Singapore Company Guide NetLink NBN Trust

Version 11 | Bloomberg: NETLINK SP | Reuters: NETL.SI

Refer to important disclosures at the end of this report

DBS Group Research . Equity

BUY

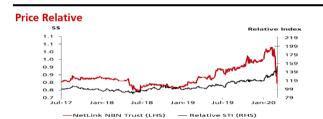
Last Traded Price (20 Mar 2020): \$\$0.90 (STI : 2,410.74) Price Target 12-mth: \$\$0.95 (6% upside) (Prev \$\$1.05)

Analyst

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What's New

- Netlink's outperformance is likely to continue due to the regulated nature of its business
- In case of a severe market-meltdown, Netlink could decline to S\$0.76, implying 10% downside risk
- Netlink's 5.8% yield is attractive compared to 6.2% average yield offered by large-cap industrial S-REITs. BUY with revised TP of \$\$0.95



Forecasts and Valuation				
FY Mar (S\$m)	2019A	2020F	2021F	2022F
Revenue	354	369	381	393
EBITDA	250	267	278	288
Pre-tax Profit	69.8	82.2	93.6	103
Net Profit	77.4	86.1	97.3	105
Net Pft (Pre Ex.)	77.4	86.1	97.3	105
Net Pft Gth (Pre-ex) (%)	54.9	11.3	13.0	7.8
EPS (S cts)	1.99	2.21	2.50	2.69
EPS Pre Ex. (S cts)	1.99	2.21	2.50	2.69
EPS Gth Pre Ex (%)	55	11	13	8
Diluted EPS (S cts)	1.99	2.21	2.50	2.69
Net DPS (S cts)	4.88	5.07	5.20	5.32
BV Per Share (S cts)	77.7	75.0	72.3	69.8
PE (X)	45.3	40.7	36.0	33.4
PE Pre Ex. (X)	45.3	40.7	36.0	33.4
P/Cash Flow (X)	15.3	11.2	13.6	13.1
EV/EBITDA (X)	16.0	14.9	14.3	13.8
Net Div Yield (%)	5.4	5.6	5.8	5.9
P/Book Value (X)	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.3
Net Debt/Equity (X)	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2
ROAE (%)	2.5	2.9	3.4	3.8
Earnings Rev (%):		-	-	-
Consensus EPS (S cts):		2.20	2.40	2.50
Other Broker Recs:		B: 8	S: 0	H: 3

Source of all data on this page: Company, DBS Bank, Bloomberg Finance L.P

23 Mar 2020

Built for the tough times

Netlink's outperformance is likely to continue. The stock has dropped 4% year-to-date (YTD) vs. 25% decline for Strait Times Index (STI). NetLink NBN Trust (NLT) is trading at 5.8% yield, vs. an average yield of 6.2% offered by large-cap industrial S-REITs. We argue that NLT should trade at 80-100 basis points (bps) lower yield than industrial S-REITs' as (1) NLT's distributions are largely independent of the economic cycle due to the regulated nature of its business, (2) NLT's asset life is much longer as it incurs annual capex to replenish its depreciated asset base, and (3) NLT's gearing is less than half of S-REITs' with ample debt headroom to fund future growth.

Where we differ: We benchmark Netlink's yield against industrial S-REITs whose asset life is 40-50 years. Netlink, on the other hand, incurs an annual capex of \$\$50-60m to replenish its depreciated asset base, leading to a very long asset life. Also, Netlink's net debt to EBITDA of less than 2x implies ample room for raising cheap debt if needed. Regulated Asset Base (RAB) Trusts can lever up to 5x easily, implying that Netlink can easily raise up to \$\$500m in additional debt if required.

Potential catalysts: NLT could use its debt headroom to invest in Smart Nation initiatives, not factored in our TP

Valuation:

Maintain BUY, lower TP of \$\$0.95. We revise weighted average cost of capital (WACC) to 6.0% from 5.4% in our DCF (terminal growth rate of 1.2%) valuation. We project higher market risk premium and beta in the face of higher market volatility.

Key Risks to Our View:

Bear case TP of S\$0.76 implies 10% downside potential, including 5.8% yield. In case of industrial S-REITs declining from their mean valuation (6.2% yield) to -2SD valuation (7.7% yield), Netlink's yield could also decline to 6.8%

At A Glance

Issued Capital (m shrs)	3,897
Mkt. Cap (S\$m/US\$m)	3,507 / 2,418
Major Shareholders (%)	
Temasek Holdings Pte Ltd	25.4
UBS AG / Singapore	5.6
Lazard Ltd	4.9
Free Float (%)	64.1
3m Avg. Daily Val (US\$m)	7.7
	and the second second

GIC Industry: Communication Services / Telecommunication Services

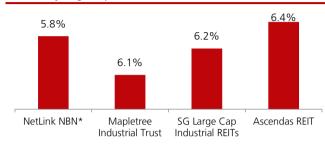






WHAT'S NEW

NLT should trade at 80-100 bps lower yield than S-REITs' NetLink is trading at 5.8% yield, vs. an average yield of 6.2 % offered by large-cap industrial S-REITs.



*FY21F for NetLink NBN

Source: Reuters, DBS Bank

We argue that NLT should trade at a lower yield of 80-100bps than large-cap Industrial S-REITs' yield due to three reasons:

- NLT's distributions are largely independent of the economic cycle due to the regulated nature of its business. Almost 93% of the business is regulated in nature, another 5% of the business is unregulated but contractual in nature. Only ~2% of the business from diversion income and others is less predictable in nature.
- NLT's asset life is longer than S-REITS as it incurs annual capex to replenish its depreciated asset base. NLT incurs an annual capex of S\$55-60m or more to replenish its depreciated asset base, making its asset life quite long. Industrial S-REITs, on the other hand, have much shorter asset life of 40-50 years.
- 3. NLT's gearing is less than half of S-REITs' with ample debt headroom to fund future growth. Netlink's net debt to EBITDA of less than 2x implies ample room for raising cheap debt if needed. If we look at regional utilities and infrastructure players with RAB model, most of them have net debt to EBITDA above 5x. Clearly, Netlink can easily raise up to \$\$500m in additional debt if required. NLT's net debt to equity of 16% is less than half the gearing of S-REITs at 35-40%. We think that NLT's gearing has been

kept low to have enough flexibility to raise capex in the future as NLT provides the backbone of broadband infrastructure in Singapore.

Maintain BUY, lower TP of \$\$0.95. Our DCF valuation assumes 6.0% WACC and 1.2% terminal growth based on long-term household formation rates. Our change in TP is largely on the back of higher WACC (5.4% previously) to factor in a higher market risk premium and beta in the face of higher market volatility.

We have raised market risk premium from 7% to 7.5%, and beta from 0.5 to 0.6 to reflect the higher volatility brought about by the COVID-19 crisis. The Federal Reserve Board of US announced another rate cut on 15 March, and hence we have cut the risk-free rate from 2.5% previously to 2%.

SG large-cap Industrial REIT yields: Implied yields based on Mean & Standard deviations of Price to Net Asset Value

	Current	Mean	-1 SD	-2 SD
Mapletree Industrial Trust	6.1%	6.4%	7.1%	8.0%
Ascendas REIT	6.4%	6.0%	6.6%	7.4%
Average	6.2%	6.2%	6.9%	7.7%

Source: DBS Bank

According to our bear-case scenario analysis, NLT could drop to \$\$0.76 per share. In the case of continued market dislocation due to COVID-19, industrial S-REITs could decline to -2SD valuation in the worst-case scenario. This would imply industrial S-REITs' average yield dropping to 7.7% from 6.2% currently (pls see the table above) implying almost a drop of 20% in the share price of industrial S-REITS. Given higher earnings resilience, lower gearing and longer asset life of NLT, we project NLT to trade at 90bps of 6.8% under our bear case scenario. Based on current FY21F distribution per share of 5.2Scts, it translates into a bear-case price of \$\$0.76 per share. Overall, that implies a downside risk of 10% including 5.8% yield.



CRITICAL DATA POINTS TO WATCH

Critical Factors

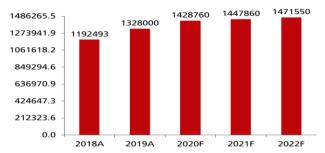
Fibre broadband penetration set to rise from c.94% currently. As of Dec 2019, NLT's network had passed over 1.5m residential homes, while there were 1.42m residential end-user connections, representing 94.5% of homes passed. NLT should benefit from StarHub's accelerated fibre migration over 1HFY20 which will have a full-year impact over FY21F. In the subsequent years, we expect NLT to benefit from (1) higher end-user fibre penetration currently, and (2) growth in the number of new households.

Growing market share in non-residential fibre business. NLT expanded its market share from c.30% in FY17 to c.34% in FY18, having grown from zero in 2012. Growth in market share will be driven by an expanding SME market, which is mainly located outside of the Central Business District (CBD) and business parks where NLT faces lower competition from other fibre network providers due to its relatively extensive nationwide network coverage. Key strategies include: (1) deploying fibre within selected non-residential buildings, and (2) extending network footprint into new major developments such as the Greater Southern Waterfront project.

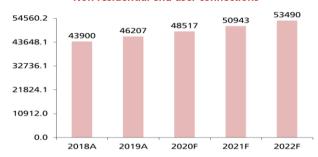
Opportunities in Non-Building Access Points (NBAP) segment.

Growth opportunities could arise from the Smart Nation Programme, which requires the deployment of a network of sensors and monitoring equipment across Singapore to support applications such as autonomous vehicles, high-definition surveillance cameras, parking space management and weather data collection. NLT continues to support the Requesting Licensees and government agencies on the rollout of Smart Nation initiatives.

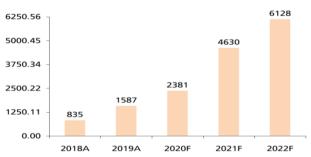
Residential end user connections



Non residential end user connections



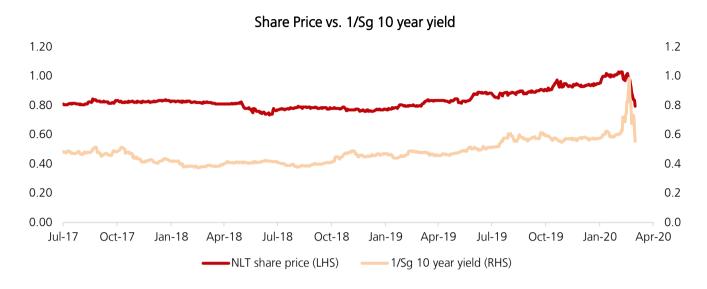
NBAP connections



Source: Company, DBS Bank

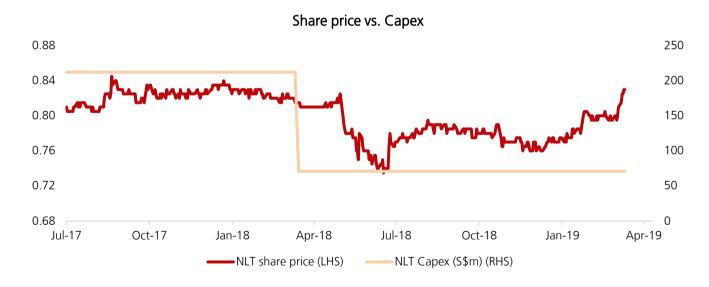


Appendix 1: A look at Company's listed history – what drives its share price?



Source: Reuters, DBS Bank

NLT's share price correlates positively to the inverse of Singapore's 10-year benchmark government bond yield. We believe NLT is being priced like a bond proxy due to its strong yield characteristics. In a lower yield environment, NLT's share price should perform well as it continues to deliver DPU growth.



Source: Reuters, Company, DBS Bank

Since Netlink gets a guaranteed 7% return on its regulated asset base (RAB) and higher than regular capex will translate into higher EBITDA for Netlink. Netlink's regular annual capex is \$\$55-60m but any upside surprise on the capex can be easily debtfunded at low-interest cost of 2.5%-3.0% which will generate 7% returns as allowed by the regulators.



Blance Sheet:

Prudent capital structure. NLT has in place a prudent capital structure, with a S\$510m term loan plus two revolving credit facilities totalling S\$300m (S\$90m + S\$210m). Total gross debt as of 31 Dec 2019 stood at S\$636m. Net debt-to-equity ratio for the Trust is low, at around 0.2x. More importantly, the Trust's gross debt/EBITDA ratio as of 31 Dec 2019 at 2.2x is quite conservative compared to other listed utility/infrastructure companies and business trusts.

Low gearing allows for opportunistic acquisitions,

developments. Current gearing is low, with net debt-to-equity ratio at c.0.2x. The Manager has ample headroom for opportunistic acquisitions and developments.

Share Price Drivers:

We identify several catalysts for NLT's share price: (i) wider scope of Smart Nation initiatives as NLT could use its debt headroom to invest in those initiatives, leading to a healthy growth in distributions in the long term, and (iii) more clarity on NLT's potential participation, if at all, in the 5G rollout programme that is expected over next two years.

Key Risks:

Regulatory changes. As c.80% of the revenue is regulated under the RAB model, any changes in nominal pre-tax WACC from 2022 onwards may lead to changes in Interconnection Offer (ICO) pricing. The pre-tax WACC for the current review period is currently set at 7%.

Technology risk. We note that NLT's unique "ring" and "star" topology schemes are considered as highly future-proof passive infrastructure. While wired fibre broadband remains the most efficient and effective technology today for the transmission of large amounts of data at high bandwidth with low latency from point-to-point directly and is often thought to be future-proof with limited substitution risk, there is risk of technology obsolescence with new technologies.

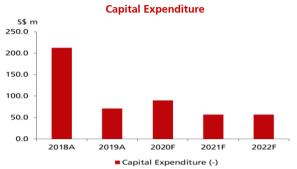
Environment, Social, Governance:

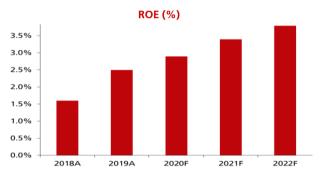
In FY19, NLT determined its material environmental, social and governance aspects, as it continues to expand its business and network infrastructure while upholding various sustainability efforts. NLT has formed a Sustainability Steering Committee to monitor and manage sustainability approaches as well as various ESG risks and opportunities.

Company Background

NLT designs, builds, owns and operates the fibre network infrastructure which is the foundation of Singapore's Next Generation Nationwide Broadband Network.











Source: Company, DBS Bank





Key Assumptions

FY Mar	2018A	2019A	2020F	2021F	2022F
Residential end user Non residential end user	1,192,493 43,900	1,328,000 46,207	1,428,760 48,517	1,447,860 50,943	1,471,550 53,490
NBAP connections	835	1,587	2,381	4,630	6,128

Segmental Breakdown

FY Mar	2018A	2019A	2020F	2021F	2022F
Revenues (S\$m)					
Residential connections	196	207	233	238	242 🔪
Non-residential & NBAP	26.4	30.0	33.0	35.9	39.2
Ducts, manholes and CO	47.3	54.9	46.1	46.1	46.5
Others	(40.9)	62.0	57.1	60.6	65.3
	229	354	369	381	393

Income Statement (S\$m)

FY Mar	2018A	2019A	2020F	2021F	2022F
Revenue	229	354	369	381	393
Cost of Goods Sold	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Gross Profit	229	354	369	381	393
Other Opng (Exp)/Inc	(173)	(265)	(266)	(266)	(269)
Operating Profit	56.0	88.9	103	115	124
Other Non Opg (Exp)/Inc	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Associates & JV Inc	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Net Interest (Exp)/Inc	(12.2)	(19.1)	(20.4)	(21.1)	(21.2)
Exceptional Gain/(Loss)	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Pre-tax Profit	43.8	69.8	82.2	93.6	103
Tax	6.14	7.61	3.90	3.72	2.17
Minority Interest	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Preference Dividend	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Net Profit	50.0	77.4	86.1	97.3	105
Net Profit before Except.	50.0	77.4	86.1	97.3	105
EBITDA	168	250	267	278	288
Growth					
Revenue Gth (%)	(23.6)	54.7	4.4	3.2	3.1
EBITDA Gth (%)	(24.9)	48.3	6.8	4.1	3.6
Opg Profit Gth (%)	(30.8)	58.7	15.5	11.7	8.1
Net Profit Gth (Pre-ex) (%)	(37.1)	54.9	11.3	13.0	7.8
Margins & Ratio					
Gross Margins (%)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Opg Profit Margin (%)	24.5	25.1	27.8	30.1	31.6
Net Profit Margin (%)	21.9	21.9	23.3	25.6	26.7
ROAE (%)	1.6	2.5	2.9	3.4	3.8
ROA (%)	1.2	1.8	2.0	2.3	2.5
ROCE (%)	1.3	2.1	2.5	2.8	3.1
Div Payout Ratio (%)	252.8	245.8	229.5	208.0	197.7
Net Interest Cover (x)	4.6	4.6	5.0	5.4	5.8

Source: Company, DBS Bank

We project 99% fibre penetration in FY22F; non-residential to benefit from rise in market share FY Mar





3Q2020

2Q2020

Quarterly	v / Interim	Income Statement	(S\$m)
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3Q2019

Revenue	89.0	87.9	92.0	94.1	91.6
Cost of Goods Sold	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Gross Profit	89.0	87.9	92.0	94.1	91.6
Other Oper. (Exp)/Inc	(66.4)	(65.8)	(67.6)	(67.2)	(66.0)
Operating Profit	22.6	22.1	24.5	26.9	25.6
Other Non Opg (Exp)/Inc	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Associates & JV Inc	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Net Interest (Exp)/Inc	(4.5)	(4.4)	(4.5)	(4.7)	(5.1)
Exceptional Gain/(Loss)	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Pre-tax Profit	18.1	17.7	20.0	22.2	20.5
Tax	1.52	2.32	0.96	0.97	1.02
Minority Interest	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Net Profit	19.6	20.0	20.9	23.2	21.5
Net profit bef Except.	19.6	20.0	20.9	23.2	21.5
EBITDA	62.8	62.8	65.2	67.6	67.9
Consider					
Growth	(4.7)	(4.2)	4.0	2.2	(2.6)
Revenue Gth (%)	(1.7)	(1.3)	4.8	2.2	(2.6)
EBITDA Gth (%)	1.4	0.0	3.8	3.7	0.4
Opg Profit Gth (%)	6.5	(2.3)	11.0	9.8	(4.7)
Net Profit Gth (Pre-ex) (%)	5.0	2.0	4.6	10.8	(7.2)
Margins	4000				4000
Gross Margins (%)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Opg Profit Margins (%)	25.4	25.1	26.6	28.6	27.9
Net Profit Margins (%)	22.1	22.8	22.7	24.6	23.5

4Q2019

1Q2020

Net profit number is not a meaningful figure as accounting depreciation is much higher than regulatory depreciation. Regulatory depreciation is used to calculate the

Balance Sheet (S\$m)

FY Mar	2018A	2019A	2020F	2021F	2022F	
Net Fixed Assets	3,211	3,125	3,051	2,945	2,838	
Invts in Associates & JVs	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	
Other LT Assets	928	924	924	924	924	
Cash & ST Invts	167	149	214	223	229	
Inventory	3.89	4.74	6.47	6.68	6.89	
Debtors	63.5	75.8	69.8	72.0	74.3	
Other Current Assets	4.28	4.34	4.34	4.34	4.34	
Total Assets	4,377	4,282	4,269	4,175	4,076	
ST Debt	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	
Creditor	48.4	56.0	120	124	128	
Other Current Liab	12.5	23.7	23.7	23.7	23.7	
LT Debt	589	635	670	678	678	
Other LT Liabilities	553	538	534	530	528	
Shareholder's Equity	3,174	3,030	2,922	2,819	2,719	
Minority Interests	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	
Total Cap. & Liab.	4,377	4,282	4,269	4,175	4,076	
Non-Cash Wkg. Capital	10.8	5.20	(63.1)	(64.5)	(65.9)	
Net Cash/(Debt)	(421)	(486)	(455) 🔪	(455)	(449)	
Debtors Turn (avg days)	95.0	71.9	72.0	68.0	68.0	
Creditors Turn (avg days)	(220.2)	(118.5)	(196.1)	(273.4)	(280.6)	
Inventory Turn (avg days)	(15.2)	(9.8)	(12.5)	(14.7)	(15.1)	
Asset Turnover (x)	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	\
Current Ratio (x)	3.9	2.9	2.1	2.1	2.1	
Quick Ratio (x)	3.8	2.8	2.0	2.0	2.0	
Net Debt/Equity (X)	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	
Net Debt/Equity ex MI (X)	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	
Capex to Debt (%)	36.0	11.2	13.4	8.4	8.4	

1.9

1.8

1.7

1.7

2.0

Net debt to EBITDA of less than 2x implies ample room for raising cheap debt if needed as RAB Trusts can lever up to 5x easily

Source: Company, DBS Bank

Z-Score (X)



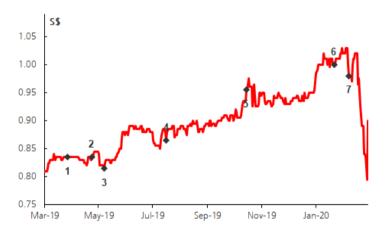


Cash Flow Statement (S\$m)

FY Mar	2018A	2019A	2020F	2021F	2022F
Pre-Tax Profit	4.81	69.8	82.2	93.6	103
Dep. & Amort.	112	162	164	163	164
Tax Paid	(11.5)	(6.1)	0.0	0.0	0.0
Assoc. & JV Inc/(loss)	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Chg in Wkg.Cap.	21.1	2.30	68.3	1.39	1.42
Other Operating CF	31.7	2.05	0.0	0.0	0.0
Net Operating CF	158	230	315	258	268
Capital Exp.(net)	(212)	(71.1)	(90.0) —	(57.0)	(57.0)
Other Invts.(net)	(1,095)	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Invts in Assoc. & JV	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Div from Assoc & JV	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Other Investing CF	0.0	0.01	0.0	0.0	0.0
Net Investing CF	(1,307)	(71.1)	(90.0)	(57.0)	(57.0)
Div Paid	0.0	(221)	(194)	(200)	(205)
Chg in Gross Debt	(1,020)	45.0	35.0	8.00	0.0
Capital Issues	2,335	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Other Financing CF	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Net Financing CF	1,315	(176)	(159)	(192)	(205)
Currency Adjustments	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Chg in Cash	166	(17.8)	65.6	8.79	5.88
Opg CFPS (S cts)	3.53	5.83	6.32	6.58	6.84
Free CFPS (S cts)	(1.4)	4.07	5.76	5.15	5.41

Source: Company, DBS Bank

Target Price & Ratings History



S.No.	Date of Report	Closing Price	Target Price	Rating
1:	17 Apr 19	0.84	0.87	BUY
2:	14 May 19	0.84	0.90	BUY
3:	28 May 19	0.82	0.90	BUY
4:	06 Aug 19	0.87	0.95	BUY
5:	04 Nov 19	0.96	1.04	BUY
6:	11 Feb 20	1.00	1.05	BUY
7:	28 Feb 20	0.98	1.05	BUY

Note: Share price and Target price are adjusted for corporate actions.

Source: DBS Bank

Analyst: Sachin MITTAL

Rui Wen LIM



DBS Bank recommendations are based on an Absolute Total Return* Rating system, defined as follows:

STRONG BUY (>20% total return over the next 3 months, with identifiable share price catalysts within this time frame)

BUY (>15% total return over the next 12 months for small caps, >10% for large caps)

HOLD (-10% to +15% total return over the next 12 months for small caps, -10% to +10% for large caps)

FULLY VALUED (negative total return, i.e., > -10% over the next 12 months)

SELL (negative total return of > -20% over the next 3 months, with identifiable share price catalysts within this time frame)

*Share price appreciation + dividends

Completed Date: 23 Mar 2020 08:28:39 (SGT) Dissemination Date: 23 Mar 2020 09:05:29 (SGT)

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