches that support the program, and trade in their old device with a new iPhone 12 model. The credit amount of the old device will be transferred to the customer's stc account immediately in order to purchase their new iPhone. The operation is easy, simple and safe.

Customers are able to purchase the iPhone 12 Pro Max, iPhone 12 Pro, iPhone 12, and iPhone 12 mini now, following the pre-order launch which started on November 13. For complete pricing and availability details, please visit [www.stc.com.kw](http://www.stc.com.kw).

On this occasion, engineer Nasser Al-Saadoun, Chief Consumer Officer at stc, said, "We are proud

to participate in the official launch of the iPhone 12 series in Kuwait. Partnering with leading companies such as Apple, enables stc to expand the range of newly released products to its customers with special offers designed to enhance the user experience. Each device comes equipped with 5G connectivity, as well as hardware and software upgrades. This launch builds on our commitment to add new lines of 5G enabled devices as we enter the new era of high-speed connectivity." Al-Saadoun added, "The long awaited iPhone 12 series is now available to our customers. To ensure convenient access to all our products and services, customers can take advantage of this limited time offer at one of stc's branches, our website ([www.stc.com.kw](http://www.stc.com.kw)), or through the mystc App."



**Nasser Al-Saadoun**

## Markaz launches its second sustainability report for 2018/2019

**KUWAIT:** As a testament to its steadfast commitment to doing business in a responsible and sustainable fashion, Kuwait Financial Centre "Markaz" announced the release of its second Sustainability Report, for the 2018 and 2019 period, expanding the positive trends demonstrated in the first edition, and reinforcing its commitment to clients, business, people and community at large. Developed in full accordance with the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) Standards, it highlights the company's contribution to the global goals. It is strongly tied to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Kuwait National Development Plan (KNDP) and Boursa Kuwait Sustainability Disclosure Guide.

**A holistic approach**

The report underlines Markaz's continuous commitment to measuring and evaluating its sustainability performance, and to transparently report the results to all stakeholders. The company is a proactive steward of responsible business strategies and practice, and has always been a strong advocate for sustainability. The report is not required under regulation or compliance; therefore, submitting itself to evaluation against these global standards is a compelling affirmation of Markaz's ethical approach and its pursuit of best practices. Doing so reflects a core belief, that the only way to operate is by recognizing and carefully managing the impact of its activities upon its internal and external stakeholders and on the communities it serves.

Deena Y Al-Refai, Senior Vice President Investor

Relations, gave her view: "We see growing social, economic and environmental challenges, but also, of course, many opportunities. Markaz works to provide innovative financial solutions in a time of change. Our holistic approach takes sustainability into account. We engage positively with stakeholders, to embed and optimize governance, economic, people, community and environmental factors. This approach further emphasizes Markaz's sustainable success and its contribution to ESG."

Key components of Markaz's sustainability development

**Governance**

Al-Refai added: "Markaz is known for its strong and effective governance, the source of its ethical and transparent business practices. Our strategic approach, underpinned by adherence to sound policies and principles, strengthens stakeholder journeys into sustainable growth."

**Economy**

Striving to deliver healthy returns and contribute to economic development, Markaz has focused on calculating its Sustainability Return on Investments (SROI). Active innovation ensures a wider and longer lasting economic impact, and so its products' growth and performance highlight the wider positive impact of sustainability practices, for both financial and non-financial outcomes.

**People**

An essential element of Markaz's sustainable development is its people. Markaz establishes a work environment that enables personal best performance, a daily experience that encourages creativity and that attracts and retains professionals committed to the clients, to the community and to the environment. Markaz's reputation emanates from the efforts of team members who embody Markaz's values and ethical reputation, within a cul-

ture that creates opportunities for career growth, optimizing everyone's potential to meet and exceed client expectations.

**Community**

Keen to fulfill its commitment to providing inclusive solutions, Markaz focuses on the local community as well. Community engagement means delivering on economic needs of the nation in equal consideration of surrounding social needs. These needs go hand in hand when the focus is on sustainable growth.



**Deena Al-Refai**

**The environment**

"A sustainable environmental impact cannot be achieved," Al-Refai concluded, "without the consistent availability of solutions that incorporate this thinking, which we ensure through our diligent contribution to ESG. We are primarily experts in finance and client services, but in all we do, we promote and nurture environmental stewardship. Our internal practices focus on digitization to minimize and manage waste, and we work to maximize environmentally-friendly processes and practices." Markaz is keen to add value in all areas of operation, and to lead by example with the various reporting and research efforts it makes throughout the year, with all key stakeholders' interest at heart. One of its recent contributions was the launch of its 'Procurement Guide to contractual arrangements between governmental and quasi-governmental entities and the company', in an effort to establish guided contractual relationships between both the private and government sector.

browse through the participating brands, log in with their Emirates Skywards account details; select their preferred brand; and continue to the brand's website to complete the purchase with their ABK Emirates Visa card.

Skywards Miles earned will be credited to the ABK Emirates Visa Infinite and Signature cardholders' Emirates Skywards membership account within 45 days. Miles can then be redeemed for reward flights, flight upgrades with Emirates and flydubai, hotel stays, and a variety of money-can't-buy experiences. This strategic partnership demonstrates ABK's commitment to enhancing its customer banking experience, and offer innovative products in partnership with leading brands.

## ABK partners with Emirates Skywards to offer triple miles

**KUWAIT:** Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK), has partnered with Emirates Skywards, the award-winning loyalty program of Emirates and flydubai, to launch a lucrative miles multiplier campaign exclusively for ABK Emirates Visa Infinite and Signature credit cardholders.

## Frankfurt pharma hub prepares for COVID vaccine task

**FRANKFURT:** As a string of COVID-19 vaccines near approval, Frankfurt Airport staff are gearing up to handle the unprecedented logistical challenge of transporting millions of life-saving doses worldwide.

Frankfurt is Europe's largest hub for transporting pharmaceutical goods, and will be key to the success of inoculating millions of people against the deadly coronavirus. "The stress is increasing now that we're entering the 'hot' phase," Karin Krestan, Lufthansa Cargo's director of operations, told AFP during a tour of the temperature-controlled "Cargo Cool Center" terminal.

Krestan, who uses her skills as a former nurse, is sure her team is ready for the task. "The processes have been established, we're very confident and we feel well prepared," she said. In fact, Max Philipp Conrady, head of freight infrastructure at Fraport, told AFP: "We've been ready since August".

**Keeping cool**

Frankfurt's cargo terminal has been working around the clock since the pandemic began, delivering medicine, surgical gowns and masks and supporting global supply chains as passenger numbers collapsed and airlines grounded planes. The vast temperature-controlled hangar, a few kilometers from the main passenger terminal, handled 120,000 tons of vaccines, drugs and other pharmaceutical products in 2019, airport operator Fraport said. It has 12,000 square meters (129,000 square feet) of temperature-controlled warehouses, essential for storing medicines. About 8,000 square meters (86,000 square feet), around the size of a football field, handles Lufthansa cargo alone, Krestan said.

Warehouses hum as ventilation systems pump conditioned air and staff buzz around on forklifts. Boxes packed with measles vaccines stand ready for departure. Frankfurt has 2,000 square meters (21,500 square feet) of cold storage, Krestan said, set at two to eight degrees Celsius (36 to 47 degrees Fahrenheit), which is ideal for vaccines. Fraport recently boosted investment in high-tech refrigerated "dollies" that transport vaccines from cold-storage hangars to planes, and now have 20 so several freighters can be loaded at the same time.

Some vaccines, such as one produced by AstraZeneca and Oxford University, can be shipped at normal refrigerator temperatures. But Pfizer's, developed at the BioNTech lab in Mainz, around 20km (12 miles) from the Frankfurt airport, must remain at around -70 degrees C (-94 F).

That requires car-sized containers which use dry ice to keep contents at stable, ultra-low temperatures.

They can do so for up to 120 hours without a power supply, long enough to reach far-flung destinations.

**Flight capacity**

The EU recently agreed to buy 300 million doses of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine, presaging a huge logistical operation, much of which will involve Frankfurt in the coming months. While the airport has the capacity to handle the extra-cold freight, Krestan noted that flight capacity will be a major factor in the pace of distribution. —AFP