

A Chinese investor checks stock prices at a brokerage house in Beijing on Nov 28, 2019. Asian shares were mostly lower on Thursday after President Donald Trump signed a bill expressing support for human rights in Hong Kong. (AP)



Merchandise trade levels in the twenty richest global nations (G20) continued to slump in the third quarter, with export and import levels reaching two-year lows, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) said on Thursday. It is latest report for the June-September quarter, the OECD indicated that G20 exports contracted by 0.7 percent while imports fell by 0.9 percent. The report said that a nearly 20 percent drop in oil prices and currency depreciations against the US dollar largely contributed to the decline. But trade between the US and China also

slumped because of ongoing trade tensions and threats of increasing tariff barriers between the largest and second-largest world economies. "Trade remained weak across all G20 regions in the third quarter of 2019. The slowdown was particularly pronounced in the European Union, with exports contracting by 1.8 percent and imports by 0.4 percent," the Paris-based economic policy body said. In particular, exports and imports fell 3.6 percent and 1.7 percent, respectively, in France, and 0.4 percent and 1.8 percent respectively, in Germany. In Italy, trade fell for the sixth straight quarter,

with exports and imports decreasing by 1.2 percent and 1.0 percent in the third quarter of 2019. Meanwhile, British exports contracted 3.3 percent and imports declined 1.6 percent, largely due to Brexit fears and a drop in the value of Sterling. In North America, exports from the United States fell marginally, by 0.2 percent, while imports decreased by 0.7 percent and US exports to China remain significantly below the levels seen before the recent bilateral trade tensions, despite a pick-up in the second quarter. US imports from China fell 2.1 percent in the quarter. (KUNA)

G20 merchandise trade continues slump

PDVSA offer to suppliers

Facing US sanctions, Venezuela eyes yuan

CARACAS, Nov 28, (RTRS): Venezuela's government and its oil company PDVSA have offered to pay suppliers and contractors into currencies in China using the yuan currency, five people familiar with the matter said. The move made in recent months is the latest example of how Caracas has sought new ways of making international payments since sweeping sanctions by Washington, intended to force out socialist President Nicolas Maduro, cut off the country's access to the US financial system.

Officials have made the proposal verbally to at least four companies that provide services to the public sector, said the people, including two government officials and three sources from private companies in the financial or oil sectors. The individuals declined to disclose which companies have been approached. The companies are evaluating the proposal, the sources said. Reuters could not determine whether any such payments in yuan have been made.

China's central bank, the Peoples' Bank of China, did not respond to a faxed request for comment. PDVSA, Venezuela's central bank, and Venezuela's information ministry did not respond to requests for comment. Venezuelan public entities have traditionally paid private sector partners in the local bolivar currency or US dollars. But hyperinflation and US sanctions, which prohibit American companies from doing business with Venezuela's public sector, are complicating those methods. The offer comes after Venezuela's government and PDVSA have paid some suppliers and contractors with euros in cash, which they have received from some oil and gold sales, in response to the loss of access to the US financial system due to the sanctions.

Analysts said they expect China's imports of Venezuelan crude to have fallen to zero last month. But China is importing more and more crude blends from Malaysia, which include some Venezuelan oil. "The government must be able to take a closer look, for example, if national security interests are affected by foreign investments," the paper said. Under the new rules, investors in sectors including artificial intelligence, robotics, semi-conductors, biotechnology and quantum technology would have to make public any purchases of 10% or more and allow Germany to check them. Previously, only investments in critical infrastructure, such as energy, water, telecommunications and defence could be screened. Last year, the government dropped the investment threshold for those sectors to 10% from 25%.

Germany plans to tighten foreign investment rules for key sectors

BERLIN, Nov 28, (RTRS): Germany plans to screen non-European investors that want to buy into firms in high-tech sectors such as robotics and artificial intelligence in a move widely seen as targeting Chinese state-backed investors. The measures, outlined in a document seen by Reuters, are part of a new industrial strategy due to be announced by Economy Minister Peter Altmaier on Friday.

While China is not mentioned in the document, German and European Union officials have repeatedly said they want a fair playing field with China, which they accuse of shielding its own companies from foreign investors. "The economy ministry has worked out a further amendment to the law under which we will extend the screening possibilities and define a catalogue of critical technologies," the document seen by Reuters said.

Global equities stall as US-China tensions flare again, pound rises

Wall Street closed for Thanksgiving holiday

LONDON, Nov 28, (RTRS): A four-day rally that had lifted world stocks to near-record highs stalled on Thursday after China said it would retaliate for US legislation backing Hong Kong's protesters, leaving investors concerned as to the extent of the Chinese response. Fading hopes of a rapprochement between the world's two biggest economies before additional, potentially damaging tariff hikes kick in has lowered risk appetite, pushing the benchmark German 10-year government yield to its lowest since Nov 1.

The yen - a safe-haven currency - gained against the US dollar, recovering from six-month lows. London's blue-chip index fell from two-month highs and a pan-European stocks index was down 0.2%, led by trade-sensitive sectors such as autos, down 0.6% and tech, down 0.4%. The US legislation, which threatens sanctions for human rights violations and seeks to safeguard Hong Kong's autonomy, prompted China to warn of "firm counter measures".

China's state council said that it would step up punishment for intellectual property violations - a key sticking point in the US-China conflict - and that it would lower non-tariff trade barriers. Fears as to the extent of Chinese retaliation started to ease during London trading. Wall Street's main indexes closed at record levels for a third straight day on Wednesday, albeit in thin liquidity before the Thanksgiving holiday, after data showed US economic growth had picked up in the third quarter and consumer spending had increased.

Elsewhere, though, the outlook for growth looks less rosy. Japanese retail figures slumped the most since 2015 as a sales tax hike dragged on the economy, exacerbating a slowdown caused by slowing exports and manufacturing. That took Asian shares including Japan down 0.2%. Japan's Nikkei, Hong Kong's Hang Seng and Shanghai blue chips all closed weaker. That kept MSCI's world equity index flat, after it approached the record reached in January 2018. However, the index is up almost 3% so far in November and is on track for the best month since June as investors fit in and our depending on the trade news. "People don't want to be caught on the wrong side," said Geoff Yu, head of the UK investment office at UBS Wealth Management. "It does reflect there's cash on the sidelines. If you can stretch the positive narrative, if the trade issue is out of the way for the time being, we might actually see a demand pick up."

UK Eurozone economic sentiment rebounded more than expected in November, with more optimism in the services sector, data from the European Commission showed. Sentiment in industry, among consumers, and in industry all improved but remain below zero. The euro was little changed by the news. Data released on Thursday also showed that bank lending to euro zone companies in October rebounded, after dropping the month before. The British pound rose on Wednesday after a model for pollsters YouGov, which accurately predicted the 2017 election, said Prime Minister Boris Johnson was on course to win a majority in parliament at the Dec 12 election. However, the currency failed to build on its gains, trading steady against the dollar at \$1.2926. It was little changed versus the euro after surging to its highest in nearly seven months at 85 pence in early London trading. Implementing Brexit by the end of January, as Johnson had promised, would leave him a "miniscule" 11 months to agree a trade deal with the European Union, analysts at Societe Generale told clients. The Institute for Fiscal Studies - a British think tank - said that neither of the UK's major parties have credible plans to manage Britain's public finances.

Europe European shares pulled back from near-record highs on Thursday, as US President Donald Trump signed into law a bill backing protesters in Hong Kong, sparking doubts about a resolution to the prolonged tariff war between Washington and Beijing. The law, which warns of sanctions against human rights violations in Hong Kong amid pro-democracy protests, drew a sharp rebuke from China for what it views as US interference in an internal matter. The pan-European STOXX 600 index was down 0.2% after closing Wednesday just points away from a record high, as the latest standoff threatens to derail trade negotiations between the world's top two economies. Shares of trade-sensitive auto parts makers shed 0.8% in their sharpest one-day drop in more than a week. The tech sector, which includes chipmakers with a large exposure to China, was down 0.6%. "I wouldn't go as far as to say that we're back at square one, but this clearly underlines the more structural tensions between the United States and China," said Teeuwe Mevisen, senior market economist at Rabobank. "But the interests for both China and the US to not escalate the situation and pause this conflict are still very much alive."

Asia London's FTSE 100 retreated from a near four-month high on Thursday, weighed down by stocks trading ex-dividend and as US ratification of legislation on Hong Kong raised concerns that progress in trade talks with China may be undone. The blue-chip index fell 0.2% after four straight days of gains, with Vodafone giving up nearly 4% and utility National Grid shedding almost 3% as they traded without entitlement to a dividend pay-out. The FTSE 250 once again climbed to a near 1-1/2 year high as it advanced 0.3%. Leading gains almost single-handedly was Virgin Money UK, which soared 19% on its best day ever. The meteoric rise came after provision for claims related to the PPI mis-selling scandal fell in line with its estimates. CMC Markets' David Madden said, given the rally in the stock, traders think a line has been drawn under the scandal. Some traders and analysts also indicated that the Clydesdale and Yorkshire Bank owner's decision to suspend the dividend may have been a shrewd move. Though overall trading volumes were thin, with US markets shut for Thanksgiving, Asia-focused HSBC and miners weakened the FTSE 100 after US President Donald Trump approved legislation backing pro-democracy protesters in Hong Kong. The move drew condemnation from Beijing and escalating tension cast doubts over whether this would derail the attempt by the two countries to settle their protracted trade dispute. Other losers on the FTSE 100 included equipment rental firm Ashtead

which gave up 2.6% after a downgrade by HSBC. Europe The dollar slipped to 109.47 Japanese yen from 109.54 yen on Wednesday. The euro was steady at \$1.1007. Oil Oil prices fell for a second day on Thursday after official data showed US crude and gasoline stocks rose and President Donald Trump signed into law a bill backing protesters in Hong Kong, fueling tensions with China. Brent crude was down 35 cents, or 0.5%, at \$63.71 a barrel by 1503 GMT. West Texas Intermediate crude fell 17 cents, or 0.3%, to \$57.94. Crude stockpiles in the United States swelled by 1.6 million barrels last week as production rose to a record 12.9 million barrels per day (bpd) and refinery runs slowed, the Energy Information Administration said. Investors have also been focused on next week's meeting of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and allies including Russia, a group known as OPEC+, which have been withholding production to support prices. Russian oil companies proposed not to change their output quotas as part of the global deal until the end of March, putting pressure on OPEC+ to avoid any major policy change. Currencies Sterling briefly touched near seven-month highs against the euro on Thursday on a poll predicting a comfortable election victory for the ruling Conservatives, then slipped to end the day marginally lower. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson is on course to win a majority of 68 in parliament, according to a model from pollsters YouGov that accurately predicted former prime minister Theresa May's loss of her majority in a 2017 election. The opinion poll pushed sterling to its highest level against the euro since May 6 at 85 pence, though it ended the day 0.2% weaker at 85.27 pence. Versus the greenback, the pound rose to a one-week high of \$1.2953, then slipped, ending 0.2% weaker on the day to \$1.2907. Sterling "will rally further if Wednesday's poll from YouGov... is confirmed on Dec. 12," Stephen Gallo, currency strategist at BMO Capital Markets, said, referring to election day. Though he noted that an increase in the pound "from here is rather limited, with risks during the Brexit transition now being considerably underpriced by the FX market."

If Britain was to leave the European Union on Jan. 31, it would still need to negotiate a trade deal with the bloc during the transition period, due at the end of 2020. Analysts predict it would be very hard to agree on a deal in such a constrained time. Hopes that a Johnson victory would end more than three years of uncertainty over Brexit have lifted the pound in recent weeks, despite persistent concerns that Britain could end up exiting the European Union without a trade deal.

exchange rates - Nov 28

Table with multiple columns for different currencies and their exchange rates against the US dollar. Includes sections for US dollar, Sterling pound, Euro, Japanese yen, Swiss franc, Canadian dollar, Swedish krona, Saudi riyal, UAE dirham, Bahraini dinar, Omani riyal, Danish krone, Indian rupee, Pakistani rupee, Sri Lankan rupee, Bangladesh taka, Philippine peso, Australian dollar, Hong Kong dollar, Singapore dollar, Jordanian dinar, Egyptian pound, Cyprus pound, Yemeni riyal, Thai baht, South African rand, Korean won, Syrian pound, Iranian Riyal, Lebanese pound, Malaysian ringgit, Indonesian rupiah, New Zealand dollar, and travellers cheques.