

Bank of England to Hold Rates as Clouds Gather Over Outlook



Bank of England officials will probably keep policy on hold next week as they acknowledge that the economic outlook has worsened materially since May.

All but one of the 24 economists surveyed by Bloomberg predict a unanimous vote to maintain the benchmark rate at 0.75%. The risk of a no-deal departure from the European Union under new Prime Minister Boris Johnson and an increasingly gloomy global outlook suggest that policy makers will be cautious.

Officials have scaled back their rate-hike rhetoric and investors are increasingly pricing in rate cuts as the risk of a disorderly Brexit grows.

But with a falling pound and stronger wage growth threatening to fuel inflation, officials potentially face a dilemma. Governor Mark Carney is expected to address the trade-off between growth and prices after the BOE publishes its quarterly Inflation Report, alongside the monetary-policy decision, at noon on Thursday.

Economists are virtually unanimous in predicting the BOE will cut its 2019 growth forecast, with around half predicting a downgrade to the following two years. Officials are also widely expected to hike their inflation projections.

Policy makers have softened their language about the possibility of interest-rate increases. Michael Saunders, who led the charge for the BOE's last two rate hikes, has suggested he's in no rush to begin another push, telling Bloomberg the economy right now is "clearly not overheating."

Chief Economist Andy Haldane, also considered among the more hawkish members of the Monetary Policy Committee, said in a speech this week that the case for keeping policy unchanged is strong and the group should proceed with caution on any loosening.

Carney has also warned that damage to the global economy from rising protectionism could be significant and require a major policy response.

While one economist sees a dissenter on the nine-member rate setting committee calling for an immediate cut, most recent comments point to unanimity.

Officials may try to address the discrepancy between their official forecasts and market expectations. Carney has said they will explore "how best to illustrate" the market "sensitivities."

Source: Bloomberg

France aims for US digital tax deal by late August – minister



France wants to reach a deal with the US on taxing tech giants by a G7 meeting in late August, Economy Minister Bruno Le Maire said Saturday.

He was responding to US President Donald Trump, who on Friday vowed “substantial” retaliation against France for a law passed this month on taxing digital companies even if their headquarters are elsewhere.

The law would affect US-based global giants like Google, Apple, Facebook and Amazon, among others.

‘Foolish’ Emmanuel Macron

Trump denounced French President Emmanuel Macron’s “foolishness”, though they discussed the issue by phone on Friday, according to the White House.

Le Maire told a news conference Saturday: "We wish to work closely with our American friends on a universal tax on digital activities.

Inspired by "We hope between now and the end of August – the G7 heads of state meeting in Biarritz – to reach an agreement."

Leaders of the Group of Seven highly industrialised countries are to meet in the southwestern French city on August 24-26.

Le Maire emphasised that "there is no desire to specifically target American companies," since the three-percent tax would be levied on revenues generated from services to French consumers by all of the world's largest tech firms, including Chinese and European ones.

The law aims to plug a taxation gap that has seen some internet heavyweights paying next to nothing in European countries where they make huge profits as their legal base is in smaller EU states.

Raising a glass

In a move that's rattling the industry, President Trump responded to the French plans by threatening to raise tariffs on French wine. French vintners sold 1.6 billion euros worth of wine last year to American consumers.

Trump derided French wines in a tweet, and later said he might hit them with retaliatory tariffs to French. He made a similar threat last year.

About 20% of French wine is sold in the US, and the Federation of French Wine and Spirits Exports on Saturday expressed concern about tariffs that could hurt "French players in this market, but also their clients and American consumers."

The federation urged French and American authorities to pursue dialogue on the tax issue, expressing hope "that they can quickly find a path to follow to prevent these threats from

materialising.”

Le Maire said the US “should not mix the two issues,” and noted that European wines already face tariffs in the US as do American wines in Europe.

Trump insisted Friday that he has a good relationship with Macron and had just spoken with him.

After initially befriending the US president despite their starkly different worldviews, Macron has increasingly stood up to the impulsive, America-first Trump on trade, climate change and Iran’s nuclear program.

The tech tax is just their latest battleground, and will be a key tension point when the two men meet at a Group of Seven summit in France next month.

France failed to persuade EU partners to impose a Europe-wide tax on tech giants, but is now pushing for an international deal on it with the G7 and the 34 countries of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development.

France has said it would withdraw the tax if an international agreement was reached, and Paris hopes to include all of the OECD countries by the end of 2020.

Chevron wins 90-day Venezuela waiver despite opposition



Bloomberg/Houston

Chevron Corp and four oil services companies won a last-minute US government reprieve to continue producing oil in Venezuela, albeit only for a 90-day period.

The US Treasury Department supported Chevron's request to extend its sanctions waiver by six months, but the majority of other government agencies involved opposed any extension at all, a senior administration official told reporters on a call on Friday. President Donald Trump backed a compromise between the two positions, resulting in the three-month time period.

The extension allows San Ramon, California-based Chevron to essentially keep the lights on and the facility running, but another extension will be harder, the official said.

The company has operated in Venezuela for almost a century, since the discovery of the Boscan field in the 1920s. It has outlasted many other oil companies, including Exxon Mobil Corp, which left after a series of industry nationalisations during Hugo Chavez's tenure as president.

The US Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control said in a statement Friday that Chevron can continue its joint venture with state-owned Petroleos de Venezuela SA until October 25. The previous waiver was due to end yesterday.

Oilfield service companies Schlumberger Ltd, Halliburton Co, Baker Hughes and Weatherford International Plc were also allowed to continue their work in Venezuela for three months. Chevron closed 1.5% lower in New York, at \$123.72.

It's a partial victory for Chevron that leaves the Trump administration with the option of pulling the company out later this year. The impact of any eventual refusal of a Chevron waiver is rising as other production falters, giving the company a bigger and bigger size of the market in the country, the official said.

"Our advice to Chevron would be to start preparing to leave after October," Joseph McMonigle, an analyst for HedgeEye Risk Management, wrote in a note. "We are highly doubtful there will be another extension granted." While Venezuela only accounted for 1% of Chevron's global crude production last year, it remains strategically important as home to the world's largest oil reserves. As the only US major still in the country, it could be first in line for any investments under a new government.

"Our operations in Venezuela continue in compliance with all applicable laws and regulations," Chevron spokesman Ray Fohr said in an e-mailed statement.

In recent months, Chevron made the case to the Trump administration that if it were to leave, its Venezuelan assets could easily be turned over to another operator with little effect on overall production. That could mean the state, or even Russian or Chinese interests would benefit.

The ruling "does indicate Chevron has the ear of key government officials," said Muhammed Ghulam, a Houston-based analyst at Raymond James & Associates.

Venezuela has seen its oil output drop precipitously in recent years. Production is currently below 800,000 barrels a day, down from as much as 3.71mn in 1970, according to data from the oil ministry. At least half of that oil is produced by joint ventures with foreign companies.

Chevron's joint ventures with PDVSA produce more crude in Venezuela on average than those with other companies –

including China National Petroleum Corp and Russia's Rosneft Oil Co. The US producer only receives a portion of that supply, however, amounting to about 40,000 barrels a day from its Venezuelan affiliate in 2018.

The US has refused to recognise Nicolas Maduro as Venezuela's president after an election last year. Sanctions have become its main tool for depriving Maduro of cash and pressuring the military to turn against him.

Earlier this week, Venezuela's opposition-led National Assembly issued a decree that guaranteed Chevron's assets in the country would be protected under a new government led by Juan Guaido.

Oil purchases from Venezuela have become complicated since the US expanded its sanctions regime to include any business done with PDVSA, as the national oil company is also known. Other companies, including Spain's Repsol SA and Italy's Eni SpA, continue to do business with Venezuela.

Sasol's SA plants threatened by emission standards



Sasol said some of its South African plants are under threat from sulfur dioxide emission standards that it will need to comply with by 2025.

The company, South Africa's biggest by revenue, operates plants that convert coal into motor fuel and chemicals in Secunda, east of Johannesburg, and Sasolburg to the south. Flue-gas desulfurisation equipment needed to cut emissions of the gas, which causes acid rain and a range of health complications, is too costly and technically difficult to install, Sasol said.

Globally, as well as in South Africa, the company produces a range of chemicals.

Air pollution in the area around coal-fired plants operated by Sasol and Eskom east and south of Johannesburg rivals levels in some of the most polluted cities on earth. The government has proposed doubling the new limit, but is coming under increased pressure to act against the two companies as it's being sued by environmental activists over the breach of current emission limits.

Sasol will have to comply with new sulfur dioxide emission limits for coal boilers of 500 milligrams of the pollutant per normal cubic meter. Its 2018 emission reports show that some equipment at both Secunda and Sasolburg regularly exceeds 1 000 milligrams.

“The new plant standard for sulfur dioxide will pose a compliance risk challenge for Sasol post 2025 from both a technical and financial feasibility point of view,” the company said in an emailed response to questions. “All commercially available technologies for the abatement of sulfur dioxide to meet new plant standards have been evaluated and we continue to scan for new technologies.” A failure to comply could lead to fines and the closing of plants.

While Sasol has already won a postponement, Eskom is yet to hear whether its applications to have its compliance with the sulfur dioxide emission standards delayed from 2020 until 2025 are successful. It has argued that it would only be economic and feasible to fit the pollution abatement technology on its two newest plants.

Eskom, which operates about 15 coal-fired power stations, has said that flue-gas desulfurisation equipment can cost between R20bn and R40bn per plant. Environmental activists including Greenpeace put the cost significantly lower.

“Sasol is still saying they can’t afford flue-gas desulfurisation,” said Robyn Hugo, program head for pollution and climate change at the Cape Town-based Centre for Environmental Rights. “Sasol itself has confirmed that there are no other means to meet these minimum emission standards.”

In addition to being technically difficult and costly, flue-gas desulfurisation equipment would require that additional water and limestone are brought in from the Northern Cape province. Existing limestone mines in that province are 450 kilometers (280 miles) to 800 kilometers away from Sasol’s

plants.

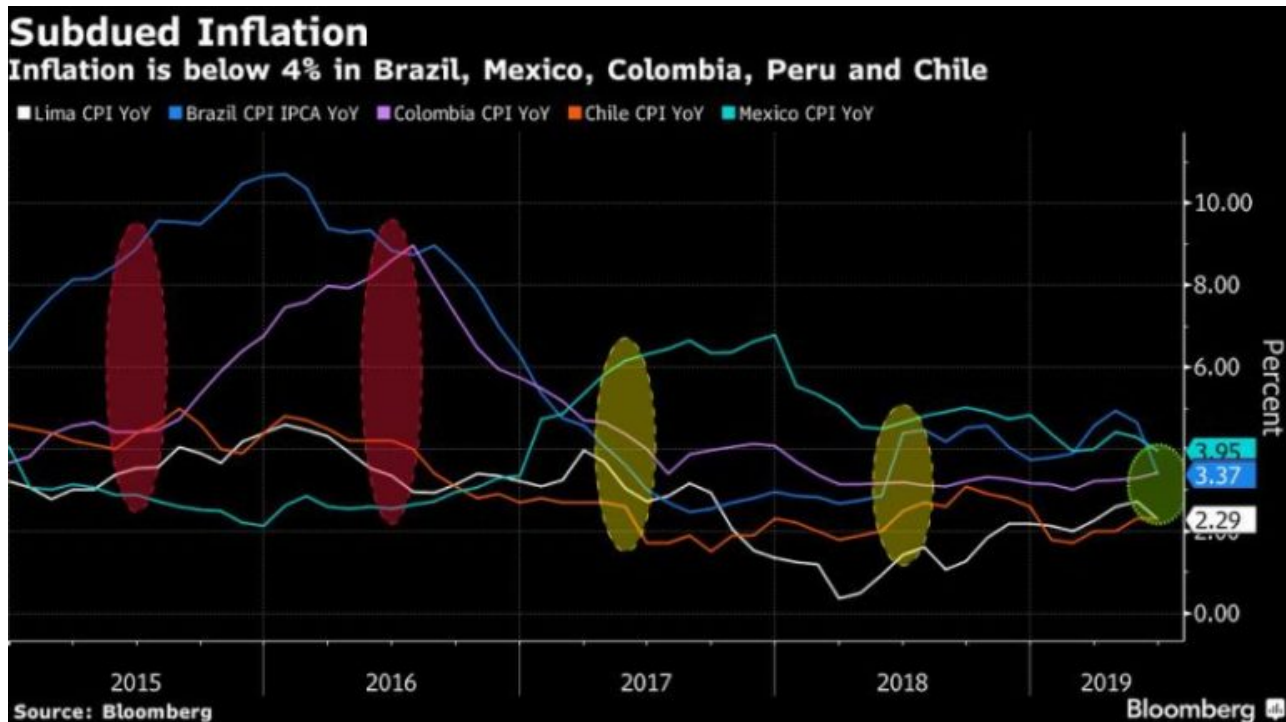
“Flue-gas desulfurisation technology is proven,” Sasol said. Still, “it would be significantly challenging to retrofit” the equipment at the existing plants, it said.

In a separate application for a delay in meeting emission limits for a range of other pollutants, Sasol has asked for permission to significantly exceed caps for nitrogen dioxide, particulate matter and carbon monoxide until 2025. By that time, it says in the application, new equipment should enable it to comply.

On incinerators at its Secunda plant, it wants limits of as much as 90 times the new cap to be applied for carbon monoxide and particulate matter.

Sasol shares have declined by 27% this year as the company battles cost overruns at its Lake Charles chemicals project in Louisiana.

The world economy's biggest week of 2019 as Fed prepares cut



There will be no chance of a summer break for investors or policy makers in coming days as they brace for what might be the busiest week for the world economy this year.

The highlight is Wednesday's decision by the Federal Reserve with markets and economists virtually united in predicting Chairman Jerome Powell and colleagues will cut interest rates for the first time in more than a decade.

What's Likely to Happen?

Some Fed watchers predict officials will cut their benchmark by half a percentage point, but the signal is that they will eschew a bigger move in favor of a quarter point reduction. They will likely also leave open the possibility of further action down the road as they seek to sustain the record-long U.S. expansion and kick start inflation.

"While the Fed cutting rates by a quarter point will hardly be a surprise to financial market participants – as it has been well advertised and is priced in with a relatively high probability – the broader question will be how the Fed telegraphs its intentions regarding additional easing," said Carl Riccadonna, chief U.S. economist at Bloomberg Economics. "Policy makers are keen to avoid getting 'bullied' by the

markets into more than 50 to 75 basis points of rate reductions.”

The Fed isn't the only event with the ability to shape the outlook for the global economy this year.

On Monday, U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer and Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin are set to travel to China for for the first high-level, face-to-face trade negotiations between the world's two biggest economies since talks broke down in May.

Then on Friday, the monthly payrolls report will shed light on whether the Fed's move was necessary. Economists surveyed by Bloomberg predict a 166,000 gain in non-farm jobs in July, slower than the 224,000 of June.

If that's not enough, Bank of Japan policy makers meet on Tuesday amid calls to reinforce their commitment to low rates and Brazil's central bank may cut rates on Wednesday. Thursday sees the release of global manufacturing data amid concerns many industries are already suffering recession.

Here's our weekly rundown of other key economic events:

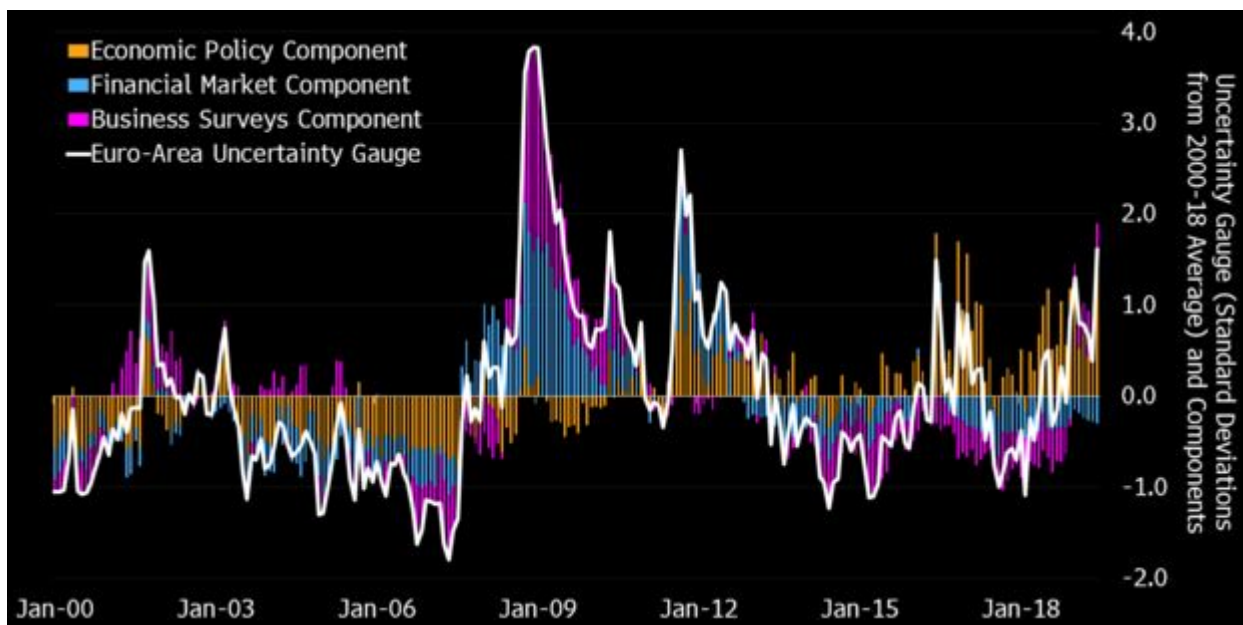
U.S.

As Fed officials begin their discussions on Tuesday they will have some more data with which to assess the economy. Personal income, pending home sales and consumer confidence statistics are all due that morning. Then on Thursday, the ISM manufacturing report is expected to show industry is stabilizing and continuing to expand. Friday's trade data will be pored over for evidence that the skirmish with China is having an effect. Also next week, the Treasury will say on Wednesday how much money it needs to borrow amid rising budget deficits.

Europe, Middle East and Africa

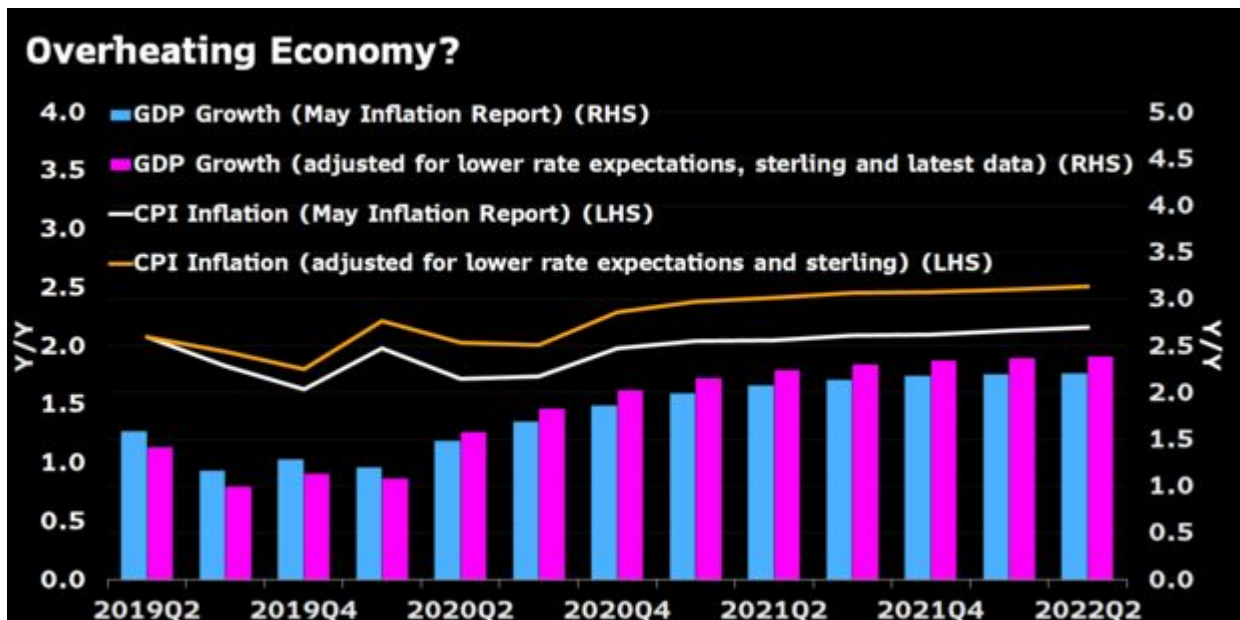
It's a big week for data after European Central Bank President Mario Draghi last week paved the way to cut interest rates in September and perhaps relaunch bond-buying. Tuesday is set to witness another decline in euro-area confidence while the following day is likely to confirm that the economy slowed in the second quarter to half the pace of the 0.4% of the prior three months. Inflation data the same day is expected to show consumer price growth languishing well below the ECB's target of just below 2%. Thursday sees the release of purchasing managers indexes.

New Uncertainty Gauge Shows Damage to Euro-Area Economy



Source: Bloomberg Economics

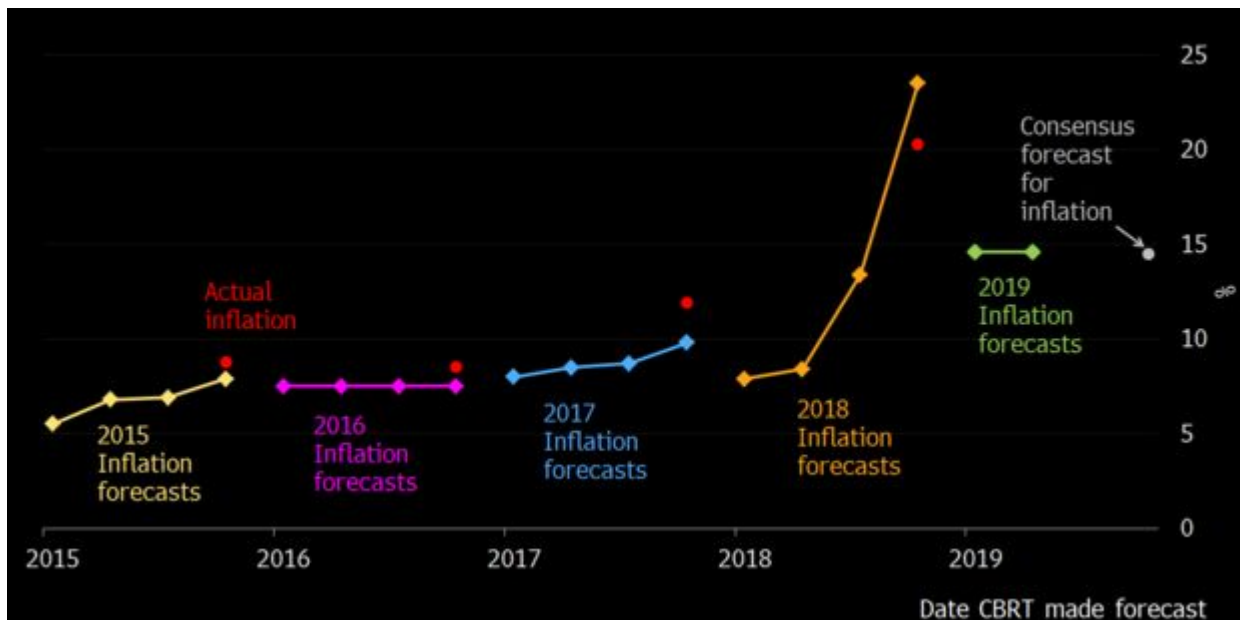
In the U.K., the Bank of England publishes its latest forecasts on Thursday with Bloomberg Economics reckoning it will turn more dovish as the Oct. 31 Brexit deadline nears. The Czech central bank is predicted to leave its benchmark unchanged at 2% on Thursday.



Source: Bank of England, Bloomberg Economics

Turkey's new Central Bank Governor Murat Uysal will face public questioning for the first time on Wednesday when he presents the quarterly inflation report. The lira was relatively unscathed after a 425-basis-point interest-rate cut at his first meeting, the largest in recent Turkish history, investors will be curious as to whether he shares President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's unconventional belief that high interest rates cause inflation. Banks across the Persian Gulf region will probably move to ease if the Fed cuts as expected.

Turkish Central Bank's Inflation Forecast in Line With Consensus



Source: CBRT, Bloomberg

Asia

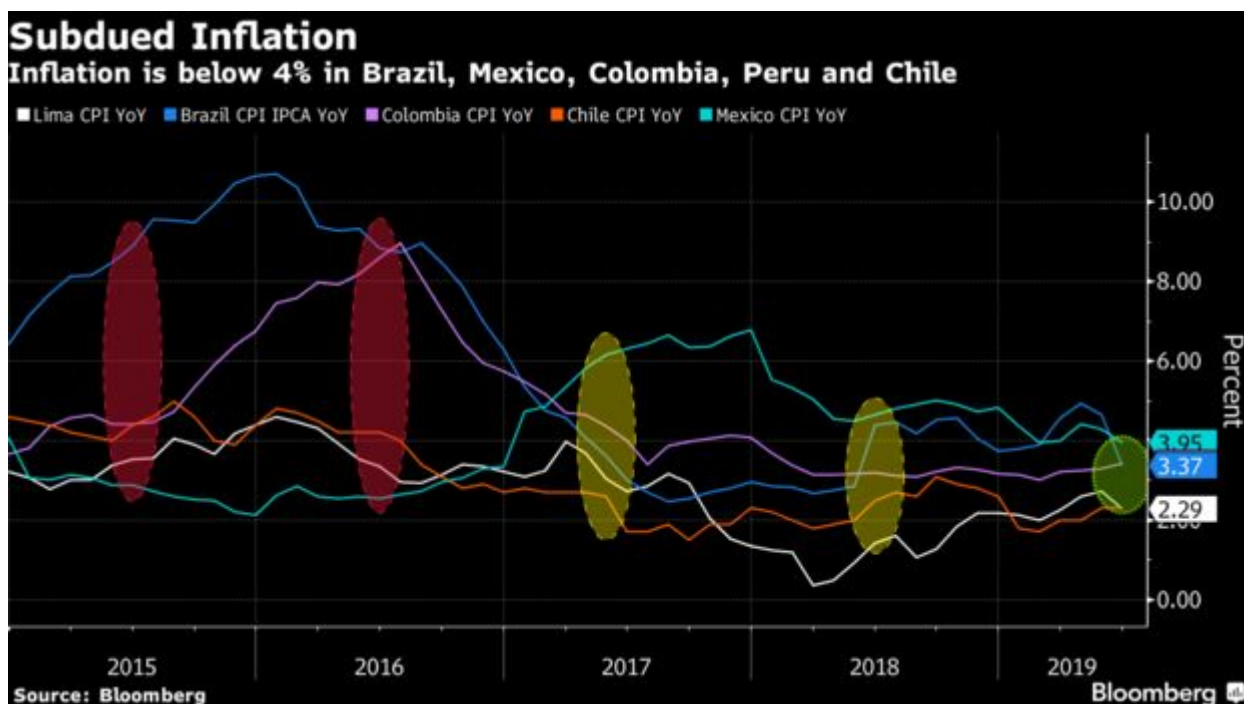
Bank of Japan policy makers finish a meeting on July 30. About a third of economists in a survey published last week said they expect policy makers to strengthen their pledge to maintain rock-bottom interest rates rather than do nothing and risk a sharp appreciation of the yen should the Fed cut rates. Still, some officials see little to be gained from such a tweak, according to people familiar with the matter. Data released on Tuesday is forecast to show industrial production shrank again in June amid weak external demand.

Easy Does It

In China, Bloomberg Economics says purchasing managers' indexes will probably remain in contractionary territory as pressure on exporters persist. Elsewhere, a report on Thursday is set to show South Korean exports slid for an eighth straight month which will unnerve those already worried about global trade. Inflation data for Australia, Indonesia, South Korea and Thailand will help inform central bankers.

Latin America

Brazil's central bank is widely expected to cut borrowing costs on Wednesday with economists and traders debating how deep it will go. The following day, July industry output data may shed light on whether Latin America's largest economy slipped into technical recession in the first half of the year. Mexico will learn if it was able to avoid a technical recession on Wednesday, when the national statistics bureau releases preliminary output data for the second quarter.



**First Annual
Mediterranean
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**Eastern
Energy**



Interest in the Eastern Mediterranean has increased during the last years with the discovery of major gas fields such as Tamar, Leviathan and the giant Zohr field in Egypt. These have opened up major opportunities for new discoveries, but also for oil and gas investments in the region.

The **First Eastern Mediterranean Energy Leadership Summit** will be held at the **Divani Apollon Palace & Thalasso** in Athens, Greece, from **October 1 – 2, 2019**. The event is organized by the Transatlantic Leadership Network, the University of Piraeus – MSc in Energy: Strategy, Law & Economics of the Department of International & European Studies, and SGT S.A.

Held at the Ministerial level, the Summit will gather together senior government officials and business executives from the energy market to identify crucial opportunities and challenges for continued commercial and geopolitical cooperation. Invited countries include the United States, members of the Three Seas Initiative, and countries surrounding the Eastern Mediterranean Region. During the conference diverse thoughts, ideas and best practices will be presented on how Eastern Mediterranean countries can best take advantage of their geographical positions and exploit available energy resources to secure a more reliable, self-sufficient and environmental sustainable energy supply.



Download Summit Details

Topics of discussion:

- The Future of Oil & Gas in the Eastern Mediterranean: Alternative Scenarios and Policy Perspectives
- Security Dimensions of Transatlantic Energy Cooperation: The Effects on the Eastern Mediterranean
- Opportunities for Energy Cooperation in the Eastern Mediterranean: Project View
- Building a Framework for Regional Energy Cooperation and Integration
- Energy Developments in South East Europe. The Challenge for the Region
- Market Trends: Predicting Winners and Losers
- Regional Electricity Market Dynamics
- Investment Outlook: Required Financial Resources and Remaining Challenges
- Removing Barriers and Exploiting Opportunities

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IEA ready to act quickly to keep global oil market supplied



PARIS (Reuters) – The International Energy Agency (IEA) is closely monitoring developments in the Strait of Hormuz and ready to take swift action if needed to keep the global oil market supplied, it said on Monday.

The Paris-based agency said the right of free energy transit through the strait was critical to the global economy and must be maintained.

Iranian Revolutionary Guards seized British-flagged oil tanker Stena Impero at the Strait of Hormuz on Friday in apparent retaliation for the British capture of an Iranian tanker two weeks earlier.

Oil prices rose on Monday on concerns that Iran's seizure the tanker could lead to supply disruptions in the energy-rich Gulf. [O/R]

The Strait of Hormuz is a vital maritime transit route for world energy trade. About 20 million barrels of oil, or about 20% of global supply, are transported through the strait each day, the IEA said.

“The IEA is ready to act quickly and decisively in the event of a disruption to ensure that global markets remain

adequately supplied,” it said, adding that executive director Fatih Birol has been in talks with IEA member and associate governments as well as other nations that are major oil consumers or producers.

“Consumers can be reassured that the oil market is currently well supplied, with oil production exceeding demand in the first half of 2019, pushing up global stocks by 900,000 barrels per day,” the IEA said in a statement.

countries hold 1.55 billion barrels of public emergency oil stocks. In addition, 650 million barrels are held by industry under government obligations and can be released as needed, it said.

The stocks are enough to cover any supply disruptions from the strait for an extended period, it added without saying how long that might be.

Reporting by Bate Felix; Editing by David Evans and David Goodman

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<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-iran-iea/iea-ready-to-act-quickly-to-keep-oil-market-supplied-idUSKCN1UH1SN>

A Reform Opportunity for the IMF



Jul 19, 2019 JOSÉ ANTONIO OCAMPO

The departure of Christine Lagarde from the helm of the International Monetary Fund represents a golden opportunity to put the institution on a path toward a more effective and inclusive future. What should her successor's priorities be?

NEW YORK – This month marks the 75th anniversary of the signing of the Bretton Woods agreement, which established the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. For the IMF, it also marks the start of the process of selecting a new managing director to succeed Christine Lagarde, who has resigned following her nomination to be European Central Bank president. There is no better moment to reconsider the IMF's global role.

The most positive role that the IMF has played throughout its history has been to provide crucial financial support to countries during balance-of-payments crises. But the conditionality attached to that support has often been controversial. In particular, the policies that the IMF demanded of Latin American countries in the 1980s and in Eastern Europe and East Asia in the 1990s saddled the Fund's programs with a stigma that triggers adverse reactions to this day.

It can be argued that the recessionary effects of IMF programs are less harmful than adjustments under the pre-Bretton Woods gold standard. Nonetheless, the IMF's next managing director should oversee the continued review and streamlining of conditionality, as occurred in 2002 and 2009.

The IMF has made another valuable contribution by helping to strengthen global macroeconomic cooperation. This has proved particularly important during periods of turmoil, including in the 1970s, following the abandonment of the Bretton Woods fixed-exchange-rate system, and in 2007-2009, during the global financial crisis. (The IMF also led the gold-demonetization process in the 1970s and 1980s.)

But, increasingly, the IMF has been relegated to a secondary role in macroeconomic cooperation, which has tended to be led by *ad hoc* groupings of major economies – the G10, the G7, and, more recently, the G20 – even as the Fund has provided indispensable support, including analyses of global macro conditions. The IMF, not just the “Gs,” should serve as a leading forum for international coordination of macroeconomic policies.

At the same time, the IMF should promote the creation of new mechanisms for monetary cooperation, including regional and inter-regional reserve funds. In fact, the IMF of the future should be the hub of a network of such funds. Such a network would underpin the “global financial safety net” that has increasingly featured in discussions of international monetary issues.

The IMF should also be credited for its prudent handling of international capital flows. The Bretton Woods agreement committed countries gradually to reduce controls on trade and other current-account payments, but not on capital flows. An attempt to force countries to liberalize their capital accounts was defeated in 1997. And, since the global financial crisis, the IMF has recommended the use of some capital-

account regulations as a “macroprudential” tool to manage external-financing booms and busts.

Yet some IMF initiatives, though important, have not had the impact they should have had. Consider Special Drawing Rights, the only truly global currency, which was created in 1969. Although SDR allocations have played an important role in creating liquidity and supplementing member countries’ official reserves during major crises, including in 2009, the instrument has remained underused.

The IMF should rely on SDRs more actively, especially in terms of its own lending programs, treating unused SDRs as “deposits” that can be used to finance loans to countries. This would be particularly important when there is a significant increase in demand for its resources during crises, because it would effectively enable the IMF to “print money,” much like central banks do during crises, but at the international level.

This should be matched by the creation of new lending instruments – a process that ought to build on the reforms that were adopted in the wake of the global financial crisis. As IMF staff have proposed – and as the G20 Eminent Persons Group on Global Financial Governance recommended last year – the Fund should establish a currency-swap arrangement for short-term lending during crises. Central banks from developed countries often enter into bilateral swap arrangements, but these arrangements generally marginalize emerging and developing economies.

Then there are the IMF initiatives that have failed altogether. Notably, in 2001-2003, attempts to agree on a sovereign debt-workout mechanism collapsed, due to opposition from the United States and some major emerging economies.

To be sure, the IMF has made important contributions with regard to sovereign debt crises, offering regular analysis of

the capacity of countries in crisis to repay, and advising them to restructure debt that is unsustainable. But a debt-workout mechanism is still needed, and should be put back on the agenda.

Finally, the IMF needs ambitious governance reforms. Most important, building on reforms that were approved in 2010, but went into effect only in 2016, the Fund should ensure that quotas and voting power better reflect the growing influence of emerging and developing economies. To this end, the IMF must end its practice of appointing only European managing directors, just as the World Bank must start considering non-US citizens to be its president.

Lagarde's departure represents a golden opportunity to put the IMF on the path toward a more effective and inclusive future. Seizing it means more than welcoming a new face at the top.



JOSÉ ANTONIO OCAMPO

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35 Commentaries

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<https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/imf-lagarde-successor-institutional-reform-by-jose-antonio-ocampo-2019-07>

ECB rate-cut bets drive another big weekly fall in bond yields



- * ECB easing hopes bolster bond markets
- * German Bund yield set for biggest fall in seven weeks
- * Focus on ECB inflation target debate
- * Markets ramp up bets on July ECB rate cut
- * Euro zone periphery govt bond yields tmsnrt.rs/2ii2Bqr (Updates prices, adds comment)

By Dhara Ranasinghe

LONDON, July 19 (Reuters) – Anticipation of ECB rate cuts put German yields on track for their biggest weekly drop in seven weeks on Friday, while Italian borrowing costs were set for a seventh week of declines despite rising off 3-year lows hit the previous day.

Euro zone debt has resumed its rally after last week's brief selloff, receiving fresh impetus after a report that European Central Bank staff were studying a potential change of the inflation goal. That's added to expectations for prolonged policy easing.

"Last week, we did see a big selloff and when we entered this week it was a buying opportunity because central banks are expected to ease policy," said Pooja Kumra, European rates strategist at TD Securities in London. "And adding to that we've had further signals that we will get easing soon."

Comments by two Federal Reserve officials have also revived bets on a 50 basis-point U.S. interest rate cut this month, though 10-year Treasury yields inched higher on Friday after falling on Thursday .

With the exception of Italy, most 10-year euro area bond yields slipped, though they inched off session lows as U.S. yields rose.

Germany's 10-year yield fell 1.5 bps to minus 0.32% . It is down almost eight bps this week and set for its biggest weekly fall since the end of May.

In focus now is the ECB's July 25 meeting that is expected to flag a cut in deposit rates as early as September. Money markets suggest some investors expect a move as early as next week, pricing almost a 60% chance of a 10 bps cut, up from around 40% earlier this week.

Natixis fixed income strategist Cyril Regnat said it would make more sense to wait until September but added: "The big question is not about a rate cut but whether the ECB reopens asset purchases."

"This is what investors keep asking us about."

Bets on a deeper and longer rate-cutting cycle and the possibility of another bond-buying programme sent a key gauge of long-term euro zone inflation expectations, the five-year, five-year forward, to the highest in almost two months at 1.32% .

ITALY

Italian 10-year borrowing costs were the exception to the bullish mood, though analysts noted a seven bps rise came after yields fell to a new three-year low of 1.506% on Thursday.

Yields have fallen around 120 bps since mid-May, having outperformed euro zone peers thanks to the ECB easing speculation and relief that Rome avoided disciplinary action from the European Union over its fiscal position.

This week yields are down more than 10 bps.

But on Friday investors grew nervous as Deputy Prime Minister Matteo Salvini said he would meet coalition partner Luigi Di Maio amid speculation that the increasingly unwieldy government might collapse.

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While investors might welcome an administration that excludes Di Maio's 5-Star movement, there needs to be a government in place in October to approve the 2020 budget.

Analysts at Eurasia Group said while pressure on Italian

markets had lifted, they would remain volatile.

“The coalition remains inherently unstable and early elections remain likely, though probably not before early 2020,” they told clients.

Reporting by Dhara Ranasinghe, additional reporting by Sujata Rao; editing by William Maclean, Larry King, Kirsten Donovan

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Asian LNG prices slip but traders expect demand to pick up for winter



Asian spot prices for liquefied natural gas (LNG) slipped this

week tracking a fall in European gas prices though traders anticipate prices to bottom out soon ahead of peak winter demand.

Spot prices for September delivery to Northeast Asia LNG-AS are estimated to be about \$4.60 per million British thermal units (mmBtu), down 10 cents from last week, trade sources said.

Prices for cargoes delivered in August are estimated to be \$4.20 per mmBtu, down 20 cents from last week, they added.

Traders are likely waiting for the European gas prices to come down before taking a position on LNG, a Singapore-based industry source said.

"The LNG market is quiet but the gas market is not and many LNG buyers are just waiting on the sidelines for the gas market to cool down before they come in to buy," the source added.

Both the Dutch month-ahead and British month-ahead contracts have fallen 20 percent in the past week after a two-week long period of rises on expected supply flows due to outages in Norway and short-covering.

September contracts, which are not front-month yet, have also fallen over the week to around \$4.10 per mmBtu for the British price and \$3.85 for the Dutch, widening the spread between spot Asian LNG and the European hubs considerably.

Despite that, many traders say the spread is not wide enough and nor is there the kind of Asian demand to kick-start arbitrage from the Atlantic to the Pacific Basin.

Still, traders expect demand to pick up ahead of winter.

"There have been transactions above \$5 this week, but European (gas) hubs are very volatile, and that is reflected by traders into optimisation," a Singapore-based LNG trader said.

Angola LNG offered a cargo for August to September delivery to as far as Singapore in a tender that closes next week while Russia's Novatek has offered a cargo for mid-September loading from Rotterdam's Gate terminal in the GLX platform, industry sources said.

In term contracts, four companies are vying for a massive LNG tender by Pakistan to buy 240 cargoes for a period of 10 years, sources said.

Indonesia's Tangguh LNG plant may have offered two cargoes a month for loading or delivery over October to December into Northeast Asia earlier this month though it was not immediately clear if it had sold the cargoes.

Japan's Nippon Steel may have bought a cargo for delivery in September at about \$4.60 per mmBtu, an industry source said.

Royal Dutch Shell's LNG tanker 'Barcelona Knutsen' has loaded a cargo at Peru LNG and is now crossing the Pacific Ocean to deliver a cargo into China in the first half of August, data intelligence firm Kpler said on Thursday.

This will make it the fourth LNG cargo to be delivered from Peru to China so far this year, up from just one cargo last year, Refinitiv Eikon shipping data showed.

Source: Reuters (Reporting by Jessica Jaganathan, additional reporting by Sabina Zawadzki in LONDON; editing by Gopakumar Warrier)

GLOBAL LNG-Asian prices slip but traders expect demand to pick up for winter