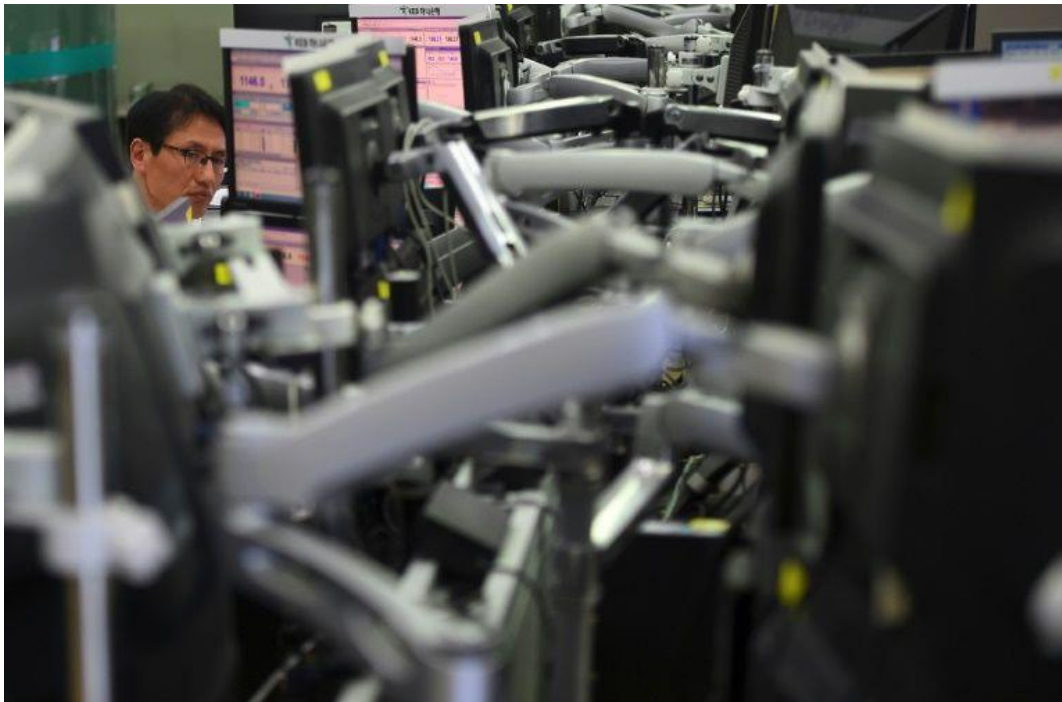


Stock markets confident Fed will seal deal

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A currency dealer monitors exchange rates in a trading room at the KEB Hana Bank in Seoul on March 13, 2017

World stock markets mostly rose Monday as investors priced in the near-certainty of a US rate rise this week following a forecast-busting US jobs report.

But enthusiasm was muted by uncertainty surrounding a Dutch election this week and the shape of Britain's exit from the EU.

The pound advanced amid speculation that Britain could trigger as soon as Tuesday the formal process for exiting the European Union.

"The anticipation of a busy week ahead including the possible triggering of Article 50, a potential populist revolt in the Dutch national election and a likely US interest rate hike meant there was a slow burn in markets," said Jasper Lawler, senior market analyst at London Capital Group.

Sterling held onto its gains despite the announcement by Scotland's nationalist government of plans for another independence vote.

-Fed rate hike coming -

In the United States, Friday's employment report reinforced a long-running belief the world's top economy was on a strong growth track and focus now is on the conclusion of the central bank's two-day policy meeting on Wednesday.

US stocks finished near flat, but airline shares tumbled as United Continental, Delta Air Lines and other carriers canceled thousands of flights in anticipation of a major snowstorm in the northeastern part of the country.

The expected whiteout competed for attention with the Federal Reserve, which is widely seen as poised to increase in the benchmark lending rate after a string of strong data.

"The market is expecting a rate increase," said David Levy, portfolio manager at Republic Wealth Advisors.

"But more importantly, the market is trying to understand from the Fed what the rest of the year in future rate hikes may potentially look like."

The dollar wobbled Monday as some traders took out their profits before the Fed meeting.

"Markets are already fully priced for a Fed rate hike on Wednesday," said Janu Chan, a senior economist at St George Bank in Sydney.

Most stock markets in Asia started the week on a high -- tracking all three main Wall Street indices -- after the Labor Department on Friday said the US economy created 235,000 new jobs in February, much more than estimated.

- Oil under pressure -

Oil prices continued under pressure, with the main US futures contract losing ground again, extending last week's losses of about nine percent.

Investors are nervous because of a surprisingly big jump in US stockpiles, increased US shale production and concerns about implementation of a OPEC-Russia led deal to cut output .

"For all the somewhat hopeful talk from industry experts about oil inventories running down later in the year, the fact remains that US shale has come back harder, faster and cheaper than anyone could have imagined," said Jeffrey Halley, senior market analyst at Oanda trading group.

"Talk is cheap, and oil is getting cheaper as well."

Among individual stocks, Dow member Intel dropped 2.1 percent after the company said it would buy Israeli car technology firm Mobileye a deal worth more than \$15 billion.

But Mobileye shares, also quoted on Wall Street, surged by a whopping 28.2 percent.

<https://sg.news.yahoo.com/asia-markets-us-jobs-dollar-slips-082738865--finance.html>