Good MornING Asia - 4 May 2020

Comments from the US' Mike Pompeo about the origin of the coronavirus together with a suggestion from President Trump that he will impose tariffs on China because of the outbreak are not helping risk sentiment and are pushing USDCNY higher

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USD/CNY rising

Our Economist for Greater China, Iris Pang, like most of us, is obliged to produce spot forecasts on a range of market indicators, as well as the usual macro numbers. It is one of those parts of the job that carries little upside. And the standing USD/CNY 7.25 forecast for end 2Q20 has not been criticism-free.

But the recent rhetoric from the US is beginning to make it look quite a promising call.

For a few weeks now, mutterings and criticism from the US administration about the origins of the Covid-19 outbreak have been growing. These reached a crescendo at the end of last week, with President Trump reported in Bloomberg to have threatened to impose tariffs on China in retaliation for the Covid-19 outbreak and US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, talking of the "enormous evidence" linking the outbreak to the Wuhan virus laboratory.

We haven't seen or heard any of the evidence referred to, so we can't comment on that. But it does look as if one of the underpinnings of the 7.25 call - namely a return to trade tension - is turning into reality. If this continues, then a 7.25 end 2Q20 USD/CNY result will suit our forecasts very well.

For those of you who can still remember the trade war, one of the key results of enhanced trade tension was - stronger USD (so weaker everything else, but especially CNY), and a drop in risk appetite. It is possible that the US administration feels emboldened to restart the trade rhetoric given the rally stocks have undergone in recent weeks. If so, Friday's S&P 500 sell-off comes as a reminder that the underlying drivers for markets have not changed. And given the incredibly weak backdrop, a return to trade war really has the potential to be even more damaging (to both sides) than it was under version 1.0. This needs close watching.

Shape of things to come

South Korea posted April CPI data showing a hefty 0.6% month-on-month drop (0.1% year-on-year). The full release shows, as one might expect, most of the damage coming through the transport component, which fell 3.5% MoM reflecting the collapse in global crude oil prices. Clothing and footwear fell 1.5% on dampened demand, and education costs also fell sharply.

The release tells us two things:

1. It provides a benchmark for other upcoming CPI releases in the region (they could be substantial) and
2. It suggests that the Bank of Korea will cut rates a further 25bp from their current 0.75% at the 28 May meeting.

Asia today

Just to reinforce my earlier comments on China and the Trade War, Iris Pang also writes today, "USD/CNH jumped to 7.13 during the May holiday from 7.06 on Friday, which should be a market reaction to the possible restart of the trade war and technology war as US President Trump has warned of a possible increase in tariffs on Chinese goods. The market will continue to react to any news on the trade and technology war as this will put pressure on both Chinese and US economies".

Iris also adds, "On data, today we will have the Taiwan Markit manufacturing PMI which should come in at only 42.2 due to the deferred release of a new model of smartphone. We will also have Hong Kong GDP growth for 1Q20, where we expect a -10%YoY reading, while the government expects a range of -4% to -7%YoY for the whole of 2020".

And ASEAN news from Prakash Sakpal:

Malaysia: March trade figures are due today. Firmer exports from most Asian economies in March impart some upside risk to the -8.3% YoY consensus on Malaysia's exports. However, underlying the weak consensus is the dent to activity due to the Covid-19 lockdown started in mid-March. Trade is the last piece of economic data for the central bank (BNM) beginning its two-day policy meeting today. We expect a 50bp cut in the overnight policy rate to 2.00%.

Singapore: The April manufacturing PMI is due today, with expectations centred on a drop in the index to an all-time low of 40.0 from 45.4 in March. The extended circuit-breaker measures mean the surprising manufacturing strength shown in the first quarter is poised to be reversed in the current quarter, leaving GDP on a path to a record contraction.

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ASEAN Morning Bytes

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EM Space: Data calendar is loaded this week and should give direction for trading

- **General Asia:** After market players reacted to hopeful trends on the virus front last week, economic data should remind investors of the bleak economic situation ahead even as governments from previous hotspots ready the gradual reopening of their economies. Regional PMI manufacturing data kicked off the data dump on Monday, with economies registering deep contractions with most countries employing some form of lockdown by April. The economic calendar is packed in the coming days with growth, trade and inflation data all set for release with downbeat reports likely the backdrop for trading this week.
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2.00%.

- **Indonesia**: Indonesia reports data on inflation for April, with market consensus at 2.8% as depressed crude oil prices help keep price pressures at bay for the time being. Bank Indonesia (BI) Governor Warjiyo indicated that inflation will likely be within target this year, likely due to lower oil prices and subdued demand due to slowing economic growth momentum. We expect inflation to remain well-behaved in the coming months, leaving the door open for further easing from the central bank should the recent IDR rally be sustained as foreign investors return to snatch up both equities and bonds.

What to look out for: Regional data and Covid-19 developments

- Malaysia trade (4 May)
- Indonesia inflation (4 May)
- Hong Kong GDP (4 May)
- US factory orders (4 May)
- Philippines remittances (4 May)
- Thailand inflation (5 May)
- Philippines inflation (5 May)
- Indonesia GDP (5 May)
- Singapore retail sales (5 May)
- Malaysia BNM policy (5 May)
- Hong Kong retail sales (5 May)
- US trade (5 May)
- Hong Kong and Singapore PMI (6 May)
- Philippines trade (6 May)
- Taiwan inflation (6 May)
- US ADP employment (6 May)
- China Caixin PMI services (7 May)
- Philippines GDP (7 May)
- China trade (7 May)
- US initial jobless claims (7 May)
- Malaysia industrial production (8 May)
- Taiwan trade (8 May)
- US non-farm payrolls (8 May)

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Asia week ahead: Central banks in the spotlight, again

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Source: Shutterstock

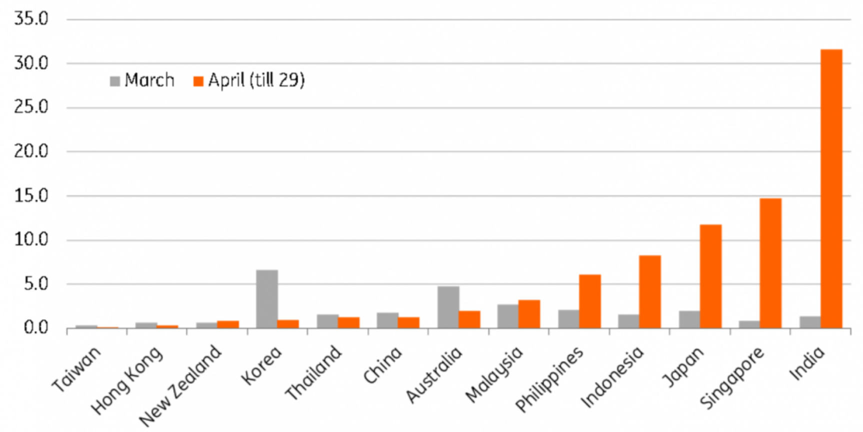
Better for some, bad for other

Next week kicks off with the April Purchasing Manufacturing Index (PMIs), providing some clues about the state of Asian economies coming into the second quarter. China PMIs have provided temporary relief for the market in that both manufacturing and services activity expanded for a second straight month in April. We may see similar PMI results for some more, but not all, economies as the accelerated spread of Covid-19 and tighter movement restrictions dented activity further this month. India and some Southeast Asian countries seem to be a lot worse (see graph).

Trade figures from China, Korea, Taiwan, Malaysia, and the Philippines will underscore a significant hit to global demand in the ongoing pandemic. And, retail sales data in Australia, Hong Kong, and Singapore will inform about the dent to consumer spending as will Japan's household spending data, though this might go unnoticed in the golden week holiday. Price pressures continue to abate with weakening demand. Inflation in some countries has already drifted into negative territory. Look out for consumer price data in Korea, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand.

The GDP release season is also in full swing, with first-quarter data due in Hong Kong, Indonesia, and the Philippines. As with everywhere else, these will probably be the worst figures in nearly a decade, with a fall of as much as 10% in Hong Kong compared to a year ago.

Monthly rise in number of Covid-19 infections in Asia



Source: Worldometers in ascending order of April data

Still, worrisome for central banks

Central bank policy meetings in Australia and Malaysia are the highlights of the week. It could be a mixed bag of events though, more likely a non-event in Australia and accelerated policy easing in Malaysia.

In an off-cycle easing move in March, the Reserve Bank of Australia nudged its policy rate to an all-time low of 0.25%, leaving no room for it to fall further. At the same time, the RBA also launched a quantitative easing (QE) programme to inject more cash into the economy. These moves suggest there's not much scope for action next week given that the country has also managed to bring the Covid-19 spread under control. Moreover, the pause in the RBA's bond purchases this week even raise the question of whether it will stay the course ahead, while Governor Philip Lowe has ruled out a move to negative interest rates.

This shifts the spotlight onto Bank Negara Malaysia's policy meeting. We have long been calling for a 50 basis point cut in the BNM's overnight policy rate to 2.00% at the May meeting, bringing it to the previous low seen during the 2009 global financial crisis. Given a far bigger scale of the current crisis than the GFC though, we would anticipate a much bigger response. The 50bp rate cut since January 2020 compares with a 150bp cut in the span of less than three months at the height of the GFC. We don't think the central bank can afford to wait much longer, as GDP is heading for the steepest fall this quarter since the 1998 Asian crisis and inflation has already moved into negative territory. We don't think the BNM will stop at a 50bp cut next week, especially with protracted deflation ahead keeping real interest rates high.

Key events

Country	Time	Data/event	ING	Survey	Prev.
		Monday 4 May			
India	0600	Apr Nikkei Manufacturing PMI	-	-	51.8
Hong Kong	0930	1Q A GDP (Q) (YoY%)	-10.0	-	-2.9
	0930	1Q A GDP (Q) (QoQ% SA)	-	-	-0.3
Malaysia	0500	Mar Exports (YoY%)	-10.0	-3.0	11.8
	0500	Mar Imports (YoY%)	-8.0	-1.4	11.3
	0500	Mar Trade balance (RM bn)	11.6	-	12.6
Indonesia	0500	Apr CPI core (YoY%)	-	2.9	2.9
	0500	Apr CPI (YoY%)	2.8	2.9	3.0
Philippines	0130	Apr Nikkei Manufacturing PMI	-	-	39.7
Singapore	1400	Apr Purchasing Managers Index	-	-	45.4
Taiwan	0130	Apr Nikkei Manufacturing PMI	49.8	-	50.4
South Korea	0000	Apr CPI (MoM%/YoY%)	-/-	-0.2/0.4	-0.2/1
	0130	Apr Nikkei Manufacturing PMI	-	-	44.2
		Tuesday 5 May			
Hong Kong	0930	Mar Retail sales value (YoY%)	-80.0	-	-44.0
	0930	Mar Retail sales volume (YoY%)	-83.0	-	-46.7
Malaysia	0800	Overnight Policy Rate	2.0	-	2.5
Indonesia	0500	1Q GDP (YoY%)	4.0	4.5	5.0
	0500	1Q GDP (QoQ%)	-	-	-1.7
Philippines	0200	Apr CPI (YoY%)	2.0	-	2.5
Singapore	0600	Mar Retail sales value (YoY%)	-16.0	-	-8.6
	0600	Mar Retail sales value (MoM% SA)	-4.4	-	-8.9
Taiwan	-	Apr Forex Reserves (US$bn)	481.5	-	480.4
Thailand	0430	Apr CPI (YoY%)	-2.0	-	-0.5
	0430	Apr Core-CPI (YoY%)	0.3	-	0.5
		Wednesday 6 May			
India	0600	Apr Nikkei Services PMI	-	-	49.3
Hong Kong	0130	Apr Nikkei PMI	-	-	34.9
Philippines	0200	Mar Trade balance (US$mn)	-1817.0	-	-1656.0
	0200	Mar Exports (YoY%)	-18.3	-	2.8
	0200	Mar Imports (YoY%)	-6.1	-	-11.6
Taiwan	0900	Apr WPI (YoY%)	-9.1	-	-7.3
	0900	Apr CPI (YoY%)	-1.5	-	0.0
		Thursday 7 May			
China	-	Apr Exports (YoY%)	-9.5	-10.0	-6.6
	-	Apr Imports (YoY%)	11.0	-11.4	-1.0
	-	Apr Trade Balance (US$bn)	-10.1	9.1	19.9
	-	Apr Forex Reserves (US$bn)	3090.0	-	3060.6
Hong Kong	-	Apr Forex Reserves (US$bn)	-	-	437.5
Philippines	0300	1Q GDP (YoY%)	3.9	-	6.4
	0300	1Q GDP (Q) (QoQ% SA)	-	-	2.2
		Friday 8 May			
China	-	1Q20 Current account balance (US$bn)	40.5	-	40.5
Indonesia	-	Apr Forex reserves (US$bn)	121.3	-	121.0
Malaysia	0500	Mar Industrial production (YoY%)	-5.0	-	5.8
	0800	Apr 30 Forex reserves (US$bn)	-	-	102.0
Taiwan	0900	Apr Exports (YoY%)	1.7	-	-0.6
	0900	Apr Imports (YoY%)	10.1	-	0.5
	0900	Apr Trade balance (US$bn)	1.8	-	2.8

Source: Bloomberg ING

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