

OUTLOOK AND STRATEGY

Market Review. Domestic fixed income assets performed well in February 2025, with the BPI Government Bond Index posting a return of 1.13% year-to-date. This came even after the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) surprised investors and decided to keep their key interest rates steady in their February policy meeting. In lieu of a policy rate cut, the BSP announced a cut in the bank's Rate Reserve Requirement (RRR) from the current 7% down to 5%. This move is estimated to release PHP 300Bn of additional liquidity into the system which may cause rates to decline further. Another headwind was inflation with the CPI print for the month of January coming out at 2.9%, the same figure as in December. In spite of all these, the BSP is still widely expected to cut the policy rates by a total of 0.5% (50 basis points) in 2025. For the month of February, the BTr held a total of 4 issuances. All auctions received strong demand, with the 5-, 7-, 10- and 20-year papers seeing average awarded yields of 5.968%, 5.973%, 6.118% and 6.376%, respectively. March will continue to see issuances across the curve with 5-, 7, 10, 3- and 25-year papers slated to be offered.

The Philippine Stock Exchange Index (PSEi) was able to bounce back in February amidst bargain-hunting following the sharp decline in January. The local bourse traded in a tight range as investors digested economic data releases such as January inflation figure—which came out steady at +2.9% or within BSP's range of +2.5% to +3.3%, the BSP policy rate pause, RRR cut, and largely in-line 4Q earnings results. Towards the end of the month, trading activity surged as MSCI rebalancing took place. The PSEi rose by 2.3% to close at 5,997.97 in February.

In terms of trading activity, the Average Daily Turnover soared by 24.8% to Php6.09 billion in February mainly buoyed by the MSCI rebalancing in the last trading day of the month. In terms of foreign activity, foreigners were net sellers yet again, registering at US\$145 million. Top foreign sold stocks were ALI (-US\$38.5 million), URC (-US\$36.7 million), and MBT (-US\$28.4 million). Foreign participation in January was at 53%.

On a per stock basis, the top three index gainers for the month include: SMC (+28.91%), JFC (+15.86%) and MONDE (+13.53%). Meanwhile, the bottom three performers were: EMI (-23.32%), BLOOM (-7.00%) and CBC (-6.99%).

Global equities experienced a slight decline in February 2025, with the MSCI World Index down by 0.72%. The month was marked by profit-taking in large-cap US technology stocks and a shift towards value stocks amid economic uncertainties. US equities struggled due to concerns over stretched valuations in mega-cap tech stocks and signs of weakening consumer demand. Retail sales declined by 0.8%, and consumer confidence softened, reinforcing investor caution. The US Federal Reserve maintained its focus on promoting maximum employment and stable prices. US inflation moderated but remained slightly above the 2% target, prompting the Fed to re-emphasize its commitment to using all available tools to support economic stability. Meanwhile, European equities outperformed as UK stocks reached record highs. Optimism was driven by the likelihood of a ceasefire in Ukraine and strong earnings in the defense and financial sectors. In Asia, Japanese equities showed resilience amid a mix of macroeconomic and geopolitical factors. The Tokyo Stock Price Index (TOPIX) saw a modest gain, driven by strong performances in the technology and consumer sectors. The Bank of Japan's decision to raise its unsecured overnight call rate to 0.5%, the highest in 17 years, was a significant move towards monetary policy normalization. This rate hike, along with positive earnings reports from major companies, bolstered investor confidence.

Fund Performance. The Fund returned 0.30% for the month.

Fund Strategy. The Fund Manager will continue to build accrual income by investing in high grade corporate and government securities with attractive yields. Meanwhile, volatility in the global financial markets should provide opportunities for capital appreciation in riskier assets. The Fund will maintain nimble positions in order to take advantage of this. Investors in a multi-asset fund must have a longer time horizon as value is typically achieved over the long-term.