India 7 June 2024

Economics



RBI Policy: Nascent rate cut discussions

Key takeaways: The RBI MPC held status quo with a continued focus on returning inflation to the 4.0% target. Growth projections were raised to 7.2% for FY25 from 7.0% and inflation was retained at 4.5%. The surprise came from distribution of votes on rates and the stance where both were agreed with a vote of 4-2 vs 5-1 (stance), indicating that rate cut discussions have surfaced in the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC). The emphatic announcement of independence from the US Fed underscores this view. We retain our first rate cut expectation in Q4FY25. If the Monsoon is normal and rainfall spatial distribution is homogenous, the likelihood of a first cut in Q3FY25 will emerge.

RBI MPC starts to think about rate cuts

The MPC held the policy repo rate at 6.5%, in line with our expectations. It retained its stance on the "withdrawal of accommodation" by a vote of 4:6. Two MPC members voted in favor of a 25bp cut and change in stance to *Neutral*. This indicates rate cut discussions have surfaced. Also, Governor Shaktikanta Das said while the RBI MPC keeps an eye on global developments, the RBI's reaction function evolves and focuses on domestic inflation – growth dynamics fully.

These developments, if supplemented by the RBI's inflation projections quarterly, indicates the MPC has started to think about rate cuts. If this materializes, the MPC is likely to change its stance to *Neutral* in Q3FY25. However, in our view, the RBI is not in a hurry, which is evident from the Governor's speech where a dip in inflation to 3.8% in Q2FY25 was clarified as, "due to favourable base effect"; he pointed out that in the next quarter, the CPI will crawl back above 4.5%+.

Monsoon remains key and its spatial distribution needs attention in our view. CY23 monsoon saw ~1SD variation vs long-term inter-regional average deviation, leading to an increase of 50bp in CPI and 322bp in CPI Food & Beverages in H2CY23 vs H1CY23. If food inflation eases and incremental weather shocks are absent, RBI is likely to get much needed comfort from inflation side.

We retain first rate cut call in Q4FY25

Considering these factors above, we expect the RBI to continue with its wait—and-watch mode in CY24 to ascertain whether the inflation impulses will remain at bay. A sustained disinflation trend is key, or else the possibility of headline CPI settling at 4.5%+ YoY remains high. Growth dynamics and continued positive impulses give the necessary policy space to hold rates at elevated levels.

For the upcoming meetings, we expect incremental development and commentaries by the RBI to prepare ground for the change in stance and first cut. If inflation impulses remain capped, a preponement of first cut is also a possibility. We assign an 80% probability to a first cut in Q4FY25 and 20% to Q3FY25. Recent rate cuts by ECB, Nordic central banks and potential first cut by BoE and Fed in Q3CY24 indicate monetary policy in Developed Markets (ex-Japan) is expected to loosen in 2HCY24. This will likely provide some necessary policy space not only for RBI but entire Emerging Market (EM space).

RBI upholds status quo



Source: CEIC, Elara Securities Research

CPI retained at 4.5% for FY25

Period (%)	MPC Feb-24	MPC Apr-24	Jun-24
Q1FY25	5	4.9	4.9
Q2FY25	4	3.8	3.8
Q3FY25	4.6	4.6	4.6
Q4FY25	4.7	4.5	4.5
FY25	4.5	4.5	4.5

Source: RBI, Elara Securities Research

Growth raised up by 20bp for FY25

Period (%)	MPC Feb-24	MPC Apr-24	MPC Jun-24
Q1FY25	7.2	7.1	7.3
Q2FY25	6.8	6.9	7.2
Q3FY25	7	7.0	7.3
Q4FY25	6.9	7.0	7.2
FY25	7.0	7.0	7.2

Source: RBI, Elara Securities Research

Weighted average call rate inches below the repo rate in April to date



Source: CEIC, Elara Securities Research.

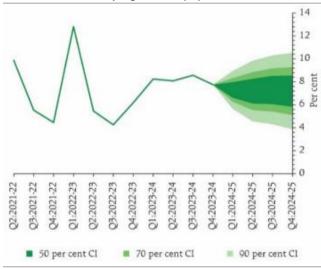


Raises FY25 growth by 20bp; retains inflation projection

The RBI sounded positive on domestic growth, notwithstanding global uncertainty. It retained its view that in FY25, domestic demand conditions are likely to support growth with rural demand catching up, continued buoyancy in the services sector, and urban demand, manufacturing activity & the investment cycle gaining steam, aided by robust government capex. Considering these factors, the RBI has raised FY25 growth to 7.2% vs 7.0% previously, with quarterly projections at 7.3% in Q1FY25 from 7.1%, 7.2% in Q2FY25 from 6.9%, 7.3% in Q3FY25 from 7%, and 7.2% in Q4FY25 from 7.0%.

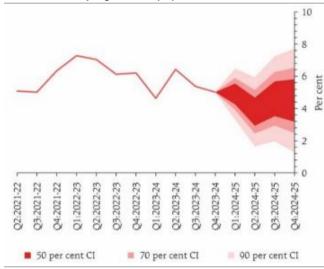
Inflation projections were retained at 4.5% for FY25, in line with our expectations. As per RBI's target, the headline CPI is likely to moderate below 4.0% to 3.8% in O2FY25, owing to a favorable base effect. However, in FY25, inflation is not climbing down to 4.0% target, on which the RBI is keeping an unwavering focus. As FY25 progresses, discussions of a rate cut are likely to gain steam, especially if core inflation continues to provide disinflationary impulses along with Brent crude and overall input prices. During the post policy press conference, Deputy Governor Michael Patra was asked if rate cuts are off the table, his reply, "nothing is off the table" signals rate cut discussions have surfaced in this meet; we await further clarity when the minutes are released.

Exhibit 1: Growth projections (%)



Note: CI = Confidence Interval; Source: RBI

Exhibit 2: CPI projections (%)



Note: CI = Confidence Interval; Source: RBI

Exhibit 3: Liquidity and regulatory announcements

Liquidity and regulatory related announcements (7 June 2024)

Review of limit of Bulk Deposits for Scheduled Commercial Banks (excluding RRB), Small Finance Banks and Local Area Banks

Revise the definition of bulk deposits as 'Single Rupee term deposits of INR 30mn and above' for SCB (excluding RRB) and SFB. Further, it is also proposed to define bulk deposit limit for Local Area Banks as 'Single Rupee term deposits of INR 10mn and above' as applicable in case of RRB

Rationalisation of Export and Import regulations under Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA), 1999 RBI has decided to rationalise existing guidelines on exports and imports of goods & services in line with changing dynamics of cross-border trade transactions globally. The proposed rationalization aims to simplify operational procedures, thereby promoting ease of doing business for all stakeholders

Setting up a Digital Payments Intelligence Platform Set up a Digital Payments Intelligence Platform which will harness advanced technologies to offset payment fraud risks. Take this initiative forward, the RBI has constituted a committee (Chairman: AP Hota, former MD & CEO, NPCI) to examine various aspects of setting up a digital public infrastructure for Digital Payments Intelligence Platform. The Committee is expected to give its recommendations within two months



Inclusion of recurring payments for FastTAG, National Common Mobility Card (NCMC), with auto-replenishment facility under the eMandate framework Include payments, such as replenishment of balances in FastTAG and NCMC, which are recurring in nature but without any fixed periodicity, into the e-mandate framework. These categories of payments are made as and when needed and, therefore, their replenishment is not time-specific or amount-specific. Under the eMandate framework, it is proposed to introduce an automatic replenishment facility for such payments. The automatic replenishment will be triggered when the balance in FastTAG or NCMC falls below a threshold amount set by the customer

Introducing auto-replenishment of UPI Lite wallet - Inclusion under the eMandate framework Bring UPI-Lite within the ambit of the eMandate framework by introducing an auto-replenishment facility for loading the UPI-Lite wallet by the customer if the balance goes below a threshold amount set by the customer. Since funds remain with the customer (funds move from customer's account to the wallet), requirement of additional authentication or pre-debit notification is to be dispensed with

Source: RBI, Elara Securities Research

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