**Question 2 Rebalancing to generate growth**

**Extract 5: China’s economic growth misses target**

China's economy grew 7.4 percent in 2014, at its slowest pace in 24 years as property prices cooled and companies and local governments struggled under heavy debt burdens, keeping pressure on Beijing to take aggressive steps to avoid a sharper downturn.

A further slowdown in China could hinder the chances of a revival in global growth in 2015, given the major role it plays, in particular for commodities and high-tech. China's property market - a major driver of demand across a range of industries - has proven stubbornly unresponsive to policy support, and lending data from the banking system shows enduring weakness. At the same time, there may be a looming fiscal crisis among debt-sodden local governments, which depend on land sales for most of their revenue. And more companies, especially small property developers, could flirt with default.

Policymakers also are concerned about the potential onset of a deflation aggravated by plummeting energy prices, industrial overcapacity and sluggish demand. Systemic deflation is an economically toxic cycle in which investors and consumers hold off on fresh spending on the assumption prices will drop further in the future. This is cited as a major reason why Beijing will need to put more money into the system.

Nevertheless, the International Monetary Fund's chief economist Olivier Blanchard said slower growth seen for 2015 reflects a welcome decision by the Chinese government to rebalance the economy away from a heavy reliance on investment and exports to a more consumption-based growth model.

Source: Kevin Yao and Pete Sweeney, *Reuters*, 20 Jan 2015

**Extract 6: Why China’s economy is slowing**

Structurally, China’s economy faces headwinds. In the long run, growth is a function of changes in labour, capital and productivity. When all three increase, as they did in China for many years, growth rates are superlative. But they are all slowing now. China’s working-age population peaked in 2012. Investment also looks to have topped out. Finally, China’s technological gap with rich countries is narrower than in the past, implying that productivity growth will be lower, too.

Another important development has been its credit binge. Total debt, including government, household and corporate, has climbed to about 250% of GDP, up 100 percentage points since 2008. This debt allowed China to power its economy through the global financial crisis but also saddled it with a heavy repayment burden. Most worrying, much of the credit flowed to property developers. China’s inventory of unsold homes sits at a record high. The real-estate sector, which previously accounted for some 15% of economic growth, could face outright contraction. From this vantage point, the abruptness of China’s current slowdown looks more cyclical than structural.

Whereas previous leaders propped up growth whenever it slowed, Xi Jinping, China’s president since 2013, has instead spread the gospel of the “new normal”, by which he means less emphasis on growth and faster structural reform. As a result, the central bank has been hesitant to ease monetary policy. Changes to fiscal rules have also made it harder for local governments to spend money.

Source: *The Economist*, 11 Mar 2015

**Extract 7: Fears mount that UK’s plan to rebalance the economy is failing**

Britain’s recovery remained on track in the third quarter but fresh figures revealed growth was heavily reliant on the consumer, leaving the government’s much hoped-for rebalancing of the economy elusive. Companies have become increasingly concerned about the economic outlook and falling business investment once again leaves the economic upturn in the hands of the consumer.

Exports fell by 0.4%, while imports increased by 1.4%, worsening Britain’s trade position. The UK’s trade deficit with the rest of the world widened to £11.2bn in the third quarter from £8.9bn in the second. Business investment, which the government is banking on to drive a sustainable recovery, actually fell by 0.7% or £300m compared with the second quarter. On the other hand, household spending, increased by 0.8% over the third quarter, extending the run of growth to 13 consecutive quarters. Services sector output was revised up to 0.8% from an initial estimate of 0.7%, reinforcing the picture of a UK recovery reliant on the consumer.

A spokesman for the Treasury repeated its persistent line that growth in the third quarter was a sign the government’s long-term economic plan is working, and that the UK economy was under threat from factors abroad. “The UK is not immune to weakness in the euro area and instability in global markets, so we face a critical moment for our economy. We need to carry on working through our economic plan that is securing a resilient economy and a better future.”

Source: Angela Monaghan, *The Guardian*, 26 November 2014

**Extract 8: Deflation in the Euro zone is all too close**

The euro area is on the verge of tipping into its third recession in six years. The zone’s overall inflation rate has slipped to 0.3% and may well go into outright decline next year. A region that makes up almost a fifth of world output is marching towards stagnation and deflation.

Some price falls are welcome. Tumbling oil prices, in particular, have given consumers’ incomes a boost. But slowing prices and stagnant wages owe more to weak demand in the economy and roughly 45 million workers are jobless in the rich OECD countries. Worse, short-term interest rates are close to zero in many economies, so central banks cannot cut them to boost spending.

If Europe is to stop its economy getting worse, it will have to stop its self-destructive behaviour. France and Italy should be allowed to slow the pace of their fiscal cuts; in return, those countries should accelerate structural reforms. Reducing the fiscal deficits has been difficult to achieve because reductions in government spending and increases in taxes depress economic activity. Lower economic activity causes increased transfer payments and reduced tax revenue, offsetting the original fiscal contraction. A cheapening euro would be an important boost for eurozone countries such as Spain, Italy and France that have very large fiscal deficits. Although the lower euro would not change the relative prices among the eurozone countries, it would have a powerful effect because nearly half the trade of the eurozone countries is with countries outside the eurozone.

Source: *The Economist*, 25th October 2014

**Table 2: GDP growth rates** (Annual % change at constant prices in local currency)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 |
| China | 10.6 | 9.5 | 7.8 | 7.7 | 7.4 |
| UK | 1.5 | 2.0 | 1.2 | 2.2 | 2.9 |
| Euro Area | 2.1 | 1.6 | -0.9 | -0.3 | 0.9 |

**Table 3: Inflation rates** (Annual % change in consumer price index)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 |
| China | 3.3 | 5.4 | 2.6 | 2.6 | 2.0 |
| UK | 3.3 | 4.5 | 2.8 | 2.6 | 1.5 |
| Euro Area | 1.5 | 3.3 | 2.5 | 1.4 | 0.2 |

Source of Tables 2 & 3: *World Bank*

**Table 4: Government Budget Balance** (% of GDP)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 |
| China | -2.5 | -1.1 | -1.5 | -2.1 | -2.1 |
| UK | -9.7 | -7.7 | -8.3 | -5.6 | -5.6 |
| Euro Area | -6.2 | -4.2 | -3.7 | -3.0 | -2.6 |

Source: *www.tradingeconomics.com*

**Questions**

**(a)** Which economy in Table 2 shows the least variation in its growth rate?

[1]

**(b) (i)** Besides the balance of trade in goods and services, state one other component of the current account on the balance of payments.

[1]

**(ii)** With reference to Extract 5, explain how a trading partner’s current account on the balance of payments is affected by China’s slowdown.

[2]

**(c)** How might UK’s multiplier size change with the rebalance of the UK’s economy?

[4]

**(d)** Comment on the usefulness of GDP growth rates in measuring UK’s standard of living.

[4]

**(e)** Discuss whether policymakers should be concerned about the onset of deflation.

[8]

**(f)** Both UK and China are experiencing slow growth and have plans to rebalance their economies. In light of the data, assess the most appropriate policy approaches their governments can adopt to achieve high and sustained growth.

[10]

[Total: 30]