Good MornING Asia - 9 April 2021

What's in store for Asian markets next week? China and Singapore are the first Asian countries to unveil their 1Q21 GDP performance, while three Asian central banks including Singapore assess monetary policy next week

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Asia week ahead: 1Q21 GDP season kicks off

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Source: Shutterstock

How did economies perform in 1Q?

China and Singapore are the first Asian countries to release their 1Q21 GDP reports.

An exceptional surge in China's activity in Jan-Feb imparts upside risk to our house view of 12% YoY 1Q GDP growth.

China was the first to enter the Covid-19 economic slump that dented its GDP growth by -6.8% year-on-year in the first quarter of 2020. That low base effect positioned it for a strong bounce in yearly growth in the first quarter of this year. Attesting to this was an exceptional surge in high-frequency activity indicators -- a 61% YoY jump in exports and around 35% YoY surges in industrial production, fixed-asset investment, and retail sales in Jan-Feb.

The March figures for these indicators will also arrive simultaneously as 1Q GDP, and they should continue to reinforce ongoing economic strength. This imparts upside risk to our house view of 12% YoY 1Q GDP growth, which is sitting at the bottom of market estimates ranging up to 22% growth.

The electronics-led export surge is leading Singapore's way out of the record economic slump of last year.

The base effect was less pronounced for Singapore, and so will be the bounce back. However, we don't think it would be as bad as some in the market see it with their negative growth forecast for 1Q. On the contrary, we expect Singapore to be among the first few Asian economies reporting positive GDP growth in 1Q, albeit mildly positive. The electronics-led export surge is leading Singapore's way out of the record economic slump of last year. Underpinning this further next week will be the non-oil domestic exports figures for March. We consider our +0.2% YoY 1Q GDP view subject to more upside than downside risk.

Elsewhere, manufacturing and trade releases from India and Indonesia should inform about the 1Q GDP performance of these economies. At the same time, Australia and Korea's jobs reports should do the same about their GDP growth.

What should central banks make of it?

Three Asian central banks will be reviewing their current monetary policy in light of the latest economic performance. These are from Korea, Singapore and New Zealand.

We don't think the MAS is in a rush to alter its neutral policy stance. The market hasn't priced in any policy move either.

The first one is the Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS), releasing its half-yearly policy statement alongside the 1Q21 GDP report on Wednesday, 14 April. The MAS operates monetary policy by managing the Singapore dollar nominal effective exchange rate within an undisclosed trading band, or S$-NEER policy band. The shift a year ago to a neutral monetary policy targeting zero S$-NEER appreciation has served well for the export-driven recovery. We don't think the MAS is in a rush to alter this policy stance just yet, given that the sustained Covid-19 spread globally has been threatening export recovery ahead. Moreover, with the S$-NEER remaining near the mid-point of the estimated policy band, the market hasn't priced in any policy move either. This is why we expect the MAS to stay the current course and leave the slope, the width and the level of the S$-NEER policy band intact next week.

There are unlikely to be any fireworks from the Bank of Korea or the Reserve Bank of New Zealand as both are expected to keep their policy rates, currently 0.50% and 0.25%, respectively, on hold.

India's CPI inflation data for March comes a bit late for the Reserve Bank of India after the central bank left the main policy rates unchanged at the meeting this week but opened its liquidity taps wide to soften the impact of Covid-19 second wave. But this data still matters for the RBI's future policy course, especially as inflation has started to rise towards the top end of the RBI's 2-6% policy target range. Our forecast for March is 5.7% YoY, up from 5.0% in February.

Asia Economic Calendar

Country	Time	Data/event	ING	Survey	Prev.
		Monday 12 April			
China	-	Mar Aggregate finance (Yuan bn)	3802		1712.9
	-	Mar Financial institution loans (Yuan bn)	3023.8		1359.4
	-	Mar Money supply (M2) (%YoY)	10.1		10.1
India	1300	Mar CPI Inflation (YoY%)	5.7		5.03
	1300	Feb Industrial Output (YoY%)	-5.3		-1.6
		Tuesday 13 April			
China	-	Mar Exports	32.7	32.7	60.6
	-	Mar Imports	24.6	21.6	22.2
	-	Mar Trade Balance	80.1	52.55	103.25
South Korea	0000	Mar Unemployment Rate	-		4.00
		Wednesday 14 April			
India	0730	Mar WPI Inflation (YoY%)	6.1		4.17
South Korea	0055	Mar Unemployment rate (% SA)	3.9		4.0
Singapore	0000	1Q21 GDP - adv (QoQ SAAR/YoY%)	8.3/0.2		15.9/-2.4
	0000	MAS semiannual policy statement			
		Thursday 15 April			
India	1230	Mar Trade Deficit Govt -USD bn	12.7		12.6
	1230	Mar Imports (YoY%)	38.0		7.00
	1230	Mar Exports (YoY%)	43.0		0.70
Indonesia	0500	Mar Consumer Confidence Index	-		85.8
	0500	Mar Exports (%YoY)	9.1		8.6
	0500	Mar Imports (%YoY)	5.6		14.9
	0500	Mar Trade balance (US$m)	1240.9		2010
South Korea	0200	Apr Bank of Korea Base Rate	0.5		0.50
Philippines	-	Feb OCW remittances (% YoY)	-2.0		-1.70
		Friday 16 April			
China	0300	Mar Industrial Output (YoY%)	25.0	15.6	35.1
	0300	Mar Retail Sales (YoY%)	28.0	27.2	33.8
	0300	Mar Fixed asset invest (YTD, %YoY)	25.0		35.0
	0300	Q1 GDP (YoY%)	12.0		2.6/6.5
Singapore	0030	Mar NODX (MoM/YoY%)	-2.4/6.4		8.2/4.2

Source: ING, Refinitiv, *GMT

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Philippines: Imports expand after long slump but trade deficit stays modest

Philippine imports post first expansion in 21 months but this isn't a clear-cut sign of recovery just yet

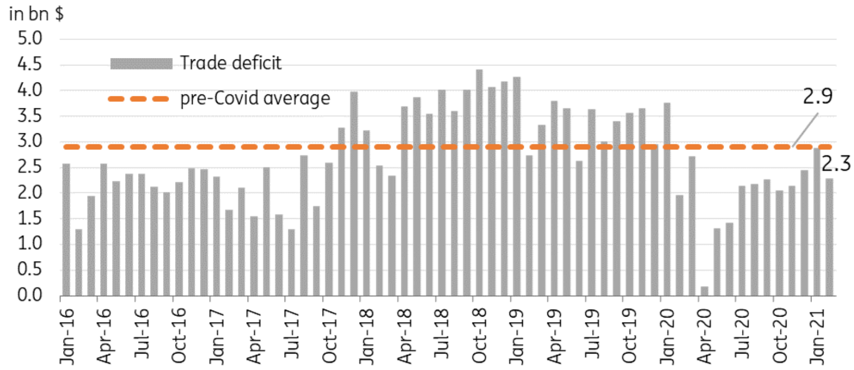
Source: Jun Acullador

-$2.3 bn Trade balance

Exports unexpectedly slip but imports rebound after long slump

Philippine February trade data showed exports slip unexpectedly while imports managed to expand for the first time in 21 months. Exports dipped 2.3%YoY (vs +2.7% expectation) with meagre gains in the mainstay semiconductor sector (0.4%) unable to offset the 5.5% contraction for the rest of the export sector with shipments to ASEAN partners down for the month. Meanwhile, imports finally grew after an almost 2-year slump with most sectors expanding, led by raw materials imports (6.4%), capital goods (5.7%) and consumer imports (3.9%). The 2.7%YoY rebound in imports, however, might be more a result of base effects rather than a true recovery for the sector with the economy still stuck in recession amidst an ongoing 12-month lockdown with daily Covid-19 infections spiking in March. With exports down and imports expanding, the trade deficit remained modest at $2.3 bn, well below the pre-Covid 19 average of $2.9bn which has lent some support to the PHP since 2020.

Philippine trade deficit



Source: Philippine Statistics Authority

Imports to sustain expansion but trade deficit to stay modest

Inbound shipments of goods and services will continue to expand in the coming months, benefiting from a favorable base and with manufacturers replenishing depleted inventories. But although we've seen growth in raw materials and capital goods, overall investment activity in the Philippines remains soft with corporates and households postponing expansion activities until the economic outlook improves. Meanwhile, exports may face some challenges in the near term with global trade expected to take a hit after select countries reinstate lockdowns to deal with spiking Covid-19 cases in their areas. Despite these trends, we expect the trade deficit to remain modest compared to pre-Covid-19 averages which should translate to a current account surplus and near-term support for the Peso.

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