

# Phillip Singapore Monthly – Feb25

## World War Trade

### SINGAPORE | STRATEGY

- Singapore equities continued its climb, rising 1.0% in February, the 4<sup>th</sup> consecutive month of gains. Leading the gainers were defence, property and conglomerates. Singapore equities reach an all-time high on 12 February.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> April could be the date that will live in infamy if the US administration proceeds with reciprocal tariffs on all trading nations. Tariffs have been raised on China, Canada, and Mexico. Transport stocks, notably Yangzijiang Shipping and SATS, are bearing the brunt of the trade war.
- The US has fired its first salvo with tariffs on China, Canada, and Mexico. The value of imports from the combined three countries is around US\$1.45tr, or 40% of the US total imports. US economic indicators have started to head South and inflation risk rising. We fear the next wave of tariffs will be on SE Asia. Sectors in Singapore that are better sheltered from a trade war include construction, defence, finance, property, power, and telcos. Manufacturing is burdened by tariff uncertainty.

**Review:** Singapore equities increased 1.0% in February, the 4<sup>th</sup> consecutive month of gains. Defence led the gainers from the jump in order books, strong results and expectations of higher global defence spending (Figure 2). SGX recovered following the MAS incentives to reinvigorate Singapore equities. Yangzijiang shipping share price collapsed (Figure 3) on news of a recommendation to impose US\$1.5mn fee on China-built ships calling US ports and a 27% drop in container rates in February (Figure 8).

**Trade War:** Reliving the speech by President Roosevelt, we think 2 April may become a date which will live in infamy, as the Rest of the World was suddenly and deliberately attacked by reciprocal tariffs. The forecasted impact on US GDP is 0.3% point weakness in real GDP and 0.5% rise in inflation (Source: PIIE). We believe it could be worse as uncertainty will pull back corporate (Figure 9) and consumer confidence (10). We have begun to see weakness in the GDP (Figure 11). Another concern are the massive layoffs and spending cut underway by Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE). Government and related sectors account for 67% of new jobs in the US (Figure 12). The more considerable concern for ASEAN is the planned reciprocal tariffs planned by the US. Based on WTO data, the average import tariff in ASEAN is around 6.5% (Figure 13). It is far lower than the 20-25% tariffs imposed on Canada, Mexico and China. ASEAN will remain competitive. However, there is a worry that reciprocal tariffs imposed by the US may include value-added taxes. This could also apply to Singapore, which has a 9% GST. In other ASEAN countries, VAT is 7% to 12%.

**Recommendation:** The highlight in the recent results season has been all the capital being returned to shareholders. DBS started the ball rolling by raising its payout ratio from 56% to 76%. The dividend yield is pushed to 6.5%, which becomes the new hurdle rate for Singapore REITs. DBS is returning S\$8bn in excess capital. The next most aggressive in returning capital is UOB (S\$3bn), followed by OCBC (S\$2.5bn). We find many other companies either raising dividends or share buybacks. Venture Corp has an almost 90% payout ratio, followed by ComfortDelgro's 80%. Sembcorp Industries increased their dividends per share by 77% in FY24. Raffles Medical and Q&M Dental are buying back an unprecedented 100mn and 50mn shares respectively. As the threat of a trade war looms, our strategy is to focus on domestic sectors to insulate against a global growth shock. Construction has a five-year roadmap of elevated spending. Banks pay attractive yields with improving economic data (Figure 14). Real estate is vibrant with projects securing bookings of 3 to 4x more than units available for launch. New home sales are expected to jump 31% in 2025. The recent budget further supports the local economy with an additional S\$2bn of SG60 vouchers (Figure 15). Total expenditure is also budgeted to rise by 10% this year (2023: +8%). The defence industry is boosted by a 12% rise in government expenditure plus the rearmament of multiple nations as the US turn more insular. The power sector offers stability with long-term and cost pass-through contracts.

7 March 2025

### February 2025 performance

Figure 1: Dividends supported the banks

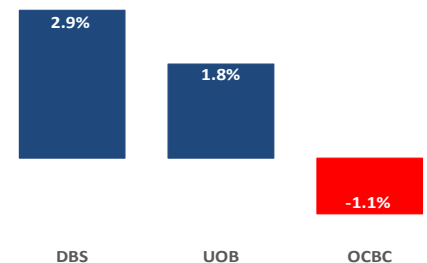


Figure 2: Defence lead the gains

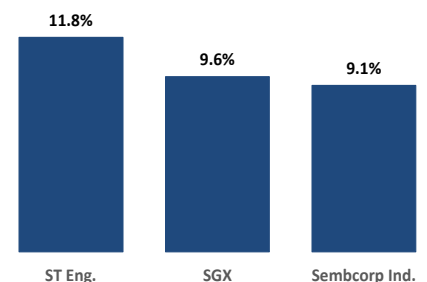


Figure 3: Trade war victims

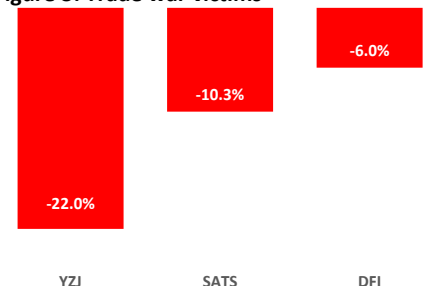
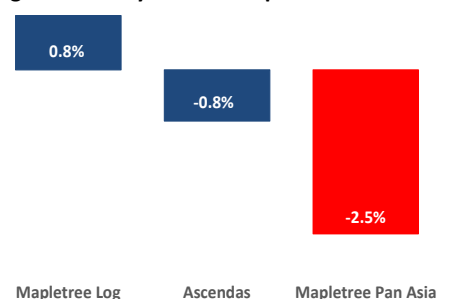


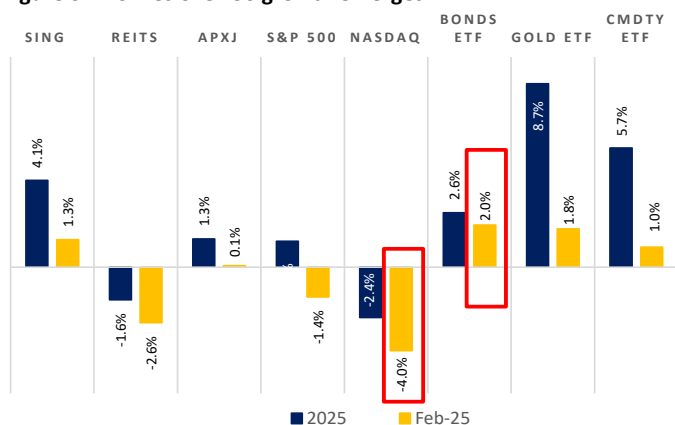
Figure 4: Delayed Fed cuts pressure REITs



Source (Fig 1-4): PSR, Bloomberg, 28Feb25

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**Corporate Insight Webinars (12pm):** APAC Realty (7Mar 12pm), Telechoice (11Mar 12pm)  
<https://www.poems.com.sg/education/events-seminars/>

**Figure 5: Worries over US growth emerges**


Source: PSR, Bloomberg # Performance in US dollar terms.

**Figure 6: Stellar Hong Kong performance**

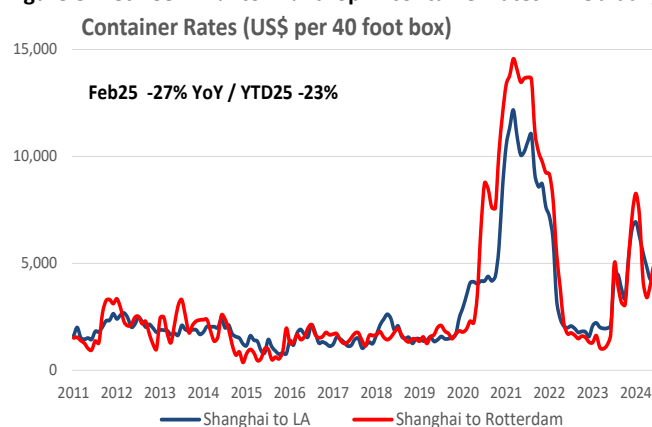
	1 Mth Perf.	3 Mth Perf.	YTD Perf.	Market Cap (US\$ bn)
Hong Kong	13.4%	18.1%	14.4%	3,381
Vietnam	3.2%	4.4%	3.0%	214
Philippines	2.3%	-9.3%	-8.1%	150
Shanghai	2.2%	-0.2%	-0.9%	7,081
SG Financials	2.0%	6.9%	4.8%	216
Malaysia	1.1%	-1.2%	-4.1%	245
Singapore	1.0%	4.2%	2.9%	437
S Korea	0.6%	3.1%	5.6%	1,381
Taiwan	-2.0%	3.6%	0.1%	2,213
SG Small Cap	-2.7%	-1.1%	-1.4%	24
SG REIT	-2.9%	-4.0%	-2.8%	65
SG Mid Cap	-3.0%	-4.5%	-4.0%	84
ASEAN 6	-5.1%	-7.6%	-7.7%	1,956
India	-5.9%	-8.3%	-6.4%	1,999
Japan	-6.1%	-2.8%	-6.9%	21,296
Thailand	-8.4%	-15.7%	-14.0%	437
Indonesia	-11.8%	-11.9%	-11.4%	688

Source: PSR, Bloomberg

**Figure 7: Conglomerates, Transport and Healthcare take the lead**

PSR (145 companies)	1 Mth Perf.	3 Mth Perf.	YTD Perf.
Commodities	0.0%	0.1%	-0.4%
Conglomerate	3.7%	5.3%	4.2%
Consumer	-6.3%	-7.2%	-6.2%
Finance	2.2%	7.1%	4.9%
Healthcare	2.3%	1.7%	1.6%
Electronics/Services	-0.8%	-0.9%	-1.2%
Property/Const.	2.1%	-1.8%	-0.1%
REIT - Hospitality	-6.8%	-1.0%	-5.4%
REIT - Industrial	-2.8%	-6.0%	-3.8%
REIT - Office	-5.6%	-2.5%	-4.9%
REIT - Retail	-0.6%	-0.7%	0.2%
REIT - Others	-2.6%	-2.5%	-2.2%
Shipping	-14.1%	3.3%	-10.2%
Telecomm.	1.8%	8.7%	9.4%
Transportation	3.0%	2.0%	0.9%
Singapore	0.8%	3.5%	2.4%
	1.03%	4.2%	2.9%

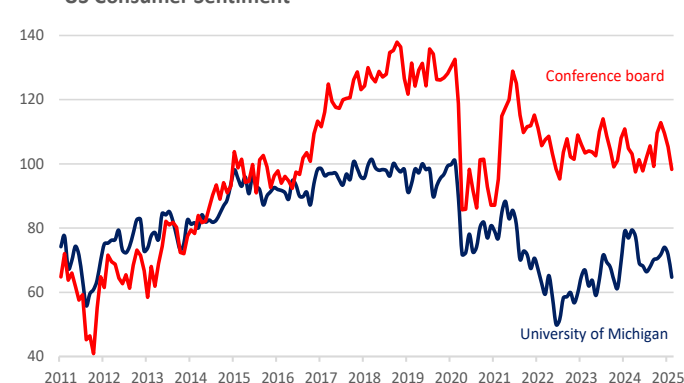
Source: PSR, Bloomberg

**Figure 8: Between 21% to 27% drop in container rates in February**


Source: PSR, Bloomberg

**Figure 9: Corporate spending on capital goods trending down**  
 US: New orders Durable Goods (3MMA YoY)


Source: PSR, CEIC

**Figure 10: US consumer sentiment sliding fast**  
 US Consumer Sentiment


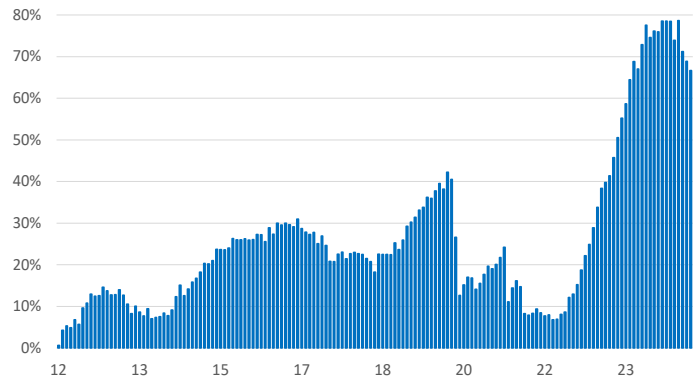
Source: PSR, CEIC

**Figure 11: GDP has started to contract**  
US: GDP Now (QoQ) - Atlanta Fed



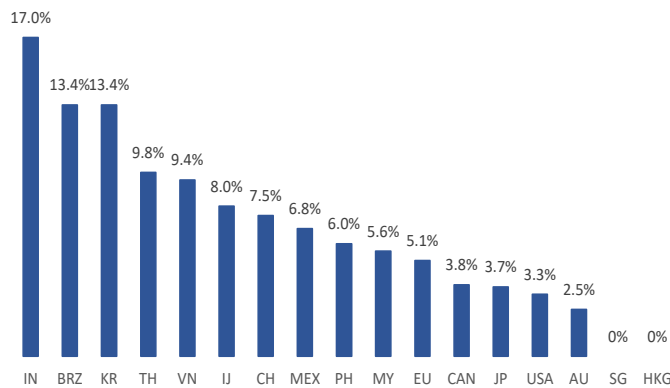
Source: PSR, CEIC

**Figure 12: Demand for electricity to spike**  
US: Govt, Healthcare and Social (TTM % of total)



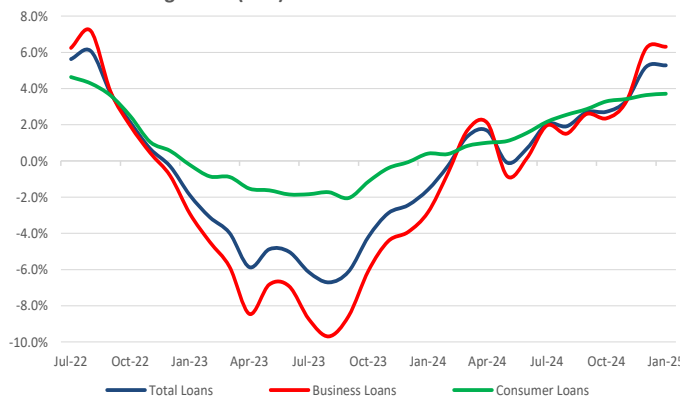
Source: PSR, CEIC

**Figure 13: ASEAN tariffs lower than the rest**  
WTO: Average import tariff



Source: PSR, CEIC

**Figure 14: Loan growth starting strongly in 2025**  
SG: Banking Loans (YoY)



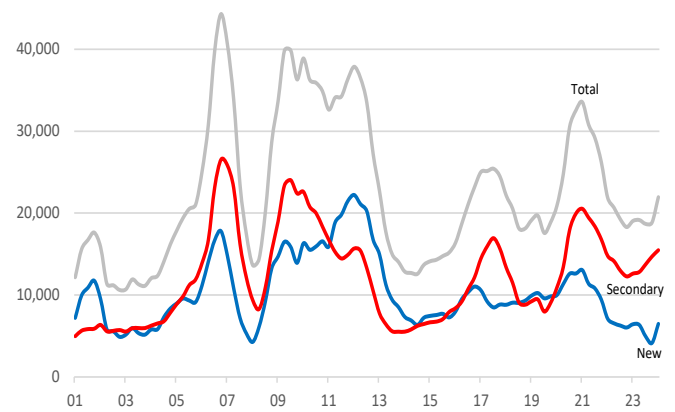
Source: PSR, CEIC

**Figure 15: Government expenditure and primary deficit to rise**

Fiscal year (\$\$bn)	2022	2023	2024	2025	FY24 YoY	FY25 YoY
Operating revenue	91.0	103.4	116.6	122.8	13%	5%
Less: Total expenditure	(104.9)	(105.3)	(112.9)	(123.8)	7%	10%
- Defence	(17.0)	(19.4)	(20.9)	(23.4)	8%	12%
- Health	(17.1)	(17.3)	(17.9)	(20.9)	4%	16%
- Education	(13.1)	(14.0)	(14.6)	(15.3)	4%	5%
- Transport	(12.8)	(13.0)	(14.7)	(14.7)	13%	0%
<b>Primary surplus/(deficit)</b>	<b>(13.8)</b>	<b>(1.9)</b>	<b>3.7</b>	<b>(1.0)</b>		
Less: Special transfers/Top ups	(8.9)	(27.1)	(25.1)	(23.4)	-7%	-7%
- SG60 Vouchers				(2.0)		
- Coastal and flood				(5.0)		
- Changi airport				(5.0)		
Net Investment return	22.4	23.0	24.0	27.1	5%	13%
<b>Overall budget surplus/(deficit)</b>	<b>(0.4)</b>	<b>(6.0)</b>	<b>2.6</b>	<b>2.8</b>		
Capitalisation of Infra.	2.2	3.7	4.2	4.6	14%	11%
Less: Depreciation of infra	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0		
SINGA Interest cost	(0.1)	(0.2)	(0.4)	(0.6)	65%	47%
<b>Overall fiscall</b>	<b>1.7</b>	<b>(2.6)</b>	<b>6.4</b>	<b>6.8</b>		
Capital receipts - land sales	13.3	17.8	25.0	19.4	41%	-22%

Source: PSR, CEIC

**Figure 16: New home sales turning around**  
SG: New and Secondary Home Sales (TTM)



Source: PSR, CEIC

## Phillip Absolute 10

Our model portfolio was down 0.7% in February, underperforming the market. Our yield stocks or REITs exposure suffered the largest decline. Despite the strong results, SATS suffered for the 2nd month on trade war concerns. Capitaland Investment rebounded with better-than-expected results. The largest outperformance was from ST Engineering on the strong results, jump in the 4Q24 orderbook and expectations of rising defence spending.

**2Q24 - Add: DBS, Cromwell European REIT; Remove: OCBC, Frasers Centrepoint Trust**

**3Q24 - Add: OUE REIT; Remove: Thai Beverage**

**4Q24 - Add: UOB, SATS; Remove: DBS, Singtel**

**1Q25 - Add: Ascott, OCBC, Wee Hur; Remove: ComfortDelGro, Valuetronics, OUE REIT**

**Strategy commentary:** Our portfolio balances yield and growth. Nevertheless, it will be exposed to expectations of interest rate changes (Ascott, Stoneweg), worries over economic growth in China (China Aviation, CLI), and trade war concerns (SATS).

Figure 17: Monthly movements

	Absolute 10	SING
Jan25	1.4%	1.8%
Feb24	-0.7%	1.0%
Mar24		
Apr24		
May24		
Jun24		
Jul24		
Aug24		
Sep24		
Oct24		
Nov24		
Dec24		
YTD	0.7%	2.8%
Out/(Under)perf.		-2.2%

Source: Bloomberg, PSR, Performance is for illustration only and excludes brokerage fees, dividends, and monthly rebalancing costs.

Figure 18: Phillip Absolute 10 performance February 2025

Company	1M	3M	YTD	Rating	Target Px (\$\$)	Share Px (\$\$)	Upside	Mkt Cap (US\$m)	Dvd. Yield
<b>Yield</b>									
CapitaLand Ascott	-3.9%	-3.4%	-1.1%	Buy	1.05	0.860	22%	2,435	7.1%
Stoneweg REIT - EUR	-3.8%	-7.4%	-5.1%	Buy	1.95	1.50	30%	884	10.5%
<b>Dividend / Earnings Growth</b>									
China Aviation	-3.9%	-3.4%	-5.5%	Buy	1.05	0.87	21%	553	3.1%
OCBC	-1.1%	5.7%	3.1%	Accumulate	17.90	17.21	4%	57,484	4.9%
SATS	-10.3%	-19.1%	-16.5%	Buy	4.34	3.04	43%	3,356	0.0%
ST Engineering	11.8%	20.2%	16.1%	Accumulate	6.10	5.41	13%	12,510	3.1%
UOB	1.8%	5.1%	5.1%	Accumulate	41.80	38.20	9%	47,435	4.7%
<b>Re-rating Plays</b>									
CapitaLand Investment	4.1%	-6.2%	-2.3%	Buy	3.38	2.56	32%	9,488	4.7%
Keppel Ltd	1.2%	1.9%	0.3%	Buy	8.00	6.86	17%	9,204	2.8%
Wee Hur Holdings	-3.1%	5.6%	13.1%	Buy	0.62	0.48	31%	324	1.3%
Average	-0.73%	-0.1%	0.7%				22.2%		4.2%

Source: Bloomberg, PSR ^ Dividend yields are historical for all stocks

Figure 19: Snapshot of Top 10 gainers and losers in February 2025

Top 10 Gainers		Top 10 Losers	
Emperador Inc	-31.0%	YZJ Fin.	25.3%
Southern Alliance	-26.6%	Rex International	20.0%
Manulife US REIT	-23.2%	Food Empire	15.7%
Prime US REIT	-22.2%	iFast	15.1%
Yangzijiang	-22.0%	ST Engineering	11.8%
Fu Yu Corp	-19.7%	Valuetronics	11.2%
mm2 Asia	-16.7%	Raffles Medical	10.8%
LHN	-15.6%	Valuemax	9.8%
Olam Group	-13.8%	SGX	9.6%
Keppel Pacific Oak	-12.5%	Aztech Global	9.3%
Top 10 SPDR Gainers		Top 10 SPDR Losers	
ST Eng.	11.8%	YZJ Shipbuilding	-22.0%
SGX	9.6%	SATS	-10.3%
Sembcorp Ind.	9.1%	DFI	-6.0%
SIA	7.1%	Mapletree Ind.	-5.7%
UOL	6.3%	Frasers Logistics	-5.6%
CLI	4.1%	Seatrium	-5.4%
HK Land	3.7%	Jardine C&C	-4.3%
DBS	2.9%	FCT	-4.2%
Wilmar	2.9%	Thai Bev.	-3.7%
Singtel	2.1%	Genting SG	-3.3%

Source: Bloomberg, PSR

**Weekly Equity Strategy Commentary**

<b>Week 7</b>	<p>Week 7 equity strategy: It is a daily whiplash of tariff news from the US. Tariffs on Canada and Mexico have now been postponed for a month. The 10% tariff on China was effective 4 February. After a temporary suspension of accepting parcels from China and Hong Kong, the de minimis exemption (small shipments less than \$800 avoid import taxes) remains for now. Shein and Temu accounted for around 30% of the 1bn shipments into the US under de minimis. SATS would have been the most impacted as the US accounts for 30% of revenue.</p> <p>The threat of tariffs on SE Asia is a clear and present danger. Trump spoke of reciprocal tariffs by early next week on countries with existing tariffs on U.S. goods. Even Japan may not be immune. The most optimistic scenario will be the tariffs are up for negotiation. US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said, "The tariff gun will always be loaded and on the table but rarely discharged". We are not so optimistic. To shelter gain from tariff threats, we believe sectors in Singapore with positive momentum are construction, capital markets, property, power and telco.</p> <p>Construction is on a multi-year growth expansion, following the 30% rise in 2024 to a record S\$44bn. Capital markets will benefit from the surge in financial volatility. SGX is operationally leveraged to the rise in trading volumes. Bank see trading income gains from forex hedging and equity volatility. The property sector is enjoying a surge in demand from delayed new launches and rising HDB prices supporting upgrading. Singapore's electricity demand is expected to climb from 1.4% CAGR (2018-23) to 4-6% by 2030. Keppel Ltd and SembCorp Industries new hydrogen-ready and more efficient power plants will be the beneficiaries. The 113% YoY jump in Bharti Airtel earnings will be supportive for Singtel.</p> <p>On SingPost, once the Australia Foreign Investment Review Board (FIRB) approval is received, an EGM is expected in March to approve the sale of its Australian business (FMH). FMH's offer was attractive at approx. S\$900mn cash after SingPost injecting only S\$90mn in equity. SingPost's 4x gearing was too high and to grow FMH, SingPost needed more equity. Meanwhile, the sale of SingPost Centre is still pending HDB approval. Operationally, market conditions are softening and employee retention could be an issue. With a net gain of S\$312mn, if we assume 50% is paid out, it implies a special dividend of 7 cents. Any announcement of the special dividend will likely be in May, after the full-year results. We think there is deep value considering SingPost Centre alone is worth S\$1bn (or 45 cents). But SingPost may not have the urgency to sell because the balance sheet will be in net cash post-FMH. News on the FIRB/EGM approval and special dividend should drive the share price higher. But we are wary of holding the share price post-special dividends, where it may merely adjust downwards at a similar level because clarity over the core business will be unclear until the postal review is completed.</p>
<b>Week 8</b>	<p>Congratulations, the Singapore index hit an all-time high on 10 February 2025 of 3921, surpassing the previous high of 3906 way back in October 2007. Tears of joy rolled down until I realised the market had gone nowhere for the past 18 years. During that period, investors would have made around 10% in returns in US dollar terms, excl. dividends. Major outperformers were technology led by Nasdaq 589% and Taiwan 136%. China and Vietnam have been the worst performing falling 43% and 25%, respectively. As details of the SGX review are unveiled on 21st Feb, our wish list is more funds allocated to Singapore equities. Access to capital should be a strategic advantage for local firms. Instead, the pool of domestic liquidity is made more available overseas. Less regulation or thinning the annual report is not the panacea.</p> <p>DBS kicks off the bank reporting season. And for the second consecutive year, the jump in dividends to a yield of 6.7%, makes it again the REIT killer - part 2. With a 6.7% yield backed by S\$3bn (67mn) share buyback plan, makes it a compelling alternative for REIT. Unless aggressive rate cuts occur, the 6.7% yield is a new hurdle rate for REITs. DBS's 35% jump in dividends to \$3 per share in 2025 is largely due to easier capital rules under Basel III. To return S\$8bn excess capital and improve ROE, DBS is effectively raising its payout ratio in the next 3 years from 56% to 76%. The capital returns exclude another \$1.5bn capital (52 cents) that can be released by MAS on the operational risk charge. Operationally, momentum is on loan growth and wealth management, but net profit is guided lower due to a \$400mn hit from the global minimum tax (12.5% to 15%).</p> <p>Finally, Trump is planning reciprocal tariffs on all countries. We think this is better than imposing arbitrary politically motivated tariffs. Details of how the tariffs will be computed are not disclosed by the imposition on 2 April. Based on WTO data, countries with the highest tariffs in Asia include India (17%), S Korea (13%) and Thailand (9.8%). Our base case is the impact on listed semiconductor stocks that export to the US is minimal as tariffs in Singapore and Malaysia are some of the lowest at 0% and 5.6% respectively. However, the caveat is data available is average tariffs to all countries not specific to the US and excludes domestic taxes imposed such as excise duties and GST, which the US may deem as reciprocal tariffs.</p>
<b>Week 9</b>	<p>Arise small-mid caps, the light has come. MAS will be deploying \$5bn into fund managers that invest substantially in Singapore equities. The amount is not large, at just 0.8% of the entire market cap of SGX-listed companies S\$617bn. But it is a substantial 8% of small-mid cap market cap less than S\$1bn totalling S\$60bn. If we adjust for free float or S\$25bn, it becomes an even larger 20% of the market cap. We do not expect all S\$5bn to be earmarked for Singapore equities. Most funds will look for larger regional mandates that can also attract new capital. Nevertheless, if we assume around 30% or S\$1.5bn goes to the small-mid cap, it is still a substantial 6% of free float. We commend the holistic approach MAS is adopting to improve the attractiveness of the equity market. The global trend of passive</p>

investing and algo trading is impacting global equities. The largest and most overvalued companies attract the most capital. SGX has the opportunity to become a primary destination for smaller regional companies where the ecosystem supports a better price discovery process. This is through an ecosystem of deeper equity research, higher disclosure standards, larger available capital and wider institutional investor base.

On the Singapore budget, sectors that benefit the most near-term will be retail and supermarkets due to the slew of household handouts. Construction is supported by further combined top-up in Coastal Flood Protection and Changi Airport totalling S\$5bn each. Defence spending is budgeted to rise 12% in FY25 from 8% last year.

On corporate news, earnings released last week have generally been disappointing. Wilmar's earnings collapsed as sugar prices corrected from elevated levels last year. The outlook appears moderately better this year as soybean crush margins in China are improving. Seatrium's disappointing earnings were due to its high-cost base and legacy US contract suffering from large provisions. Net margins are 2% on revenue of S\$9bn. StarHub was below expectations from the intense mobile price competition. It was so severe the company is not providing revenue guidance for 2025. Venture Corp earnings were the weakest in 7 years and near-term guidance sluggish. Trump's policies on tariffs are causing customers to be cautious about their orders and cuts in the national health budget will pull back spending on life science equipment.

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