

Asia week ahead: Fourth-quarter growth numbers dominate the calendar

Moderating GDP contraction in the final quarter of 2020 remains the baseline for most Asian economies. But having said that, markets may shrug off the data and instead focus on what's shaping the region's economic outlook in 2021



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What to expect from 4Q GDP?

Hong Kong SAR, Korea, Taiwan and the Philippines will release their GDP performance in the final quarter of 2020.

Like China, Taiwan continued to buck the region-wide negative GDP trend in the last quarter of 2020. Not only staying in the positive territory, but growth also gained further traction to our house forecast of 4.2% year-on-year in 4Q from 3.9% in 3Q. Accelerating exports are driving the growth - a trend hinging on how the global semiconductor cycle pans out this year. As of now, it seems to be in full swing, given the strong electronics exports in December.

Moderating GDP contraction remains the baseline for other Asian countries too with the Philippines continuing to be the region's underperformer

The electronics-led export argument holds good for Korea too, though it may not turn the corner into positive territory as the rapid spread of the virus depressed consumer and business confidence and brought a decade-high unemployment rate of 4.6%.

The low base year effect seems to be the only hope of a little less negative growth in Hong Kong. That said, our house view of steep GDP contraction in 4Q, by -5.0% YoY than -3.5% in 3Q, is probably a reflection of this economy losing its lustre as the world's gateway to China.

Moderating GDP contraction remains the baseline for other Asian countries too with the Philippines continuing to be the region's underperformer with another quarter of double-digit GDP contraction (ING forecast -10.4% YoY in 4Q vs. -11.5% in 3Q). This is because the pandemic weighed down domestic demand and exports failed to catch up despite its high electronics content.

➔ What else to look out for?

Lots of December industrial production releases will help refine GDP estimates for the last quarter, though Korean and Taiwanese data would be of little use as we also get their GDP figures. However, forward-looking indicators like consumer and business sentiment indices from Korea should be of some interest.

We don't see CPI inflation figures from either Singapore or Australia causing any ripples in the markets either

That leaves us looking out for December industrial production from Japan and Thailand where sluggish export recovery sustained the negative spell on manufacturing growth. Singapore also reports industrial production data, which will indicate likely direction of revision to the -3.8% YoY advance 4Q GDP estimate released earlier this month. Also, look out for Singapore's jobs report for the fourth-quarter, which should show an unchanged unemployment rate at 3.6%.

Lastly, we don't see CPI inflation figures from either Singapore or Australia causing any ripples in the markets. Prices continue to be under pressure from weak consumer spending, which together with sluggish growth prospects argue for sustained policy accommodation ahead.

Asia Economic Calendar

Country	Time	Data/event	ING	Survey	Prev.
Monday 25 January					
Singapore	0700	Dec Core CPI (YoY%)	-0.1		-0.1
	0700	Dec Consumer Price Index (YoY%)	0.0		-0.1
Taiwan	0800	Dec Industrial Output (YoY%)	4.2		7.8
	0800	Dec Money supply (M2) (%YoY)	7.6		7.6
South Korea	2300	Q4 GDP Growth (QoQ/YoY%) Advance	1.5/-0.9		2.1/-1.1
Tuesday 26 January					
Singapore	0500	Dec Manufacturing Output (MoM/YoY%)	-2.0/13.0		7.2/17.9
Hong Kong	0900	Dec Imports	8.2		5.1
	0900	Dec Exports	10.9		5.6
	0900	Dec Trade balance	-25.0		-25.6
South Korea	2100	Jan BoK Consumer Sentiment Index	95.4		89.8
Wednesday 27 January					
China	0130	Dec Industrial Profit (YoY%)	27.0		15.5
Thailand	0330	Dec Manufacturing Prod (YoY%)	-2.4		0.4
South Korea	2100	Feb BOK Manufacturing BSI	80.0		77.0
	2100	Feb BOK Non-manufacturing BSI	70.0		64.0
Thursday 28 January					
Philippines	0200	Q4 GDP (YoY%)	-10.4		-11.5
Singapore	0230	Q4 Unemployment Rate Prelim SA	3.6		3.6
South Korea	2300	Dec Industrial Output (MoM/YoY%)	-0.5/-2.0		0.3/0.5
Friday 29 January					
Malaysia	0400	Dec Imports	-10.0		-9.0
	0400	Dec Exports	4.0		4.3
	0400	Dec Trade balance	24.7		16.8
Thailand	0730	Dec Current Account	-0.9		-1.5
Taiwan	0800	Q4 GDP (YoY%) Prelim	4.2		3.9
Hong Kong	0830	Dec 4Q20 GDP - advance (YoY%)	-5.0		-3.5

Source: ING, Refinitiv, *GMT