Good MornING Asia - 5 November 2019

As expected the week is off on a positive note of increased risk appetite stemmed from hopes of the US and China coming to a partial trade deal later this month. There is nothing on the Asian calendar to derail the positive sentiment today. The key highlights of the day are central bank policy meetings in Australia and Malaysia.

In this bundle

ASEAN Morning Bytes

Market players continue to focus on developments on the trade front with the US and China seemingly closing in on a partial deal.

EM Space: US and China believed to be inching closer to phase one agreement

- **General Asia:** As expected the week is off on a positive note of increased risk appetite stemmed from hopes of the US and China coming to a partial trade deal later this month. There is nothing on the Asian calendar to derail the positive sentiment today. The key highlights of the day are central bank policy meetings in Australia and Malaysia.
- **Malaysia:** Bank Negara Malaysia announces its policy decision at 3 pm local time. Yesterday's weak trade report showed a steepest export drop in three years was timely support to our view of a 25bp rate cut today. Accelerated declines in both exports and imports in 3Q point to slower GDP growth, while persistent external risks are likely to hold back growth in the period ahead. This tips the balance in favour of a pre-emptive easing as continued low inflation and stable to strong currency provide scope for such a policy.
- **Thailand:** In further support of our call of a 25bp Bank of Thailand policy cut tomorrow, Finance MinisterUttama Savanayna signaled a move to narrow the central bank's policy target of inflation, currently 1-4%. Barring occasional hits, inflation has undershot the target since 2015 (0.7% YTD in 2019). So, cutting it down to a reasonable level makes more sense for better policymaking. We see a likelihood of a point target of 2% inflation, instead of a new lower range.

- **Indonesia:** 3Q GDP report is due with the consensus of a modest slowdown in growth to 5.0% from 5.05% in the 2Q. Despite four policy rate cuts this year, Bank Indonesia (BI) continues to be accommodative and a downside GDP surprise could nudge it for further easing ahead. Household consumption is expected to support the headline GDP growth, though that may not be enough to offset drags from fixed capital formation and net exports.
- **Philippines:** October CPI is due with consensus centered on a 0.8% YoY inflation, slightly slower than the 0.9% in the previous month. The index-heavy food component is expected to remain in negative territory due to base effects, while transport costs will likely also push headline inflation below 1%. Our forecast for the month is 0.9% inflation. The Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) has flagged a pause in easing for now though we expect it to cut policy rates again in early 2020 should inflation continue to stay below the target.

What to look out for: regional growth and central bank data

- Philippines inflation (5 November)
- China Caixin PMI Services (5 November)
- Indonesia GDP (5 November)
- Malaysia BNM meeting (5 November)
- US trade (5 November)
- ISM services PMI (5 November)
- Philippines trade (6 November)
- Thailand BoT meeting (6 November)
- Taiwan inflation (6 November)
- Philippines GDP (7 November)
- Indonesia GIR (7 November)
- Malaysia GIR (7 November)
- Thailand consumer confidence (7 November)

2.75%

ING forecast of BNM policy rate

After a 25bp cut today

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Article | 4 November 2019 Malaysia

Malaysia’s weak trade report lifts odds of BNM rate cut

The electronic export vigour observed earlier in the year has ended. And with continued external headwinds, downside growth risks are rising. This is why we are bucking the consensus view of stable BNM policy. We expect a 25 basis point policy rate cut tomorrow

Source: shutterstock

-6.8% September export growth

Worse than expected

Steepest export fall in three years

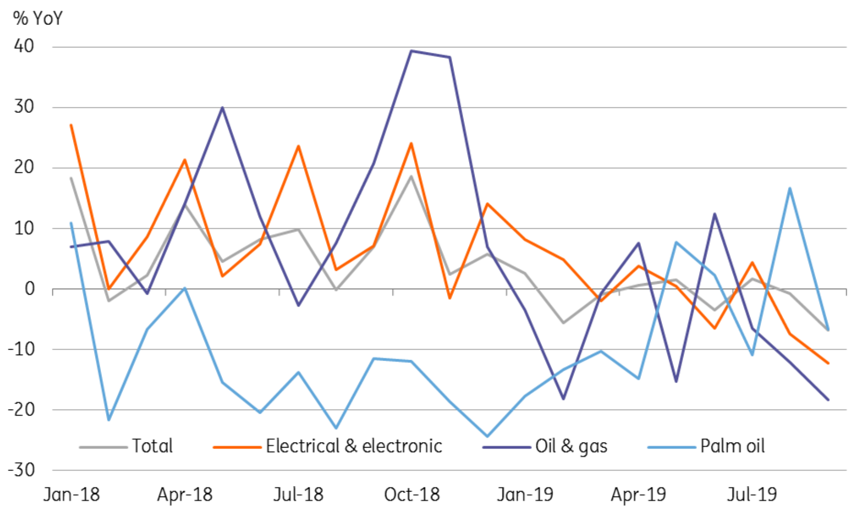
A second consecutive month of negative growth suggests to us that Malaysia's exports are finally feeling the global demand slump after their relative outperformance earlier this year.

A 6.8% year-on-year export fall was a big downside surprise for the consensus centred on zero growth. Following on from a 0.8% fall in August, this was the weakest print since October 2016.

Although part of the steeper year-on-year export decline is the result of a high base year effect, the second straight month-on-month fall (-4.5% followed -7.5% in August) reinforced that the weak trend is really getting a grip on exports.

Just as electronics helped the overall export outperformance earlier this year, electronics are now leading the weakness. Electrical and electronics exports, accounting for about 38% of total exports, were down 12% YoY in September on the back of a 16% fall in semiconductor shipments. Commodities were also a drag, with an 18% fall in oil and gas and a 7% fall in palm oil exports.

Export growth by key categories



Source: Bloomberg, CEIC, ING

Firmer imports, narrower trade surplus

Imports were slightly better than expected, recording 2.4% YoY growth (consensus 1.4%). Don't be misled by a significant positive swing from -12.5% in August as reflecting any domestic demand strength. Instead, this too largely was the base year effect as monthly growth continued to be negative.

The confluence of weak export growth and firmer import growth produced a narrower trade surplus. At MYR 8.3 billion, the trade surplus was the lowest in a year, beating the consensus for a widening to MYR 14.2 billion from a surplus of MYR 10.9 billion in the previous month.

What all this means for 3Q GDP growth …

Aggregating the data for the third quarter of the year reveals that both export and import growth rates deteriorated in the last quarter. At -1.9% YoY, 3Q export growth was down from -0.4% in 2Q. The slump in imports was steeper to -5.8% from -1.4% in a sign that weakness in domestic demand gained momentum over these quarters.

Yet what we read from the MYR 8.4 billion widening of the trade surplus in 3Q from a year ago is that net trade likely sustained its positive contribution to GDP growth for the fourth straight quarter. Nonetheless, we are afraid this won't be enough for the economy to continue to buck the global growth slowdown after upside GDP growth surprises in the first half of 2019.

Look out for 3Q GDP data next week (15 November). We expect a slight dip in GDP growth to 4.8% from 4.9% in 2Q.

... and for the central bank policy?

Bank Negara Malaysia's (BNM) Monetary Policy Committee has begun its two-day policy meeting today, the last meeting of the year. The policy decision is expected at around 3 pm local time tomorrow. The consensus has yet to come to terms with the need for one more 25 basis point BNM policy rate cut this year (the last cut was in May), which has been our call since August.

The electronic export vigour observed earlier in the year has ended. And with continued external headwinds, the downside growth risks are rising. This is why we are bucking the consensus view of stable BNM policy. We expect a 25bp BNM rate cut tomorrow.

Today's trade figures come as a timely boost to our BNM policy view.

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