

China's Q3 GDP slows to 7.4 pct

China's economy grew 7.4 percent year-on-year in the third quarter of 2012, slower from 7.6 percent in the second quarter and 8.1 percent in the first, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) announced Thursday.

The growth rate has slowed for the seventh straight quarter. However, it was in line with economists' predictions that third-quarter economic output would grow by between 7.4-7.5 percent in the world's second-largest economy.

GDP reached 35.35 trillion yuan (5.61 trillion U.S. dollars) in the first three quarters of 2012, NBS spokesman Sheng Laiyun told a press conference.

"GDP grew 7.7 percent in the first three quarters, and the economy is generally stable," Sheng said. During the first half, the GDP grew 7.8 percent.

"Compared with the first half, we have seen some improvements in the third quarter," he said. Despite the growth slide, Sheng said that the economy had been stabilizing, especially since September.

He said a slew of evidence backed this, citing the trade rebound and other major economic indicators that showed growth picking up.

NBS data released Thursday showed total retail sales in September hit 1.82 trillion yuan, up 14.2 percent year-on-year, with the growth rate 1.46 percentage points higher than in August.

Fixed asset investment rose 20.5 percent year-on-year to 25.69 trillion yuan in the first nine months, with the growth rate accelerating slightly by 0.1 percentage point from the first half of 2012.

Industrial value-added output grew 10 percent in the first nine months of the year, 0.5 percentage point lower than growth in the first six months of 2012.

During recent talks on economic conditions, Premier Wen Jiabao said China's economic growth had started to stabilize and witnessed positive changes with the economy running well in the third quarter.

The country has made "stabilizing growth" a top priority this year amid the economy's downward pressure. The government has quickened the process of export tax rebates for enterprises as one of the measures to stabilize trade. It has also approved a raft of investment projects to shore up growth.

The central bank has twice cut the reserve requirement ratio for banks and lowered benchmark interest rates this year.

Challenged by a sluggish external market and global economic woes, China lowered its full-year growth target for 2012 to 7.5 percent in early

March, after its economy grew 9.2 percent year-on-year in 2011.