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HRnetGroup Ltd (HRNET SP)

Adding an external wing

Acquires majority stake in fintech start-up

HRnetGroup (HRnet) is acquiring a 51% stake in fintech startup Octomate for SGD676.5K from an unrelated third party. The move will facilitate the integration of Octomate's Instant Payment solution with HRnet's Ease Works app that allows contractor employees to be paid instantly after approval of their timesheets. While there is no material impact on our EPS forecasts, we think Octomate is in a sweet spot to extract potential synergies as it enables cross-selling to the group's new and existing clients. Maintain BUY with TP of SGD1.07, based on 15x FY23E P/E.

Offering instant payment to entice contractors

Octomate's CEO and Co-Founder Zoey Tong will become the 37th business co-owner of the group. Set up in 2019, Octomate is a cloud-based workforce management solution, designed to help enterprises manage their contractors from onboarding to roster and timesheet management. It is built on blockchain for maximum security and scalability. The breakout star in its suite of offerings is the ability to power instant payments (i.e salary, reimbursements of claims, or even rewards). Octomate is the first of its kind to offer hybrid HR tech and fintech solution on one platform.

An independent brand with strong clientele base

According to management, Octomate will remain an independent brand of HRnet. It intends to develop this young start-up further as a value-added product offering. Currently, Octomate has over 3,000 daily active users with blue chip customers such as Amazon, H&M, and Hyundai Motor Group, etc. There is a one-time implementation / activation fee charged to customers to go live, as well as recurring subscription fees by tier or volume of transactions, depending on clients' nature of business.

The fight for top global talent is on

HRnet's professional recruitment business segment looks set to benefit as Singapore goes all out to attract more highly skilled foreigners to strengthen its position as a global talent hub. From 1 Jan 2023, applicants for Singapore's new work pass will need a monthly salary of at least SGD30k, comparable to the top 5% of Employment Pass holders. Higher remuneration packages should help HRnet offset slower placement volume growth amid the current uncertain economic outlook.

FYE Dec (SGD m)	FY20A	FY21A	FY22E	FY23E	FY24E
Revenue	433	591	626	648	665
EBITDA	71	97	101	107	109
Core net profit	45	61	67	71	73
Core EPS (cts)	4.5	6.1	6.7	7.1	7.3
Core EPS growth (%)	(11.8)	34.6	10.0	6.4	2.3
Net DPS (cts)	2.5	4.0	4.2	4.3	4.4
Core P/E (x)	12.1	13.2	11.2	10.5	10.3
P/BV (x)	1.6	2.2	1.9	1.8	1.7
Net dividend yield (%)	4.6	5.0	5.6	5.7	5.9
ROAE (%)	14.1	18.7	17.5	17.4	16.7
ROAA (%)	10.4	12.4	12.5	12.9	12.5
EV/EBITDA (x)	3.2	5.1	4.2	3.7	3.3
Net gearing (%) (incl perps)	net cash				
Consensus net profit	-	-	68	71	71
MKE vs. Consensus (%)	-	-	(0.8)	(0.0)	2.2

Eric Ong ericong@maybank.com (65) 6231 5924

BUY

Share Price SGD 0.75

12m Price Target SGD 1.07 (+42%)

Previous Price Target SGD 1.07

Company Description

HRnetGroup provides personnel recruitment and human resource related services under two key segments: Professional Recruitment and Flexible Staffing

Statistics

52w high/low (SGD)	0.83/0.69
3m avg turnover (USDm)	0.1
Free float (%)	20.5
Issued shares (m)	1,004
Market capitalisation	SGD752.8M
	USD526M

Major shareholders:

Simco Global Ltd.	77.0%
Fidelity Management & Research Co. LLC	3.0%
HRnetGroup Ltd.	0.9%

Price Performance



——HRnetGroup Ltd - (LHS, SGD) ——HRnetGroup Ltd / Straits Times Index - (RHS, %)

	-1M	-3M	-12M
Absolute (%)	(4)	(3)	(3)
Relative to index (%)	(2)	(4)	(4)

Source: FactSet





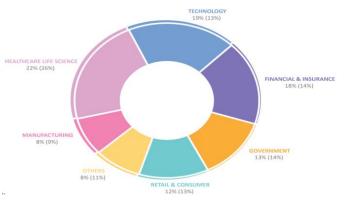
HRnetGroup Ltd

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Value Proposition

- Balanced business model with professional recruitment and flexible staffing segments that are complementary through economic cycles and help customer retention.
- Geographical diversification and multi-disciplinary focus help it serve clients with varied staffing needs and with multicountry presence in APAC.
- Has 3,000+ clients, including several Fortune 500 companies operating in the region.
- Co-ownership is a key advantage in staff retention and motivation, which makes up about 25% of its permanent staff base in FY21.
- According to Frost & Sullivan, HRnet is the largest recruitment player in Singapore in terms of number of licensed consultants and revenue.

Diversified sector contribution



Source: Company

Financial Metrics

- Two complementary businesses provide margin resilience in economic and recruitment cycles, as seen by relatively stable margins over past the three and a half years.
- Commands decent ROE of 14-15% despite its significantly ungeared balance sheet.
- Low capex intensity with strong free cashflow generation.
- Does not require high working capital commitments as flexible staffing does not involve talent 'inventory'.

Revenue and GPM trend



Source: Company, Maybank IBG Research

Price Drivers

Historical share price trend



Source: Company, Maybank IBG Research

- On 2 Aug '18. HRnet acquired 100% stake in Career Personnel for HKD800k, which is in the business of flexible staffing and provides temp and contract personnel predominantly to HK government agencies.
- 2. On 2 Aug '19, it paid GBP21m for a 25% interest in Staffline a leading workforce recruitment and training organisation providing services mainly in the UK and Ireland, to both government/commercial customers.
- 3. On 17 Jan '20, HRnet set up a JV, PT Recruit First Indonesia (RFI), to provide manpower services and other management consultancy service.
- 4. On Apr '22, the Group secured a 2-year contract for the recruitment of admin and ancillary positions for SGH.

Swing Factors

Upside

- Faster-than-expected organic growth in existing markets, particularly in Singapore where its market dominance is perceived to leave limited headroom for further growth.
- Successful and swift execution of its M&A strategy in acquiring accretive businesses.
- Expansion of other fee-generating services like payroll processing and HR consulting that can augment its core services and customer 'stickiness'.

Downside

- Slower-than-expected organic growth in existing markets; margin pressure from increased competition in its key markets.
- Execution missteps for its M&As, creating a drag on returns due to idle balance sheet or non-accretive acquisitions.
- Staff turnover among its key performers and customer relationship managers.

ericong@maybank.com

HRnetGroup Ltd





ericong@maybank.com

Risk Rating & Score ¹	na
Score Momentum ²	na
Last Updated	na
Controversy Score ³	na

Business Model & Industry Issues

- As a recruitment firm, the Group's key asset is human capital and hence, it places the development, engagement and retention of its own staff high on the list of priorities. By enabling their growth and progression, this also helps to cultivate a highly driven and effective workforce.
- The HR industry is also increasingly going digital. These trends lean towards a need for reassessment of various aspects of its business ranging from internal areas such as its own benefits management, working arrangements, and training & education for its workforce, to external-facing elements such as methods of outreach to clientele and candidates, and helping to bridge the gap between the employees and employers.
- Its unique Co-Ownership plans further provide the opportunity for high-performers to unleash the entrepreneurship spirit in them, invest in the Group, and/or a new venture and share in its success as well as its risk of failure.

Material E issues

- Over the past 2+ years, remote working or work-from-home has become the standard for many amid the lingering COVID-19 pandemic. In a way, this is also better for the environment.
- With fewer people in the office at any one time, the group may find that they can afford to downsize, cutting down on office space and energy usage. It will also mean a reduction in people on the roads driving in to work.

Material S issues

Whenever HRnet starts an overseas business unit, it always seeks to localise leadership roles. This allows the group to kickstart operations as a local business with a staff population that is acutely aware of the nuances and intricacies involved when serving the domestic market. It has also committed to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, in particular with regard to promoting sustainable economic growth, decent work for all, and reducing inequalities.

Key G metrics and issues

- The board consists of six directors, of which half (3) are independent and the rest are Sim family members i.e., Mr Sim Yong Siang, Mr Sim Joo Siang and Ms. Adeline Sim.
- The nominating, audit and remuneration committees are chaired by independent directors.
- None of the independent directors have served on the board beyond nine years from the date of his or her first appointment.
- SIMCO Ltd's (controlled by the Sim family) deemed stake in the company is 77%.
- Key management/ directors' compensation accounted for 3.8%/6.5% of total employee compensation in 2021.
- External auditor is Deloitte & Touche LLP (appointed on 12 Aug '20).
- Recruitment is a heavily regulated industry with the Ministry of Manpower leading the regulations. Noncompliance will lead to costly fines and reputational damage.
- It has therefore put in place a whistle-blowing policy and channels for employees to report any suspicious and noncompliant practices.
- In 2021, there were no incidents of corruption or noncompliance with laws or regulations resulting in significant fines and non-monetary sanctions.

<u>Risk Rating & Score</u> - derived by Sustainalytics and assesses the company's exposure to unmanaged ESG risks. Scores range between 0 - 50 in order of increasing severity with low/high scores & ratings representing negligible/significant risk to the company's enterprise value, respectively, from ESG-driven financial impacts. <u>*2score Momentum</u> - indicates changes to the company's score since the last update - a <u>negative</u> integer indicates a company's improving risk score; a <u>positive</u> integer indicates a deterioration. <u>*3controversy Score*</u> - reported periodically by Sustainalytics in the event of material ESG-related incident(s), with the impact severity scores of these events ranging from Category 0-5 (0 - no reports; 1 - negligible risks; ...; 5 - poses serious risks & indicative of potential structural deficiencies at the company).



	Quantitative Parameters (Score: 44)									
	Particulars	Unit	2019	2020	2021	KELYA US (2021)				
	Scope 1 GHG emissions	m tCO2e	N/A	N/A	N/A	1,553				
	Scope 2 GHG emissions	m tCO2e	N/A	N/A	N/A	9,469				
	Total	m tCO2e	N/A	N/A	N/A	11,022				
	Scope 3 GHG emissions	m tCO2e	N/A	N/A	N/A	5,577				
Ε	Total	m tCO2e	N/A	N/A	N/A	16,599				
ļ <u>-</u>	GHG intensity (Scope 1 and 2)	tCO2e/t	N/A	N/A	N/A	3.6				
	Energy intensity	KwH/empl.	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A				
	Share of renewable energy use in operations	%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A				
	NPE (New Plastic Economy) investments	SGD m	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A				
	Cases of environmental non-compliance	number	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0				
	% of women in workforce	%	74.6%	73.9 %	74 %	71%				
S	% of women in management roles	%	62.5%	64.7%	61.6%%	66%				
٦	Incidences of non-compliance with laws	number	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0				
	Average training hours per employee	hours	77	72	64	N/A				
	MD/CEO salary as % of reported net profit	%	3.9%	4.3%	3.7%	2.5%				
G	Board salary as % of reported net profit	%	2.9%	3.2%	2.6%	3.5%				
	Independent directors on the Board	%	57 %	57 %	57 %	78%				
	Female directors on the Board	%	33%	33%	33%	44%				
	Dividends payout ratio as % of net profit)	%	55%	54%	61%	15%				

Qualitative Parameters (Score: 33)

- a) is there an ESG policy in place and whether there is a standalone ESG committee or is it part of a risk committee?
- Yes. The committee is tasked with developing sustainability, keeping in view the Group's overall long-term plans and vision, setting relevant KPIs and targets, managing and monitoring overall sustainability performance.
- b) is the senior management salary linked to fulfilling ESG targets?

No

- c) Does the company follow the task force of climate related disclosures (TCFD) framework for ESG reporting?
- No. But the Group intends to start climate related disclosure per SGX requirement from 2022.
- e) Does the company have a mechanism to capture Scope 3 emissions which parameters are captured?
- f) What are the 2-3 key carbon mitigation/water/waste management strategies adopted by the company?

Management has changed its entire on-boarding process to become paperless to reduce its impact on the environment. It recruits engineers for environmental firms and sustainability professionals. The Group also consciously seek to rent offices at green buildings.

g) Does carbon offset form part of the net zero/carbon neutrality target of the company? No

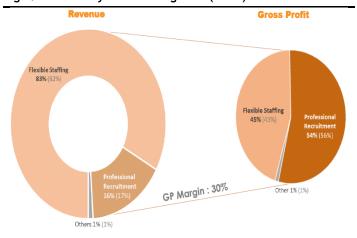
Target (Score: 100)		
Particulars	Target	Achieved
Maintain zero confirmed incidences of leaks, thefts of customer data/losses	0	0
Maintain zero confirmed incidents of discriminations	0	0
Maintain zero confirmed incidents of corruption	0	0
Maintain zero non-compliance with local laws and regulations	0	0
Target an average of at least 60 hours per year per employee	60	64
Impact		
NA		
Overall Score: 55		
As per our ESG matrix, HRnetGroup (HRNET SP) has an overall score of 55.		

ESG score	Weights	Scores	Final Score
Quantitative	50%	44	22
Qualitative	25%	33	8
Target	25%	100	25
Total			55

As per our ESG assessment, HRNET has an established framework, internal policies, and tangible mid/long-term targets but needs to make headway in improving its quantitative "E" metrics YoY. HRNET's overall ESG score is 55, which makes its ESG rating above average in our view (average ESG rating = 50; refer to Appendix I for our ESG Assessment Scoring).

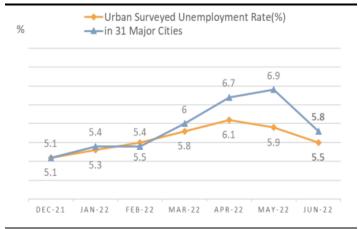
Focus charts

Fig 1: Revenue by business segment (FY21)



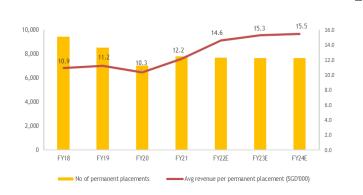
Source: Company

Fig 3: China urban employment rates



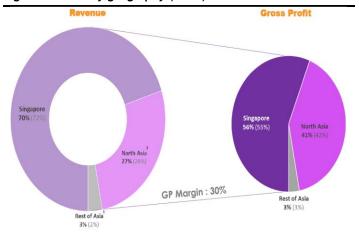
Source: China National Bureau of Statistics

Fig 5: Key assumptions for professional recruitment



Source: Company, Maybank IBG Research

Fig 2: Revenue by geography (FY21)



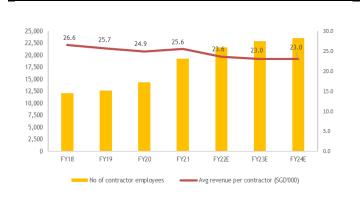
Source: Company

Fig 4: Rise in wages with tight labour market



Source: HSBC, Company

Fig 6: Key assumptions for flexible staffing



Source: Company, Maybank IBG Research

Peer Comparison

Fig 7: Relative valuation

Company	BBG	MIBG	MIBG TP	Price	FYE	Market Cap		P/I (x)			EV/EBITDA (x)	P/B (x)	ROE (%)
	Code	Rec	(LC)	(LC)	mm/dd	USDm	Actual	FY1	FY2	FY3	Actual	Actual	Actual
HRnet	HRNET SP	Buy	1.07	0.75	12/31	558	16.1	11.5	11.2	10.5	4.5	2.2	18.0%
Global peers													
Persol Hldgs	2181-JP	NR	-	2,886.00	03/31	4,719	21.1	20.7	18.3	15.2	8.5	3.5	18.5%
Kelly Services	KELYA US	NR	-	14.28	01/02	542	9.5	8.3	6.1	-	5.8	0.4	12.2%
SThree	STEM-LN	NR	-	3.76	11/30	569	12.2	9.6	9.5	8.8	5.3	-	29.5%
Beijing Career Int'l	300662-CH	NR	-	34.01	12/31	944	26.6	21.2	16.0	12.5	13.8	3.2	16.4%
Adecco	ADEN-VX	NR	-	27.86	12/31	4,760	7.5	8.0	7.8	7.1	7.0	1.2	17.1%
Randstad Hldgs	RAND-NA	NR	-	45.90	12/31	8,322	11.2	10.0	10.7	10.1	5.6	1.9	16.1%
ManpowerGroup	MAN US	NR	-	69.54	12/31	3,598	9.6	8.3	8.7	6.9	6.7	1.5	15.4%
Hays	HAS-LN	NR	-	1.07	06/30	1,946	13.4	12.1	11.0	9.4	5.9	2.3	18.5%
PageGroup	PAGE-LN	NR	-	3.93	12/31	1,451	11.3	9.0	10.1	9.1	4.6	3.2	36.1%
Korn/Ferry	KFY US	NR	-	50.82	04/30	2,713	8.2	9.1	9.1	7.5	4.7	1.7	21.9%
JAC Recruitment	2124 JP	NR	-	2,290.00	12/31	655	23.8	20.9	17.2	13.7	10.2	6.9	28.0%
Heldrick & Struggles	HSII US	NR	-	27.90	12/31	551	6.8	7.6	9.2	-	2.2	1.5	24.0%
Staffline Group	STAF-LN	NR	-	0.37	12/31	69	5.2	8.2	6.7	6.3	3.8	0.9	3.5%
Robert Walters	RWA LN	NR	-	4.56	12/31	387	10.4	8.1	7.7	6.8	3.7	2.0	19.5%
AVERAGE							12.6	11.5	10.6	9.4	6.3	2.3	19.8%

Source: FactSet, Bloomberg

				FY24E
				10.3
				10.3
				1.7
				1.7
				5.9
				11.7
3.2 3.9	5.1 5.8	4.2 4.7	3.7 4.1	3.3 3.8
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				0.0
				73.0
45.4	61.1	67.1	/1.4	73.0
332.2	327.1	356.5	390.6	423.0
72.9	119.6	113.4	107.4	103.4
0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
1.5	1.5	1.4	1.3	1.2
14.7	19.1	18.5	18.5	18.5
0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
31.0	63.0	50.8	51.7	52.6
452.4	530.3	540.6	569.6	598.7
0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
82.1	116.6	93.5	87.5	81.5
0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
23.0	26.0	28.0	29.0	30.0
105.2	142.5	121.9	116.7	111.0
331.7	370.2	395.3	423.5	452.4
15.5	17.6	23.4	29.3	35.3
347.1	387.9	418.7	452.9	487.7
452.4	530.3	540.6	569.6	598.7
59.0	84 8	88 4	93.8	96.0
				12.4
				0.0
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	(30.2)	12.0	(3.8)	(4.7)
0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	433.0 71.4 (1.2) (8.6) 59.4 (0.4) 0.0 0.0 0.0 59.0 (9.2) (2.9) 0.0 46.9 45.4 332.2 72.9 0.0 0.0 1.5 14.7 0.0 31.0 452.4 0.0 82.1 0.0 0.0 23.0 105.2 331.7 15.5 347.1 452.4 59.0 11.9 0.0 44.0 (9.5) 0.0 105.5 (1.2) 104.2 (30.1) 0.0 0.0	12.1	12.1 13.2 11.2 1.6 2.2 1.9 1.7 2.3 2.0 4.6 5.0 5.6 19.1 7.3 8.8 3.2 5.1 4.2 3.9 5.8 4.7 433.0 590.5 625.6 71.4 96.9 100.8 (1.2) (1.2) (1.3) (8.6) (7.9) (8.3) 59.4 85.3 89.0 (0.4) (0.5) (0.6) 0.0 0.0 0.0 0.0 0.0 0.0 0.0 0.0 0.0 0.0 0.0 0.0 0.0 0.0 0.0 0.0 0.0 0.0 0.0 0.0 0.0 45.4 61.1 67.1 332.2 327.1 356.5 72.9 119.6 113.4 0.0 0.0 0.0 31.0 63.0 50.8 452.4 530.3 540.6 <td>12.1</td>	12.1

FYE 31 Dec	FY20A	FY21A	FY22E	FY23E	FY24E
Key Ratios					
Growth ratios (%)					
Revenue growth	2.4	36.4	5.9	3.6	2.6
EBITDA growth	(11.7)	35.8	4.1	5.7	2.5
EBIT growth	(13.5)	43.4	4.4	6.1	2.5
Pretax growth	(13.7)	43.6	4.3	6.0	2.4
Reported net profit growth	(9.2)	39.7	2.5	6.4	2.3
Core net profit growth	(12.1)	34.7	9.9	6.4	2.3
Profitability ratios (%)					
EBITDA margin	16.5	16.4	16.1	16.5	16.4
EBIT margin	13.7	14.4	14.2	14.6	14.6
Pretax profit margin	13.6	14.4	14.1	14.5	14.4
Payout ratio	53.5	61.3	62.7	60.4	60.4
DuPont analysis					
Net profit margin (%)	10.8	11.1	10.7	11.0	11.0
Revenue/Assets (x)	1.0	1.1	1.2	1.1	1.1
Assets/Equity (x)	1.4	1.4	1.4	1.3	1.3
ROAE (%)	14.1	18.7	17.5	17.4	16.7
ROAA (%)	10.4	12.4	12.5	12.9	12.5
Liquidity & Efficiency					
Cash conversion cycle	nm	nm	nm	nm	nm
Days receivable outstanding	64.2	58.7	67.0	61.3	57.1
Days inventory outstanding	nm	nm	nm	nm	nm
Days payables outstanding	75.4	86.0	86.7	72.7	66.3
Dividend cover (x)	1.9	1.6	1.6	1.7	1.7
Current ratio (x)	4.0	3.5	4.3	4.7	5.2
Leverage & Expense Analysis					
Asset/Liability (x)	4.3	3.7	4.4	4.9	5.4
Net gearing (%) (incl perps)	net cash				
Net gearing (%) (excl. perps)	net cash				
Net interest cover (x)	143.9	nm	148.4	135.0	121.0
Debt/EBITDA (x)	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Capex/revenue (%)	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.3
Net debt/ (net cash)	(332.2)	(327.1)	(356.5)	(390.6)	(423.0)

Source: Company; Maybank IBG Research

Research Offices

ECONOMICS

Suhaimi ILIAS Chief Economist Malaysia | Philippines | Global (603) 2297 8682 suhaimi_ilias@maybank-ib.com

CHUA Hak Bin

Regional Thematic Macroeconomist (65) 6231 5830 chuahb@maybank.com

LEE Ju Ye

Singapore | Thailand | Indonesia (65) 6231 5844 leejuye@maybank.com

Dr Zamros DZULKAFLI (603) 2082 6818

zamros.d@maybank-ib.com Fatin Nabila MOHD ZAINI

(603) 2297 8685 fatinnabila.mohdzaini@maybank-ib.com

Brian LEE Shun Rong (65) 6231 5846

brian.lee1@maybank.com

Luong Thu Huong (65) 6231 8467 hana.thuhuong @maybank.com

Saktiandi SUPAAT (65) 6320 1379 saktiandi@maybank.com.sg

TAN Yanxi (65) 6320 1378

(65) 6320 1374 fionalim@maybank.com.sg

STRATEGY

Anand PATHMAKANTHAN

(603) 2297 8783 anand.pathmakanthan@maybank-ib.com

FIXED INCOME

Winson PHOON, FCA (65) 6340 1079 winsonphoon@maybank.com

SE THO Mun Yi, CFA (603) 2074 7606 munyi.st@maybank-ib.com

PORTFOLIO STRATEGY

CHAN Han Chin (603) 2297 8888 hanchin.chan@maybank-ib.com

ONG Seng Yeov (65) 6231 5839

ongsengyeow@maybank.com MIBG SUSTAINABILITY RESEARCH

Jigar SHAH

Head of Sustainability Research (91) 22 4223 2632 jigars@maybank.com

Neerav DALAL (91) 22 4223 2606 neerav@maybank.com

REGIONAL EQUITIES

Anand PATHMAKANTHAN Head of Regional Equity Research (603) 2297 8783 anand.pathmakanthan@maybank-ib.com

WONG Chew Hann, CA Head of ASEAN Equity Research (603) 2297 8686 wchewh@maybank-ib.com

ΜΑΙ ΔΥSΙΔ

Anand PATHMAKANTHAN Head of Research (603) 2297 8783 anand.pathmakanthan@maybank-ib.com

Strategy

WONG Chew Hann, CA (603) 2297 8686 wchewh@maybank-ib.com

Non-Bank Financials (stock exchange)
 Construction & Infrastructure

Desmond CH'NG, BFP, FCA (603) 2297 8680

desmond.chng@maybank-ib.com

Banking & Finance

LIAW Thong Jung (603) 2297 8688 tjliaw@maybank-ib.com • Oil & Gas Services- Regional

Automotive

ONG Chee Ting, CA (603) 2297 8678 ct.ong@maybank-ib.com · Plantations - Regional

YIN Shao Yang, CPA (603) 2297 8916 samuel.y@maybank-ib.com

Gaming - Regional
 Media • Aviation • Non-Bank Financials

TAN Chi Wei, CFA (603) 2297 8690 chiwei.t@maybank-ib.com • Power • Telcos

WONG Wei Sum, CFA (603) 2297 8679 weisum@maybank-ib.com

Property • Glove

Jade TAM (603) 2297 8687 jade.tam@maybank-ib.com · Consumer Staples & Discretionary

Nur Farah SYIFAA (603) 2297 8675

nurfarahsyifaa.mohamadfuad@maybank-ib.com Renewable Energy • REITs

Arvind JAYARATNAM

(603) 2297 8692 arvind.jayaratnam@maybank.com
• Petrochemicals • Technology

Shafiq KADIR, CFA

(603) 2297 8691 msshafiqk.abkadir@maybank-ib.com • Healthcare • Software

LOH Yan Jin (603) 2297 8687 lohyanjin.loh@maybank-ib.com • Ports • Shipping

Eugene HOO Yee Hui (603) 2082 6819 eugene.hoo@maybank.com

TEE Sze Chiah Head of Retail Research (603) 2082 6858 szechiah.t@maybank-ib.com · Retail Research

Nik Ihsan RAJA ABDULLAH, MSTA, CFTe (603) 2297 8694 nikmohdihsan.ra@maybank-ib.com

Amirah AZMI (603) 2082 8769 amirah.azmi@maybank-ib.com SINGAPORE

Thilan WICKRAMASINGHE Head of Research (65) 6231 5840 thilanw@maybank.com
• Banking & Finance - Regional

• Consumer

Eric ONG (65) 6231 5924 ericong@maybank.com

· Healthcare · Transport · SMIDs

Kelvin TAN (65) 6231 5837 kelvintan1@maybank.com • Telcos • Industrials

LI Jialin (65) 6231 5845 jialin.li@maybank.com • RFITs

Jarick SEET (65) 6231 5848 jarick.seet@maybank.com

 Technology **PHILIPPINES**

Jacqui de JESUS Head of Research (63) 2 8849 8840 jacqui.dejesus@maybank.com
• Strategy • Conglomerates

Rachelleen RODRIGUEZ, CFA

(63) 2 8849 8843

rachelleen.rodriguez@maybank.com
• Banking & Finance • Transport • Telcos

Danhne S7F (63) 2 8849 8847 daphne.sze@maybank.com

• Consumer Miguel SEVIDAL (63) 2 8849 8844

miguel.sevidal@maybank.com • REITs • Property • Gaming

Fiorenzo de JESUS (63) 2 8849 8846 fiorenzo.dejesus@maybank.com
• Utilities

THAILAND

Jesada TECHAHUSDIN, CFA (66) 2658 6300 ext 1395

jesada.t@maybank.com · Banking & Finance

Vanida GEISLER, CPA (66) 2658 6300 ext 1394 Vanida.G@maybank.com

• Property • REITs Yuwanee PROMMAPORN (66) 2658 6300 ext 1393 Yuwanee.P@maybank.com
• Services • Healthcare

Wasu MATTANAPOTCHANART (66) 2658 6300 ext 1392 wasu.m@maybank.com

Telcos

Surachai PRAMUALCHAROENKIT (66) 2658 5000 ext 1470 Surachai.p@maybank.com · Auto · Conmat · Contractor · Steel

Suttatip PEERASUB (66) 2658 5000 ext 1430 suttatip.p@maybank.com • Food & Beverage • Commerce

Jaroonpan WATTANAWONG (66) 2658 5000 ext 1404 jaroonpan.w@maybank.com
• Transportation • Small cap INDONESIA

Jeffrosenberg CHENLIM Head of Research (62) 21 8066 8680

Jeffrosenberg.lim@maybank.com Strategy

Willy GOUTAMA (62) 21 8066 8500 willy.goutama@maybank.com
• Consumer

Richard SUHERMAN

(62) 21 8066 8691 richard.suherman@maybank.com
• Metals & Mining

Ftta Rusdiana PUTRA (62) 21 8066 8683 etta.putra@maybank.com

Telcos

Satriawan, CTA (62) 21 8066 8682 satriawan@maybank.com Chartist

VIETNAM

Quan Trong Thanh Head of Research (84 28) 44 555 888 ext 8184 thanh.quan@maybank.com • Strategy • Banks

Hoang Huy, CFA (84 28) 44 555 888 ext 8181 hoanghuy@maybank.com

• Strategy • Technology Le Nguyen Nhat Chuyen (84 28) 44 555 888 ext 8082 chuyen.le@maybank.com Oil & Gas - Logistics

Nguyen Thi Sony Tra Mi (84 28) 44 555 888 ext 8084 trami.nguyen@maybank.com
Consumer Discretionary

Tyler Manh Dung Nguyen (84 28) 44 555 888 ext 8085 manhdung.nguyen@maybank.com
• Utilities • Property

Tran Thi Thanh Nhan (84 28) 44 555 888 ext 8088 nhan.tran@maybank.com Consumer Staples

Nguyen Le Tuan Loi (84 28) 44 555 888 ext 8088 loi.nguyen@maybank.com Industrials

Nguyen Thi Ngan Tuyen Head of Retail Research (84 28) 44 555 888 ext 8081 tuyen.nguyen@maybank.com • Retail Research

Nguven Thanh Lam (84 28) 44 555 888 ext 8086 thanhlam.nguyen@maybank.com Chartist



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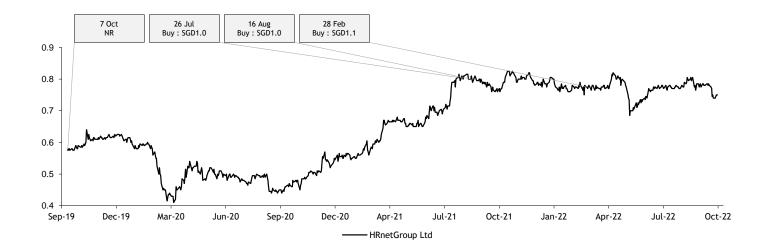
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Malaysia

Maybank Investment Bank Berhad (A Participating Organisation of Bursa Malaysia Securities Berhad) 33rd Floor, Menara Maybank, 100 Jalan Tun Perak, 50050 Kuala Lumpur

Tel: (603) 2059 1888; Fax: (603) 2078 4194

Stockbroking Business: Level 8, Tower C, Dataran Maybank, No.1, Jalan Maarof

59000 Kuala Lumpur Tel: (603) 2297 8888 Fax: (603) 2282 5136

Singapore

Maybank Securities Pte Ltd Maybank Research Pte Ltd 50 North Canal Road Singapore 059304

Tel: (65) 6336 9090

Indonesia

PT Maybank Sekuritas Indonesia Sentral Senayan III, 22nd Floor Jl. Asia Afrika No. 8 Gelora Bung Karno, Senayan Jakarta 10270, Indonesia

Tel: (62) 21 2557 1188 Fax: (62) 21 2557 1189

🧑 Thailand

Maybank Securities (Thailand) PCL 999/9 The Offices at Central World, 20th - 21st Floor, Rama 1 Road Pathumwan. Bangkok 10330, Thailand

Tel: (66) 2 658 6817 (sales)

Tel: (66) 2 658 6801 (research)

Regional Head Sales Trading

kevinfov@mavbank.com Tel: (65) 6636-3620 US Toll Free: 1-866-406-7447

Sales Trading Kevin Foy

> Indonesia Helen Widjaja helen.widjaja@maybank.com (62) 21 2557 1188

Philippines Keith Roy keith_roy@maybank.com Tel: (63) 2 848-5288 London Greg Smith gsmith@maybank.co.uk Tel: (44) 207-332-0221

India Sanjay Makhija sanjaymakhija@maybank.com Tel: (91)-22-6623-2629

London

Maybank Securities (London) Ltd PNB House 77 Queen Victoria Street London EC4V 4AY, UK

Tel: (44) 20 7332 0221 Fax: (44) 20 7332 0302

India

MIB Securities India Pte Ltd 1101, 11th floor, A Wing, Kanakia Wall Street, Chakala, Andheri -Kurla Road, Andheri East, Mumbai City - 400 093, India

Tel: (91) 22 6623 2600 Fax: (91) 22 6623 2604

Vietnam

Maybank Securities Limited Floor 10, Pearl 5 Tower, 5 Le Quy Don Street, Vo Thi Sau Ward, District 3 Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

Tel: (84) 28 44 555 888 Fax: (84) 28 38 271 030

Hong Kong

MIB Securities (Hong Kong) Limited 28/F, Lee Garden Three, 1 Sunning Road, Causeway Bay, Hong Kong

Tel: (852) 2268 0800 Fax: (852) 2877 0104

Philippines

Maybank Securities Inc 17/F, Tower One & Exchange Plaza Ayala Triangle, Ayala Avenue Makati City, Philippines 1200

Tel: (63) 2 8849 8888 Fax: (63) 2 8848 5738

www.maybank.com/investment-banking www.maybank-keresearch.com