

Outlook for Economic Activity and Prices (April 2023)

The Bank's View¹

Summary

- Japan's economy is likely to recover moderately toward around the middle of fiscal 2023, supported by factors such as the materialization of pent-up demand, although it is expected to be under downward pressure stemming from past high commodity prices and a slowdown in the pace of recovery in overseas economies. Thereafter, as a virtuous cycle from income to spending gradually intensifies, Japan's economy is projected to continue growing at a pace above its potential growth rate. That said, the pace of growth is highly likely to decelerate gradually toward the end of the projection period.
 - The year-on-year rate of increase in the consumer price index (CPI, all items less fresh food) is likely to decelerate toward the middle of fiscal 2023, with a waning of the effects of a pass-through to consumer prices of cost increases led by a rise in import prices. Thereafter, the rate of increase is projected to accelerate again moderately, albeit with fluctuations, as the output gap improves and as medium- to long-term inflation expectations and wage growth rise, accompanied by changes in factors such as firms' price- and wage-setting behavior.
 - Comparing the projections through fiscal 2024 with those presented in the previous *Outlook for Economic Activity and Prices* (Outlook Report), the projected real GDP growth rates for fiscal 2022 and 2023 are lower, mainly due to a lower projection for private consumption, but the projected growth rate for fiscal 2024 is more or less unchanged. The projected year-on-year rates of increase in the CPI (all items less fresh food) for fiscal 2023 and 2024 are somewhat higher, mainly due to a higher projection for wages.
 - Concerning risks to the outlook, there are extremely high uncertainties for Japan's economy, including developments in overseas economic activity and prices as well as developments in the situation surrounding Ukraine and in commodity prices. Under these circumstances, it is necessary to pay due attention to developments in financial and foreign exchange markets and their impact on Japan's economic activity and prices.
 - With regard to the risk balance, risks to economic activity are skewed to the downside for fiscal 2023 but are generally balanced thereafter. Risks to prices are skewed to the upside for fiscal 2023 but are skewed to the downside for fiscal 2025.
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¹ "The Bank's View" was decided by the Policy Board at the Monetary Policy Meeting held on April 27 and 28, 2023.

I. Current Situation of Economic Activity and Prices in Japan

Japan's economy has picked up, despite being affected by factors such as past high commodity prices. The pace of recovery in overseas economies has slowed. Although exports and industrial production have been affected by the developments in overseas economies, they have been more or less flat, supported by a waning of the effects of supply-side constraints. Corporate profits have been at high levels on the whole, and business sentiment has been more or less unchanged. In this situation, business fixed investment has increased moderately. The employment and income situation has improved moderately on the whole. Private consumption has increased moderately, despite being affected by price rises. Housing investment has been relatively weak. Public investment has been more or less flat. Financial conditions have been accommodative on the whole, although weakness in firms' financial positions has remained in some segments. On the price front, the year-on-year rate of increase in the CPI (all items less fresh food) is slower than a while ago, mainly due to the effects of pushing down energy prices from the government's economic measures, but it has been at around 3 percent recently owing to the effects of a pass-through to consumer prices of cost increases led by a rise in import prices. Inflation expectations have been more or less unchanged recently after rising.

II. Baseline Scenario of the Outlook for Economic Activity and Prices in Japan

A. Baseline Scenario of the Outlook for Economic Activity

Toward around the middle of fiscal 2023, Japan's economy is likely to recover moderately, supported by the materialization of pent-up demand, as well as by factors such as accommodative financial conditions and the government's economic measures, although it is expected to be under downward pressure stemming from past high commodity prices and a slowdown in the pace of recovery in overseas economies.

In the household sector, regarding the employment situation, the number of both regular and non-regular employees is likely to rise on the back of improvement in economic activity. In addition, wage growth is expected to increase, reflecting tightening labor market conditions and price rises. Due to these factors, employee income is projected to continue increasing. In this situation, although private consumption is expected to be affected by price rises, it is projected to continue increasing moderately. This is mainly because pent-up demand is likely to materialize, partly supported by household savings that had accumulated as a result of pandemic-related restrictions. Private consumption is also likely to be underpinned by the government's measures such as those to reduce the household burden of higher gasoline prices, electricity charges, and gas charges, and the domestic travel discount program.

In the corporate sector, exports and production are projected to be affected by the slowdown in the pace of recovery in overseas economies resulting mainly from the impact of global inflationary pressure and policy interest rate hikes by central banks. However, they are likely to be more or less flat due to factors such as a waning of the effects of supply-side constraints. Meanwhile, inbound tourism demand, which is categorized under services exports, is expected to continue increasing. Although past high raw material costs are projected to exert downward pressure, corporate profits are likely to remain at high levels on the whole -- albeit with variation across industries and firm sizes -- due to continued improvement in economic activity. In this situation, as accommodative financial conditions provide support and the effects of supply-side constraints wane, business fixed investment is expected to continue increasing, including investment to address labor shortages, digital-related investment, research and development (R&D) investment related to growth areas and decarbonization, and investment associated with strengthening supply chains.

From the second half of fiscal 2023, Japan's economy is projected to continue growing at a pace above its potential growth rate as a virtuous cycle from income to spending gradually intensifies in the overall economy. That said, the pace of growth is highly likely to decelerate gradually toward the end of the projection period due to a waning of the contribution from the materialization of pent-up demand, as well as to a waning of the effects of the government's economic measures.

In the household sector, employment is projected to continue increasing, but the pace of increase is likely to moderate gradually. This is because it will become more difficult for labor supply to increase, with labor force participation of women and seniors having advanced to a high degree thus far. That said, these developments will lead to an increased tightening of labor market conditions during the course of the economic recovery. In this situation, wage growth is expected to increase as a trend, partly reflecting price rises, and employee income is projected to continue increasing. Supported by the increase in employee income, private consumption is expected to keep increasing, although the pace of increase is likely to decelerate as the materialization of pent-up demand slows and the positive contribution of the government's various measures wanes.

In the corporate sector, exports and production are likely to return to an uptrend with overseas economies picking up. Inbound tourism demand is expected to continue increasing. Corporate profits are likely to follow an improving trend since domestic and external demand is expected to increase and downward pressure stemming from high raw material costs is likely to wane gradually. In this situation, with support from accommodative financial conditions, business fixed investment is projected to continue increasing. Toward the end of the projection period, it is expected to be under cyclical adjustment pressure stemming from the accumulation of capital stock, but investment to

address labor shortages and investment that is not necessarily responsive to the business cycle, such as that related to decarbonization, are likely to increase steadily.

Meanwhile, public investment is expected to be more or less flat throughout the projection period, with expenditure related to building national resilience continuing. Government consumption is expected to decline temporarily in reflection of developments in expenditure related to COVID-19 and then gradually increase in reflection of an uptrend in healthcare and nursing care expenditures.

Looking at the financial conditions on which the above outlook is based, it is expected that they will remain accommodative as the Bank pursues Quantitative and Qualitative Monetary Easing (QQE) with Yield Curve Control, and that this will support an increase in private demand.² That is, the environment for external funding, such as bank borrowing and the issuance of CP and corporate bonds, is projected to remain accommodative. In this situation, firms' financial positions are likely to follow an improving trend along with an economic recovery.

The potential growth rate is expected to rise moderately.³ This is mainly because productivity is likely to increase due to advances in digitalization and investment in human capital, and because capital stock growth is projected to accelerate due to a rise in business fixed investment. These developments are likely to be encouraged by the government's various measures and by accommodative financial conditions.

B. Baseline Scenario of the Outlook for Prices

The year-on-year rate of change in the CPI (all items less fresh food) had been increasing since last year due to the effects of the pass-through to consumer prices of cost increases led by the rise in import prices. However, the rate of increase has decelerated recently, mainly due to the effects of pushing down energy prices from the government's economic measures. Since international commodity prices are lower than a while ago and the year-on-year rate of increase in the import price index has decelerated, it is projected that there will be a waning of the effects of the pass-through to consumer prices of cost increases led by the rise in import prices. For this reason, the year-on-year rate of increase in the CPI (all items less fresh food) is highly likely to decelerate toward the middle of fiscal 2023. Thereafter, it is projected to accelerate again moderately, albeit with fluctuations, as the output gap improves and as medium- to long-term inflation

² Each Policy Board member makes their forecasts taking into account the effects of past policy decisions and with reference to views incorporated in financial markets regarding the future conduct of policy.

³ Under a specific methodology, Japan's recent potential growth rate is estimated to be in the range of 0.0-0.5 percent. However, the rate should be interpreted with considerable latitude. This is because the estimate is subject to change depending on the methodologies employed and could be revised as the sample period becomes longer over time. In addition, there are particularly high uncertainties in the current phase over how COVID-19 will affect the trends in productivity or labor supply.

expectations and wage growth rise, accompanied by changes in factors such as firms' price- and wage-setting behavior.

The outlook for the CPI (all items less fresh food) depends on the assumptions regarding crude oil prices and the government's economic measures. Crude oil prices are assumed to decline moderately toward the end of the projection period with reference, for example, to developments in futures markets. The government's measures to reduce the household burden of higher gasoline prices, electricity charges, and gas charges are expected to push down the year-on-year rate of change in the CPI (all items less fresh food), mainly for the first half of fiscal 2023. For fiscal 2024, on the other hand, they are likely to push up the rate due to a waning of the effects of those measures pushing down CPI inflation of the previous year. In this regard, looking at the CPI (all items less fresh food and energy) -- which is not directly affected by fluctuations in energy prices -- the year-on-year rate of change is projected to be at around 2.5 percent for fiscal 2023 and then be in the range of 1.5-2.0 percent for fiscal 2024 and 2025.

The main factors that determine inflation rates are assessed as follows. The output gap, which captures the utilization of labor and capital, has been slightly negative. Based on the aforementioned outlook for economic activity, the gap is likely to turn positive around the middle of fiscal 2023 and expand moderately toward the end of the projection period, albeit at a gradually slowing pace. Under these circumstances, labor market conditions are expected to tighten, partly due to a deceleration in the pace of increase in labor force participation of women and seniors, and upward pressure on wages is projected to intensify. This is likely to put upward pressure on personnel expenses on the cost side and contribute to an increase in households' purchasing power.

Medium- to long-term inflation expectations have been more or less unchanged recently after rising moderately. The March 2023 *Tankan* (Short-Term Economic Survey of Enterprises in Japan) shows that the diffusion index (DI) for output prices has been at a high level, and firms' inflation outlook for general prices has also been at a high level, not only for the short term but also for the medium to long term. With regard to the annual spring labor-management wage negotiations this year, the provisional aggregate results compiled by the Japanese Trade Union Confederation (Rengo) show that the wage growth rate agreed in the negotiations thus far has been significantly higher than in the previous year, including base pay. Given that the formation of inflation expectations in Japan is largely adaptive, the increase in inflation seen thus far has brought about a rise in households' and firms' medium- to long-term inflation expectations. Regarding the outlook, even as actual inflation decelerates toward the middle of fiscal 2023, inflation expectations are likely to rise again moderately toward the end of the projection period, with improvement in the output gap and changes in firms' price- and wage-setting behavior and in labor-management wage negotiations. This will likely lead to a sustained rise in prices accompanied by wage increases.

III. Risks to Economic Activity and Prices

A. Risks to Economic Activity

Regarding the aforementioned baseline scenario of the outlook for economic activity, the main upside and downside risks that require attention are as follows.

The first is developments in overseas economic activity and prices and in global financial and capital markets. Although inflation rates in the United States and Europe are lower than a while ago, inflationary pressure has remained on a global basis. In this situation, overseas central banks have continued to raise their policy interest rates. On this point, it is expected in the baseline scenario that inflation rates around the world will decline gradually and that overseas economies will continue to grow, albeit at a moderate pace. That said, vigilance against the risk of inflation rates staying elevated through wage increases has remained high, mainly in advanced economies. In this situation, there is concern in global financial and capital markets over whether it is possible to contain inflation and maintain economic growth simultaneously. In addition, there was a phase when market participants' risk sentiment deteriorated, mainly due to the effects of issues surrounding some financial institutions in the United States and Europe. With central banks continuing to make policy interest rate hikes, there is also a risk that global financial conditions will tighten further, mainly through adjustments in asset prices, fluctuations in foreign exchange markets, changes in financial institutions' lending positions, and capital outflows from emerging economies, and that this will eventually lead to overseas economies deviating downward from the baseline scenario. Taking these risks into account, it is necessary to pay due attention to developments in financial and foreign exchange markets and their impact on Japan's economic activity and prices. Meanwhile, regarding China, where the resumption of economic activity has progressed rapidly, there are high uncertainties over the pace of materialization of pent-up demand in terms of both upside and downside risks.

The second factor is developments in the situation surrounding Ukraine and the associated developments in prices of commodities, including grains. Depending on the course of this situation, downward pressure on overseas economies, particularly the euro area, could heighten. In addition, although prices of commodities, including grains, have declined on the whole after reaching their peak around the middle of last year, there are extremely high uncertainties regarding the outlook, such as over geopolitical factors -- particularly the situation surrounding Ukraine -- and the effects of efforts by countries around the world toward addressing climate change. Given that Japan is an importer of commodities such as energy and grains (e.g., wheat), a rise in these prices due to supply factors puts greater downward pressure on the economy through an increase in import costs, as this rise is not accompanied by an expansion in external demand or an increase in exports. Such deterioration in the terms of trade squeezes corporate profits and

households' real income, and this could lead business fixed investment and private consumption to deviate downward from the baseline scenario through more cautious spending behavior of firms and households. On the other hand, if prices of commodities, including grains, see a clearer downtrend, the economy could deviate upward.

The third factor considered from a somewhat long-term perspective is firms' and households' medium- to long-term growth expectations. It is expected that factors such as moves toward digitalization, which reflect the experience of COVID-19 and intensifying labor shortages, and progress on efforts with a view to decarbonization will change Japan's economic structure and people's working styles. Furthermore, the heightened geopolitical risks could change the trend of globalization, which has supported the growth of the global economy to date. Depending on how firms and households react to these changes, their medium- to long-term growth expectations, the potential growth rate, and the output gap could go either up or down.

B. Risks to Prices

If the aforementioned risks to economic activity materialize, prices also are likely to be affected. In addition, it is necessary to pay attention to the following two risks that are specific to prices.

The first is high uncertainties over firms' price- and wage-setting behavior, which could exert either upward or downward pressure on prices. In the current inflationary phase, against the backdrop of high raw material costs, many firms have raised prices while giving consideration to price setting by competitors. Depending on how much upward pressure will be exerted by raw material costs and on how firms' inflation expectations will develop, the pass-through to consumer prices could continue longer than expected and lead prices to deviate upward from the baseline scenario. In addition, with labor market conditions tightening, it is possible that firms will further shift their wage-setting behavior toward raising wages, in view of factors such as recruitment and retention. Under these circumstances, there is a possibility that both wages and prices will deviate upward from the baseline scenario as moves to reflect not only price developments in wage setting but also wage developments in price setting become more widespread than expected. On the other hand, with prices of commodities, including grains, declining on the whole, medium- to long-term inflation expectations could decline through the mechanism of adaptive inflation expectations formation and this could affect firms' price-setting behavior. In addition, although a wage growth rate that is significantly higher than in the previous year is likely to be achieved as a result of this year's annual spring labor-management wage negotiations, if the behavior and mindset based on the assumption that prices and wages will not increase easily remain deeply entrenched, there is a risk that moves to increase wages will not strengthen as much as expected from next year and prices will deviate downward from the baseline scenario.

The second risk is future developments in foreign exchange rates and international commodity prices, as well as the extent to which such developments will spread to import prices and domestic prices. This risk may lead prices to deviate either upward or downward from the baseline scenario. There are high uncertainties over, for example, the outlook for the global economy, and this could lead to significant fluctuations in international commodity prices. Including the possibility of inflation rates staying elevated on a global basis and of fluctuations in foreign exchange markets, how these factors will affect Japan's prices requires due attention.

IV. Conduct of Monetary Policy

In the context of the price stability target, the Bank assesses the aforementioned economic and price situation from two perspectives and then outlines its thinking on the future conduct of monetary policy.⁴

The first perspective involves an examination of the baseline scenario of the outlook. The year-on-year rate of change in the CPI has been above 2 percent. The rate of increase, however, is expected to decelerate to a level below 2 percent toward the middle of fiscal 2023. Although it will take time, toward the end of the projection period, underlying CPI inflation is likely to increase gradually toward achieving the price stability target, mainly on the back of improvement in the output gap and rises in medium- to long-term inflation expectations and in wage growth.

The second perspective involves an examination of the risks considered most relevant to the conduct of monetary policy. Concerning risks to the outlook, there are extremely high uncertainties for Japan's economy, including developments in overseas economic activity and prices as well as developments in the situation surrounding Ukraine and in commodity prices. Under these circumstances, it is necessary to pay due attention to developments in financial and foreign exchange markets and their impact on Japan's economic activity and prices. With regard to the risk balance, risks to economic activity are skewed to the downside for fiscal 2023 but are generally balanced thereafter. Risks to prices are skewed to the upside for fiscal 2023 but are skewed to the downside for fiscal 2025. On the financial side, overheating has not been seen in asset markets and financial institutions' credit activities. Japan's financial system has maintained stability on the whole. Although attention is warranted on, for example, the impact of the tightening of global financial conditions, including the effects of the recent issues surrounding some financial institutions in the United States and Europe, the financial system is likely to remain highly robust on the whole, even in the case of an adjustment in the real economy at home and abroad and in global financial markets, mainly because Japanese financial institutions

⁴ As for the examination from two perspectives in the context of the price stability target, see the Bank's statement released on January 22, 2013, entitled "The 'Price Stability Target' under the Framework for the Conduct of Monetary Policy."

have sufficient capital bases. When examining financial imbalances from a longer-term perspective, if downward pressure on financial institutions' profits, such as from low interest rates, the declining population, and excess savings in the corporate sector, becomes prolonged, this could create a risk of a gradual pullback in financial intermediation. On the other hand, under these circumstances, the vulnerability of the financial system could increase, mainly due to the search for yield behavior. Although these risks are judged as not significant at this point, it is necessary to pay close attention to future developments.⁵

As for the conduct of monetary policy, with extremely high uncertainties surrounding economies and financial markets at home and abroad, the Bank will patiently continue with monetary easing while nimbly responding to developments in economic activity and prices as well as financial conditions. By doing so, it will aim to achieve the price stability target of 2 percent in a sustainable and stable manner, accompanied by wage increases.

The Bank will continue with QQE with Yield Curve Control, aiming to achieve the price stability target, as long as it is necessary for maintaining that target in a stable manner. It will continue expanding the monetary base until the year-on-year rate of increase in the observed CPI (all items less fresh food) exceeds 2 percent and stays above the target in a stable manner. The Bank will continue to maintain stability of financing, mainly of firms, and financial markets, and will not hesitate to take additional easing measures if necessary.

⁵ For details, see the Bank's *Financial System Report* (April 2023).

Forecasts of the Majority of the Policy Board Members

y/y % chg.

	Real GDP	CPI (all items less fresh food)	(Reference) CPI (all items less fresh food and energy)
Fiscal 2022	+1.2 to +1.2 [+1.2]	+3.0	+2.2
Forecasts made in January 2023	+1.9 to +2.0 [+1.9]	+3.0 to +3.0 [+3.0]	+2.1 to +2.1 [+2.1]
Fiscal 2023	+1.1 to +1.5 [+1.4]	+1.7 to +2.0 [+1.8]	+2.5 to +2.7 [+2.5]
Forecasts made in January 2023	+1.5 to +1.9 [+1.7]	+1.6 to +1.8 [+1.6]	+1.7 to +1.9 [+1.8]
Fiscal 2024	+1.0 to +1.3 [+1.2]	+1.8 to +2.1 [+2.0]	+1.5 to +1.8 [+1.7]
Forecasts made in January 2023	+0.9 to +1.3 [+1.1]	+1.8 to +1.9 [+1.8]	+1.5 to +1.8 [+1.6]
Fiscal 2025	+1.0 to +1.1 [+1.0]	+1.6 to +1.9 [+1.6]	+1.8 to +2.0 [+1.8]

Notes: 1. Figures in brackets indicate the medians of the Policy Board members' forecasts (point estimates).

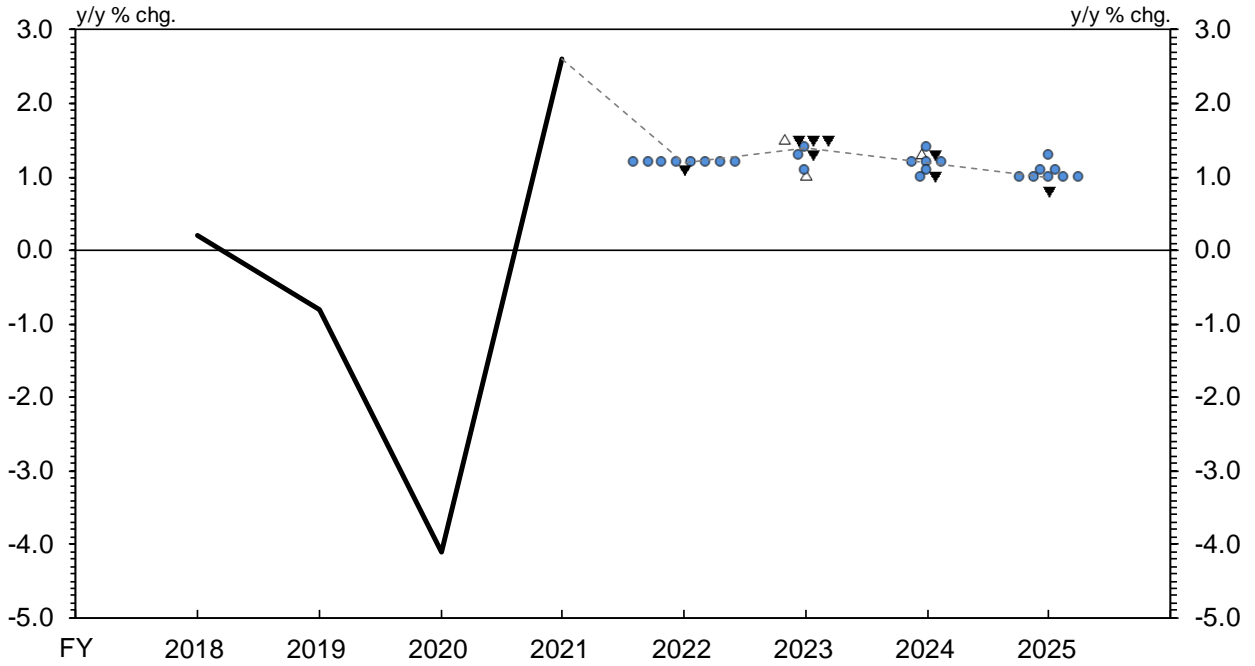
2. The forecasts of the majority of the Policy Board members are constructed as follows: each Policy Board member's forecast takes the form of a point estimate -- namely, the figure to which they attach the highest probability of realization. These forecasts are then shown as a range, with the highest figure and the lowest figure excluded. The range does not indicate the forecast errors.

3. Each Policy Board member makes their forecasts taking into account the effects of past policy decisions and with reference to views incorporated in financial markets regarding the future conduct of policy.

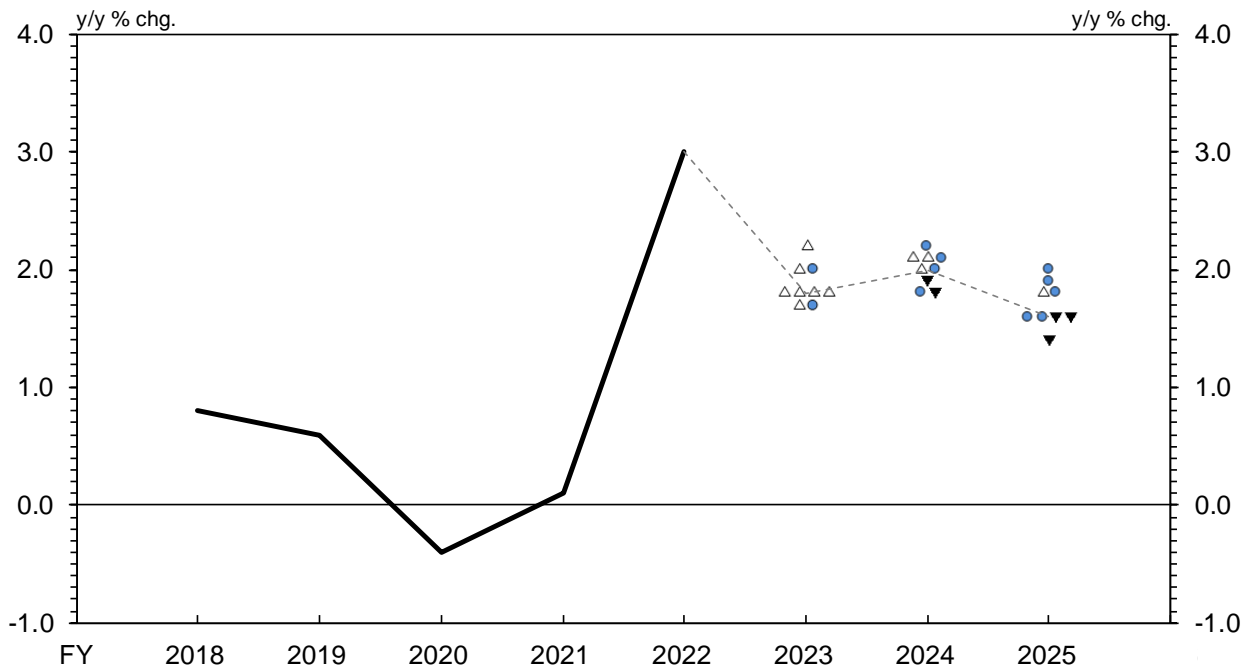
4. The CPI figures for fiscal 2022 are actual values.

Policy Board Members' Forecasts and Risk Assessments

(1) Real GDP



(2) CPI (All Items Less Fresh Food)



Notes: 1. The solid lines show actual figures, while the dotted lines show the medians of the Policy Board members' forecasts (point estimates).

2. The locations of ●, △, and ▼ in the charts indicate the figures for each Policy Board member's forecasts to which they attach the highest probability. The risk balance assessed by each Policy Board member is shown by the following shapes: ● indicates that a member assesses "upside and downside risks as being generally balanced," △ indicates that a member assesses "risks are skewed to the upside," and ▼ indicates that a member assesses "risks are skewed to the downside."