

8 January 2024

Property | Real Estate

Real Estate

Overweight (Maintained)

More Will Than Before; OVERWEIGHT

- Maintain OVERWEIGHT; Top Picks: UEM Sunrise (UEMS), Sunway and IOI Properties.** We believe the re-rating in property sector still has legs. Overall macroeconomic environment, government policies and investment flows are encouraging, supporting the growth in property sales in 2024-2025. We remain confident with our positive view on the Iskandar Malaysia property market given the concentration of high profile investments and infrastructure developments that are taking place in the southern region.
- Further rate hike seems almost impossible.** US Federal Reserve's recent signal to cut or maintain interest rates this year may offer some relief, especially emerging markets that experienced significant currency weakness last year. The shift away from the higher-for-longer approach also suggests a potential conclusion to the interest rate upcycle. This is favourable to the property market as it should indicate a more stable interest rate trajectory ahead. In the meantime, the market is expected to gradually adapt to the prevailing high inflationary environment.
- The sector is still under-owned.** After our rounds of marketing in 4Q23, we think many local institutional funds have yet to take a meaningful position in the property sector. Foreign shareholding, for example, has yet to increase substantially. Both UEMS and Sunway have foreign shareholding of <6%, as compared to about 22% during the peak a decade ago (GIC's shareholding made up 12% for Sunway then).
- The revival of HSR a potential kicker for next re-rating.** Last month, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said the Government has principally agreed to revive the Kuala Lumpur-Singapore High Speed Rail (HSR) project if it could substantially lower the cost. In a recent media interview, Johor's Sultan Ibrahim Sultan Iskandar also expressed his support to revive the project. We think MyHSR Corp may likely provide some updates regarding the project, especially after the deadline for the submission of the request for information (RFI) concept proposals which was extended until 15 Jan 2024. Positive progress on the project should see a boost in demand for properties, not only in Iskandar Malaysia but also in Kuala Lumpur.
- RNAV re-rating to be more significant in Iskandar Malaysia.** In the short term, both Malaysia and Singapore governments are expected to sign the MoU for the highly-anticipated Johor-Singapore special economic zone (SEZ) on 11 Jan 2024. The recent entry of Nvidia and Microsoft points to a boost in confidence among foreign investors, especially in the data centre space. The influx of investments and rising demand for industrial lands are already driving the land prices in Johor, and major landowners such as UEMS and Sunway will likely enjoy further RNAV re-rating going forward.
- Expect 10-15% growth in property sales.** We expect most developers to guide 2024 sales target that is 10-15% higher than the 2023 target. A number of developers indicated that they plan to roll out more projects in Iskandar Malaysia this year.

Stocks Covered 12
 Rating (Buy/Neutral/Sell): 9 / 3 / 0
 Last 12m Earnings Revision Trend: Positive

Top Picks

Company	Target Price
UEM Sunrise (UEMS MK) – BUY	MYR1.18
Sunway (SWB MK) – BUY	MYR3.00
IOI Properties (IOIPG MK) – BUY	MYR2.10

Analyst

Loong Kok Wen CFA
 +603 9280 8861
loong.kok.wen@rhbgroup.com



Relative performance of KLPRP against FBM KLCI since Jan 2023



Source: Bloomberg

Company Name	Rating	Target (MYR)	% Upside (Downside)	P/E (x) Dec-24F	P/B (x) Dec-24F	ROAE (%) Dec-24F	Yield (%) Dec-24F
AME Elite Consortium	Buy	2.00	12.6	14.8	1.3	8.9	2.5
Eastern & Oriental	Buy	0.88	26.9	13.6	0.5	3.7	1.6
IOI Properties	Buy	2.10	11.3	12.9	0.5	3.5	3.3
LBS Bina	Buy	0.82	28.7	7.0	0.7	10.1	4.4
Mah Sing	Buy	0.98	12.9	9.2	0.6	6.1	4.1
Matrix Concepts	Buy	1.88	10.8	8.3	1.0	12.1	6.1
Sime Darby Property	Buy	0.93	31.7	12.4	0.5	3.9	3.5
SP Setia	Neutral	0.93	(1.9)	15.6	0.3	1.7	1.7
Sunway	Buy	3.00	35.2	17.8	1.0	5.7	2.5
Tambun Indah	Neutral	0.91	6.4	7.3	0.5	6.6	6.4
UEM Sunrise	Buy	1.18	14.2	59.5	0.8	1.2	-
UOA Development	Neutral	1.86	6.3	18.8	0.8	4.4	5.7

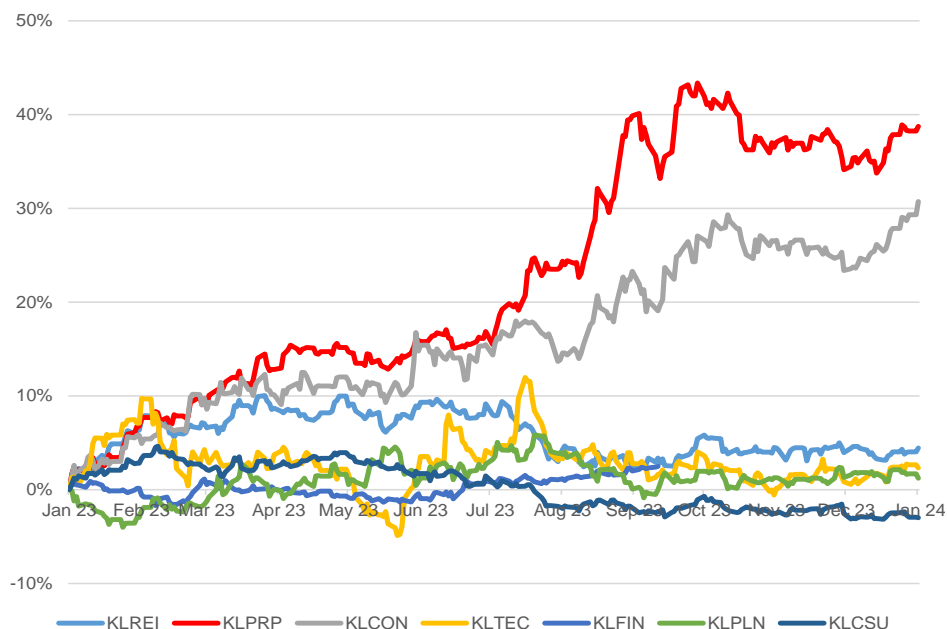
Source: Company data, RHB

The Re-Rating Story Still Has Legs

KLPRP performed strongly last year

The property sector appreciated 34% in 2023 measured by the KL Property Index (KLPRP) vs -3% for FBMKLCI. We believe the sector's re-rating still has legs as current valuation is still decent when compared to the previous sector peak in 2013.

Figure 1: KLPRP outperformed in 2023 vs performance of other sub-indices on Bursa Malaysia

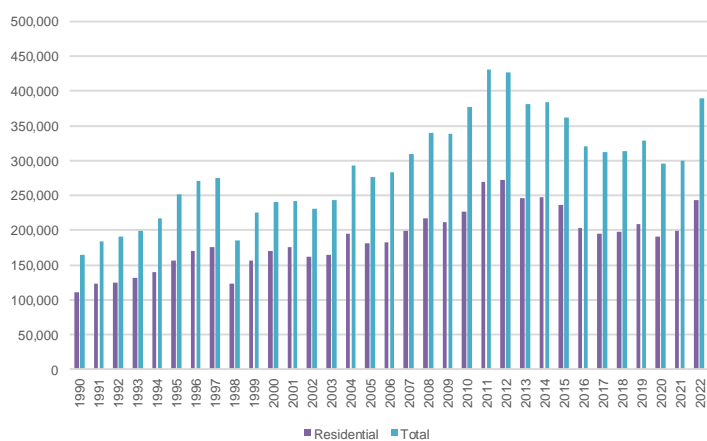


Source: Bloomberg

The property sector is still under-owned

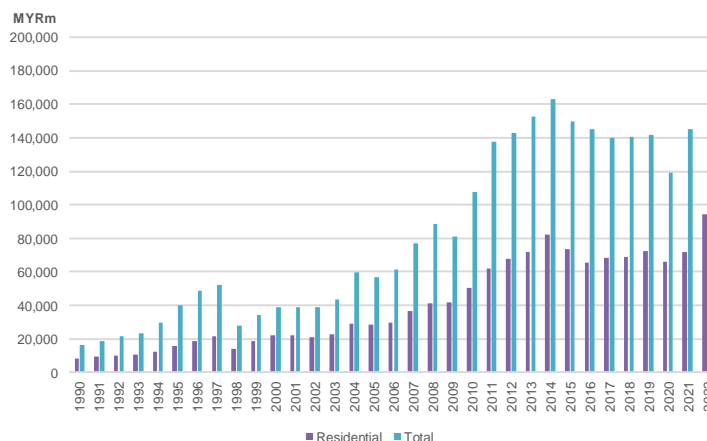
Having been in the doldrums for almost a decade, the property sector has finally rebounded in 2H23. Although the 34% appreciation in KLPRP seems to be material, valuation for the sector has yet to be comparable to the levels seen in the previous peak. We highlight that total property transaction volume for the industry in 2022 was just 10% lower than the previous peak in 2011 while total property transaction value has already surpassed the previous peak in 2014. While full-year data for 2023 has not been published, we expect the momentum to sustain in 2024.

Figure 2: Total property and residential property transaction volume



Source: National Property Information Centre (NAPIC)

Figure 3: Total property and residential property transaction value



Source: NAPIC

Foreign shareholding for liquid property stocks is still low. After our rounds of marketing over the last few months, we think many local institutional funds are still sceptical on the sector recovery while some think that they have missed the boat. Although we do not have any data to track (the local funds), foreign shareholding has yet to increase substantially especially for certain more liquid property stocks. UEMS, for example, which discloses its monthly foreign shareholding every quarter, has a foreign shareholding of less than 6% as at Dec 2023, compared to a high of 22% at the peak of the previous property cycle (Apr 2013). As for Sunway, its foreign shareholding was also around 22% during the peak (but this included GIC's 12.2% stake) as compared to only 5% as at Nov 2023 (GIC exited in 2013-2014).

Looking ahead, the following factors should continue to drive investor interest in property stocks: i) Strong news flow focusing on Iskandar Malaysia; ii) active landbanking activities, particularly in Iskandar Malaysia; iii) decent property sales growth of 10-15% in 2024; and iv) 30-day visa-free policy for travellers from China and India. These, together with the easing of requirements for Malaysia My 2nd Home (MM2H) programme are expected to drive foreigners' purchase of properties in Malaysia.

RNAV re-rating to be more significant in Iskandar Malaysia

More developers looking for land. We expect more aggressive landbanking activities in 2024. Eco World (ECW MK, NR), AME Elite Consortium, Mah Sing, and Avaland (AVALAND MK, NR) are amongst the developers that are on the lookout for land parcels. Areas of interest are primarily Iskandar Malaysia, and the Klang Valley. In Sep 2023, Eco World acquired 404 acres of land in Kulai from IOI Properties (IOIPG).

More industrial activities to take place. In the short term, both Malaysia and Singapore governments are expected to sign the MoU for the highly-anticipated Johor-Singapore SEZ on 11 Jan 2024. It was mentioned that the SEZ should lead to better and easier arrangements for people who have to work on both sides of the causeway. Potential special tax arrangements may be proposed to ensure smoother flow of goods between the two sides under the SEZ.

It was recently reported that the SEZ is aimed to attract nine sectors, which are logistics, energy, manufacturing, tourism, healthcare, education, financial services, business services and digital economy. The definitive agreement with details of the SEZ, including its physical location, is expected to be signed in 4Q24. The special taskforce is currently working on investment incentives such as tax breaks, improved trade procedures and custom processes for businesses in the SEZ. We think areas near the border, especially closer to the causeway and Tuas link, would have a good chance to be zoned under the SEZ. UEMS and Sunway have sizeable landbank in these areas.

Based on our conversation with some industrial players, regional MNCs are planning for relocation or decentralisation of operations especially after the pandemic, as part of their risk management to ensure uninterrupted production chain. Some US corporations are choosing Malaysia as a manufacturing base in South-East Asia, given the US-China trade tensions. Johor has been one of the popular investment destinations for many MNCs, especially those with regional offices in Singapore, given the proximity and relatively cheaper resources.

Sunway sets up its own logistics hub first. Leveraging on its strategic landbank location, Sunway has taken the opportunity to set up a MYR8bn worth of free commercial zone for the logistics industry in Sunway City Iskandar Puteri. The land that was carved out for this development is just 5km away from the Tuas link, and it covers 55 ha. The first phase is slated for completion by end 2025. This logistic hub is targeted to cater for a diverse range of industries in the region, including fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG), retail, e-commerce, automotive, pharmaceutical and technology.

Data centres snapping up industrial land parcels. The recent entry of Nvidia and Microsoft as well as other regional data centre operators point to a boost in confidence among foreign investors. The influx of investments and rising demand for industrial lands are already driving land prices in Johor. Some of the land parcels near to the Second Link Expressway were transacted at record prices (MYR120-125 psf) based on our checks (vendors are required to provide some infrastructure amenities). We believe the entrance of these large MNCs is just the beginning of the investment wave.

UEMS and Sunway to enjoy further RNAV re-rating. In our opinion, major landowners such as UEMS and Sunway will have a competitive advantage over peers. Their huge landbank enables them to be flexible enough to carve out some parcels for specific developments – Sunway is already taking steps. Landbank is held at historical cost and these landowners do not have to acquire new land at current market prices. As land transactions get more active with new pricing benchmarks, UEMS and Sunway are set to enjoy further RNAV re-rating going forward.

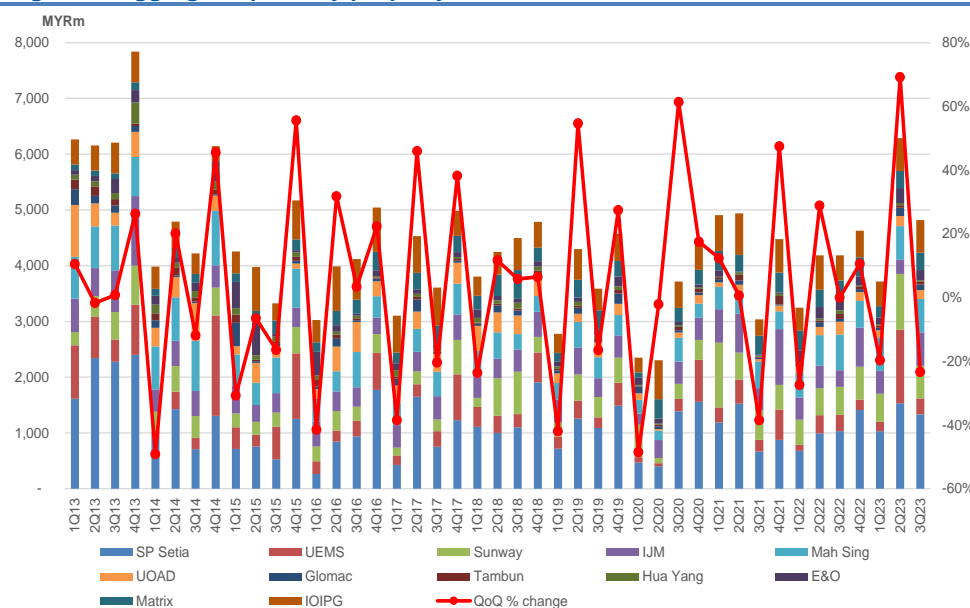
Expect 2024 property sales to grow at 10-15%

We expect most developers to guide 2024 sales target that is 10-15% higher than the 2023 target. Aggregate property sales remained resilient based on the latest sales numbers released by developers. Excluding the bulky overseas property sales in 2Q23 recorded by UEMS and Sunway, 9M23 aggregate property sales grew c.9% from the same period last year, suggesting healthy demand for property locally.

Sime Darby Property has been the outperformer in chalking up property sales over the past few years. The company managed to surpass its property sales target in 2022 and 2023, thanks to its thoughtful product positioning that comprises township development, high-rise residential, and industrial properties, which have successfully garnered property buyer interest. On the other hand, SP Setia has been embarking on land disposals to boost its property sales, while also de-leveraging its balance sheet. In 2023, the company has already sold MYR1.05bn worth of non-core landbank (but a MYR548m land deal was just terminated on 5 Jan 2024).

Going forward, as the market gradually adapts to the high inflationary environment, coupled with stable interest rate outlook, we believe property sales will likely continue to grow at a decent rate. During the 3Q23 results release, several developers have also guided that more products will be rolled out in Iskandar Malaysia next year.

Figure 4: Aggregate quarterly property sales



Source: Company

Potentially more exciting news on Iskandar Malaysia

The revival of HSR a potential kicker for next re-rating. We remain upbeat with the developments in Iskandar Malaysia. Last month, Datuk Seri Anwar said the Government has principally agreed to revive the HSR if it could substantially lower the cost. In a recent media interview, Johor’s Sultan Ibrahim Sultan Iskandar also expressed his support to revive the project. We think MyHSR Corp may likely provide some updates regarding the project especially after the deadline for the submission of the RFI concept proposals which was extended until 15 Jan 2024. Positive progress on the project should see a boost in demand for properties, not only in Iskandar Malaysia but also in Kuala Lumpur.

Apart from the HSR, it was also reported that Johor is planning to build three light rail transit (LRT) lines covering about 10km each around Johor Bahru to complement the Johor Bahru-

Singapore Rapid Transit System (RTS) link. These proposed lines are the Tebrau line, Skudai line and Iskandar Puteri line, which will connect to the Senai International Airport in Kulai. We believe this is still at the very preliminary stage of discussion, but it should benefit developers as this would mean greater connectivity within the central and western part of Iskandar Malaysia. Note that in 2Q23, together with a few parties, LBS Bina announced that it plans to jointly develop a LRT project in Johor Bahru city centre with some transit-oriented development. There should be more updates in 2Q-3Q24.

Potential high-profile investments to drive economic growth in the southern region.

We expect more big names like Nvidia to invest in Malaysia, particularly in Johor. Datuk Seri Anwar's recent visit to the US should bear some fruit. According to media reports, the Malaysian Prime Minister met with the heads of some technology giants such as Google, Enovix Corp, Microsoft and Tik Tok in San Francisco. Investor optimism in the property sector is expected to grow further as news of foreign direct investments trickles in, despite the uncertain timeline.

Favourable government policies thus far. We applaud the Government's efforts to stimulate the tourism industry. In November last year, the Government announced a 30-day visa-free entry to Malaysia for citizens of China and India. In December, the Tourism, Arts and Culture Minister Datuk Seri Tiong King Sing also officially announced the new requirements for the Malaysia My Second Home (MM2H) programme, which saw a tiered system to be implemented. Both policies are favourable to the property market, as higher tourist arrivals should spur growth in the retail and hospitality segments, while the easing MM2H requirements should attract more foreign purchasers of properties in Malaysia.

These policies are also timely, especially as the local property market is gaining momentum post pandemic. Furthermore, Iskandar Malaysia is currently seeing a boost in demand, driven by an influx of investments as well as the upcoming completion of the RTS slated for end-2026. Elsewhere in the Klang Valley, KLCC and Mont Kiara, as well as Penang should also stand to benefit as they are preferred locations among foreigners.

Valuations and stock picks

We maintain our OVERWEIGHT call for the property sector. The sector is currently trading at 60% discount to RNAV, still below the long-term mean of around 54%.

Given the visibility of the construction of the RTS link, and the positive spillover from foreign investments to the property sector, we expect demand for property in Iskandar Malaysia to pick up more materially in 2024-2025. Government policies and potential catalytic infrastructure developments are also favourable to boost the re-rating of the sector. We are of the view that the sector is still under-owned and clarity of these investments should boost investor confidence further this year.

Key risks to our call: i) Political turbulence; ii) resumption of interest rate upcycle; and iii) weaker-than-expected economic growth.

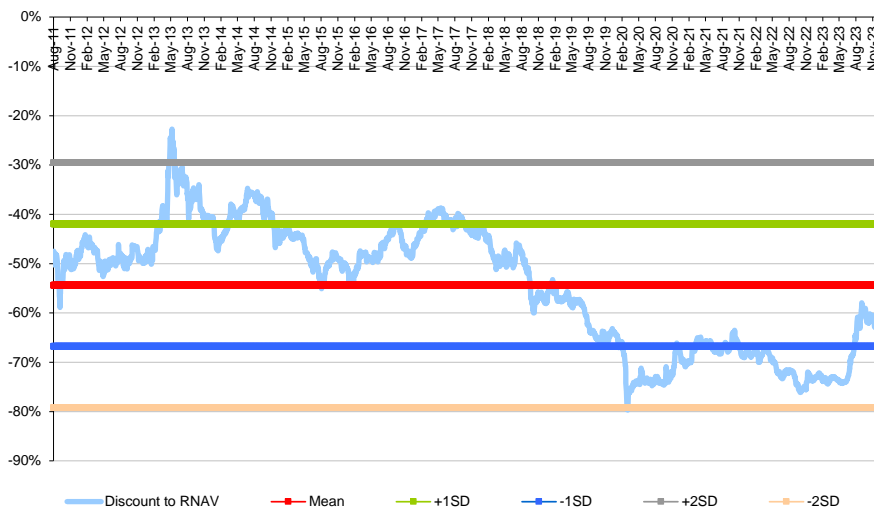
Our Top Picks are:

UEMS – We believe the stock is still the best proxy for the Johor thematic play given its strategic landbank exposure in Iskandar Malaysia, which makes up 92% of its total landbank. While some potential tie-ups with reputable players are probably in the progress of discussion, we think the company has the benefit of setting up catalytic developments with reasonable scale given the size and location of the landbank. Apart from Iskandar Malaysia, UEMS' projects in Mont Kiara should also benefit given the easing requirements of MM2H, as it is also a popular area among foreigners.

Sunway – We believe investors should start accumulating Sunway, not only because it is a Johor thematic play, but also in view of the upcoming listing of Sunway Healthcare Group (SHG). The strong performance of all the hospitals may help to accelerate the timing of the listing, and SHG is estimated to be worth MYR9bn. Similar to the listing of Sunway Construction (SCGB MK, BUY, TP: MYR2.22) eight years ago, investors are expected to be rewarded via this value-unlocking exercise.

IOIPG – IOIPG will likely see the commencement of rentals from its IOI Central Boulevard office towers by mid-2024, which will be a major earnings kicker from FY25F (Jun). We also like its other retail investment properties in the Klang Valley, which should benefit from the resilient domestic spending and the locations of the assets are relatively shielded from the competition in the KL city centre after the opening of the TRX mall.

Figure 5: Historical sector discount to RNAV



Source: Company data, Bloomberg, RHB

Figure 6: Property valuation table (as at 5 Jan 2024)

	FYE	Price (MYR/s)	Target (MYR/s)	Mkt Cap (MYRm)	P/E (x)		EPS Growth (%)		P/BV (x)	ROE (%)	DY (%)	RNAV/ share (MYR)	Discount to RNAV	Rec
					FY24F	FY25F	FY24F	FY25F	FY24F	FY24F	FY24F			
Sunway	Dec	2.22	3.00	12,115	16.9	15.8	7.8	6.9	1.0	6.0	2.5	4.14	-46%	Buy
IOI Prop	Jun	1.89	2.10	10,407	13.6	12.4	(7.6)	9.2	0.5	3.4	3.2	4.77	-60%	Buy
UEM Sunrise	Dec	1.03	1.18	5,210	59.5	56.9	23.1	4.6	0.8	1.2	0.0	2.18	-53%	Buy
Sime Darby Property	Dec	0.71	0.93	4,795	12.4	11.8	7.2	4.7	0.5	3.9	3.5	2.23	-68%	Buy
Matrix Concept [^]	Mar	1.70	1.88	2,127	8.2	8.0	4.9	2.1	1.0	12.1	6.2	2.64	-36%	Buy
Mah Sing	Dec	0.87	0.98	2,112	9.2	8.7	12.4	6.4	0.6	6.1	4.1	2.13	-59%	Buy
Eastern & Oriental [^]	Mar	0.69	0.88	1,268	16.5	14.5	21.6	14.2	0.5	3.0	0.0	2.23	-69%	Buy
AME Elite Consortium	Mar	1.78	2.00	1,138	14.4	13.3	12.6	8.2	1.3	9.0	2.5	1.97	-10%	Buy
LBS Bina	Dec	0.64	0.82	978	7.0	6.7	5.4	4.0	0.7	10.1	4.4	2.00	-68%	Buy
UOA Dev	Dec	1.75	1.86	4,358	18.8	18.0	7.8	4.4	0.8	4.4	5.7	3.16	-45%	Neutral
SP Setia	Dec	0.95	0.93	4,137	15.6	15.1	4.5	3.9	0.3	1.7	1.7	3.11	-69%	Neutral
Tambun Indah	Dec	0.86	0.91	376	7.3	6.7	10.7	8.5	0.5	6.6	6.4	3.03	-72%	Neutral
Sector Avg					14.7	13.7	3.0	6.7						

Note: [^]FY23-24 valuations refer to those of FY24-25

Source: Bloomberg, RHB

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Trading Buy:	Share price may exceed 15% over the next 3 months, however longer-term outlook remains uncertain
Neutral:	Share price may fall within the range of +/- 10% over the next 12 months
Take Profit:	Target price has been attained. Look to accumulate at lower levels
Sell:	Share price may fall by more than 10% over the next 12 months
Not Rated:	Stock is not within regular research coverage

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KUALA LUMPUR

RHB Investment Bank Bhd
Level 3A, Tower One, RHB Centre
Jalan Tun Razak
Kuala Lumpur 50400
Malaysia
Tel : +603 9280 8888
Fax : +603 9200 2216

JAKARTA

PT RHB Sekuritas Indonesia
Revenue Tower, 11th Floor, District 8 - SCBD
Jl. Jendral Sudirman Kav 52-53
Jakarta 12190
Indonesia
Tel : +6221 509 39 888
Fax : +6221 509 39 777

BANGKOK

RHB Securities (Thailand) PCL
10th Floor, Sathorn Square Office Tower
98, North Sathorn Road, Silom
Bangrak, Bangkok 10500
Thailand
Tel: +66 2088 9999
Fax :+66 2088 9799

SINGAPORE

RHB Bank Berhad (Singapore branch)
90 Cecil Street
#04-00 RHB Bank Building
Singapore 069531
Fax: +65 6509 0470