

Southeast Asia heads for robust growth in 2006

APP, Singapore

Southeast Asia's key economies are in for robust growth this year, with Vietnam on track to catch up to its wealthier neighbours but Indonesia hobbled by lingering domestic issues, analysts say.

They say risks of a bird flu pandemic, higher interest rates and volatile oil prices remain but regional economies are better prepared than before to withstand any adverse impact.

Singapore, the region's most advanced economy, is expected to continue last year's strong growth momentum, while the Malaysian and Thai economies are also fore-

cast to be on firm footing.

The Philippines is expected to remain buoyant, thanks to the billions of dollars in remittances by overseas Filipino workers, the analysts said at a forum organised by the Singapore-based Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) last week.

Song Seng Wun, a regional economist with CIMB-GK Research, expects Singapore's economy to expand by seven percent this year and about five percent over the next two years "on the back of sustained regional and global growth."

The 2006 forecast is well above the government's growth target of

three to five percent for gross domestic product (GDP), the total value of all goods and services produced in the country.

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said the city-state's economy grew by a better-than-expected 5.7 percent in 2005.

"We are seeing more broad-based growth, especially within the services-producing sector," Song told the forum of academics, diplomats and business leaders. "After seven years of decline, the construction sector should return to the black from 2006 onwards."

He expects the Philippines to achieve 4.6 to 4.8 percent GDP growth this year, buoyed by foreign

worker remittances, which accounted for 11 percent of GDP and 18 percent of current account receipts in the first half of 2005.

The country has about 10 million citizens working overseas.

Malaysia's economy should grow five to six percent this year from an expected 5.3 percent expansion in 2005 due to a recovery in external demand and sustained domestic demand, Song said.

In neighbouring Thailand, Supavud Saicheua, managing director of research group Phatra Securities, forecast that country's economy to grow 4.5 percent this year from a projected 4.3 percent in 2005.



PHOTO: SILVA PHARMACEUTICALS
The 'Annual Sales Conference 2006' of Silva Pharmaceuticals Ltd was held yesterday in Dhaka. AR Hasan Mirza, director (Operation), Anwar Mirza, managing director, and other senior officials were present at the conference.



PHOTO: SANOFI AVENTIS
Iftekharul Islam, managing director of Sanofi-Aventis Bangladesh, a multi-national pharmaceutical company, speaks at the company's 'Annual Sales & Marketing Conference 2006' on Saturday in Dhaka.



PHOTO: AB BANK
Kaiser A Chowdhury, president and managing director of Arab Bangladesh Bank Ltd, and MH Samad, managing director and chief executive officer of Central Depository Bangladesh Ltd (CDBL), pose for photographs at an agreement signing ceremony on Thursday in Dhaka. Under the deal, CDBL will convert the paper shares of the bank into electronic ones.



PHOTO: OPSONIN PHARMA
The 'Annual Marketing & Sales Conference 2006' of Opsonin Pharma Ltd was held recently in Dhaka. Chairman of the company Abdus Sabur Khan, Executive Director Abdur Rakib Khan, Managing Director Abdur Rouf Khan and other senior officials were present at the conference.

China to invest more on railway construction in 2006

CEIS, Beijing

China plans to input a total of 160 billion yuan (about 20 billion US dollars) on railway construction in 2006, Minister of Railways Liu Zhijun said.

At the national railways working conference in Beijing, Liu said the construction of 13 new express passengers rail routes will start this year, with the pace of another 11 rail routes underway to be accelerated.

The year 2006 will witness a large-scale railway building momentum in China, said Liu, noting that the ministry will launch a total of 87 railways projects this year.

As a step to renovate part of the country's outdated low-speed railways, a total length of 3,860 electrified rail routes will go into service across the country in 2006, Liu said.

Meanwhile, two key projects of the railways sector will become operational in 2006, said the minister, one is the highest-latitude Qinghai-Tibet Railway which will go into trial operation in July, and the other is the electrified Beijing-Shanghai Railway to be in service in the year.

CURRENCY

Following is Sunday's (January 8, 2006) forex trading statement by Standard Chartered Bank.

| Sell | Buy | TT/OD | BC | Currency | TT/Clean | OD/Sight/Doc | OD/Transfer |
|----------|----------|-------|----------|----------|----------|--------------|-------------|
| 68.3200 | 68.3500 | USD | 67.2000 | | 67.1776 | | 67.1328 |
| 84.5118 | 84.5490 | EUR | 80.6400 | | 80.6131 | | 80.5594 |
| 122.0947 | 122.1483 | GBP | 117.9427 | | 117.9034 | | 117.8248 |
| 52.6816 | 52.7047 | AUD | 49.6675 | | 49.6510 | | 49.6179 |
| 0.6041 | 0.6044 | JPY | 0.5824 | | 0.5822 | | 0.5818 |
| 54.2222 | 54.2460 | CHF | 52.4181 | | 52.4006 | | 52.3657 |
| 8.8927 | 8.8966 | SEK | 8.2884 | | 8.2857 | | 8.2801 |
| 59.1157 | 59.1416 | CAD | 57.0604 | | 57.0414 | | 57.0033 |
| 8.8232 | 8.8271 | HKD | 8.6564 | | 8.6536 | | 8.6478 |
| 42.1338 | 42.1523 | SGD | 40.8387 | | 40.8250 | | 40.7978 |
| 18.7522 | 18.7605 | AED | 18.1479 | | 18.1419 | | 18.1298 |
| 18.3626 | 18.3707 | SAR | 17.7768 | | 17.7709 | | 17.7591 |
| 11.5822 | 11.5973 | DKK | 10.5126 | | 10.5091 | | 10.5021 |
| 230.5050 | 230.6084 | KWD | 228.8481 | | 228.8481 | | 228.8481 |

Exchange rates of some currencies against US dollar

| Indian rupee | Pak rupee | Lankan rupee | Thai baht | Nor kroner | NZ dollar | Malaysian ringgit | Ringgit |
|--------------|-----------|--------------|-----------|------------|-----------|-------------------|---------|
| 44.32 | 59.84 | 102.1 | 39.765 | 6.5136 | 0.6916 | | 3.75 |

Local Interbank FX Trading

Local interbank FX market was subdued. Demand for USD remained high against BDT in the market.

Local Money Market

Money market was active. Call money rate increased ahead of Eid and ranged between 18.00 and 25.00 percent compared with 12.00-18.00 percent previously.

International Market

International market was closed on Sunday. The dollar slid to three-month lows against the euro, yen and Swiss franc on Friday after the US jobs in the year.

December came in much weaker than expected, bolstering expectations that the Federal Reserve is close to finishing the current cycle of monetary tightening. The US economy added just 108,000 jobs last month, well below consensus forecasts of 200,000. News that employment growth was revised sharply higher in November initially helped limit dollar losses, but traders said selling accelerated after the currency breached key technical levels against the euro and the yen. Euro rose to a three-month high against the dollar. Against the yen, US dollar was down 1.3 percent.

SHIPPING

Chittagong Port

Berthing position and performance of vessels as on 8/1/2006

| Berth no. | Name of vessels | Cargo | Lport call | Local agent | Dt of arrival | Leaving | Import disch |
|-----------|-----------------------|---------------|------------|-------------|---------------|---------|--------------|
| J1 | Continent-4 | Gl (S Ash) | Purb | CLA | 24/12 | 9/1 | 973 |
| J2 | Sanko Eternal Xer-002 | Gl (St Hrc) | Sing | Barwil | 4/1 | 12/1 | 2880 |
| J3 | Pha Shwe Gyaw Ywa | Gl (Pul/Ya) | Yang | MTA | 30/12 | 9/1 | 598 |
| J4 | Kywa Yadarar | Gl (Y Ma/Pul) | Yang | MTA | 30/1 | 9/1 | 598 |
| J5 | Fu Wen Shan | Gl | Osaka | Cosco | 5/1 | 10/1 | 2854 |
| J6 | Emily-C | Cont | Col | Seacon | 5/1 | 10/1 | 174 |
| | Kota Fberjaya | Cont | Sing | Pil (Bd) | 5/1 | 10/1 | 110 |

Vessels due at outer anchorage

| Name of vessels | Date of arrival | L. port call | Local agent | Type of cargo | Loading ports |
|------------------|-----------------|--------------|-------------|---------------|---------------|
| Bangla Robi | 8/1 | PTP | BSC | Cont | Col |
| Banga Bodor | 8/1 | PKL | Bdship | Cont | Sing |
| Asian Atlas | 8/1 | -- | Barwil | -- | -- |
| Romny | 8/1 | Sing | Pil (Bd) | Cont | Mong |
| Jelita | 9/1 | Batam | OTL | Scraping | -- |
| Full Rich | 8/1 | Russ | Mutual | Wheat(p) | -- |
| Ocean Venture | 8/1 | Tuti | Mutual | Sugar | -- |
| Tug Jaya Hawk | 9/1 | -- | Trident | -- | -- |
| Barge Labroy-160 | 9/1 | -- | Tidem | PCargo | -- |
| Dd Trader | 10/1 | Novoross | Able | Wheat(P) | -- |

Tanker due

| | | | | |
|--------------|------|------|---------|-----------|
| Isokaze | 7/1 | -- | Rainbow | CPO |
| Smooth Sea-3 | 8/1 | -- | SNCL | CKPO |
| Ionikos | 9/1 | Rast | OWSL | Crude Oil |
| Al Badiyah | 10/1 | Kuwa | MSTPL | HSD/JP-1 |
| Fossanger | 11/1 | Sant | Rainbow | CDSO |

Vessels at outer anchorage

Vessels ready

| | | | | |
|-----------------|------|-------|--------|-----|
| Banga Borti | Cont | Sing | Bdship | 4/1 |
| Ambitious | Cont | Sing | Seacon | 7/1 |
| Ocean Park | Cont | Sing | Seacon | 7/1 |
| Coastal Express | Cont | Chenn | BSCA | 8/1 |

Vessels not ready

| | | | | |
|--------------|------------|------|--------|--------------|
| Hk Deqin-201 | Gl/sp.Tsp | Sing | Kds | R/a(A)(1/12) |
| Celje | Urea(BCIC) | Sing | Seacom | |