26 May 2023

RHB**4**

Axiata Group (АХІАТА МК)

Resetting Expectations; D/G To NEUTRAL

- D/G to NEUTRAL from Buy, lower SOP TP of MYR3.25 (from MYR4.37), 10% upside. Axiata's 1Q23 results were a miss. We see downside risks to earnings given the still challenging macro-environment in frontier markets, Linknet's feeble earnings, and the group's elevated interest expense. The deconsolidation of Celcom would also contribute to earnings dilution. We cut FY23-25F earnings by 13-26% with a 25% discount included into our SOP valuation to factor in earnings and execution risks. Our TP incorporates a 2% ESG premium as per our house methodology.
- 1Q23 results underwhelmed, with core PATAMI down 83% QoQ (-77% YoY) on comparable basis. This represents only 7% of our and consensus' full-year estimates. The key deviations came from the higher-than-expected depreciation and financing costs, alongside weak showings at Dialog, Linknet, and edotco. The 15-35% depreciation of the BDT and LKR YTD further impacted translated revenues/EBITDA. Consolidated revenue was up 7.9% YoY in 1Q23, driven by all operating companies except Dialog, Ncell, Robi, and ADA. It was the first quarter post the divestment of Celcom now an associate via the group's 33.1% stake in CelcomDigi (CDB MK, NEUTRAL, TP: MYR4.60). CDB's share of profit of MYR114m in 1Q23 compares with Celcom's MYR261.2m PATAMI in 1Q22.
- Dialog's earnings to remain weak; Linknet losses expanded in 1Q23. Despite the mobile tariff hikes, electricity rates in Sri Lanka were raised by another 66% in Feb, the second time in less than a year. This impacted Dialog's network costs, which alongside higher depreciation, saw 1Q23 EBIT decline 49.2%. Linknet's (79.5%-owned) earnings continue to be hampered by high subs churn, depreciation, and finance costs, with EBIT down 84.7% YoY (-52% QoQ) while LAT widened to IDR49bn (4Q22: IDR6bn LAT; 1Q22: IDR238bn PAT).
- Resetting expectations. We cut FY23/24/25F core earnings by 26%/14%/13%, mainly to include the weaker earnings for Dialog, edotco, and Linknet, and extended digital losses, as well as after assuming higher depreciation and amortization, and finance costs. Post revision, we see Axiata's core earnings fall 44% in FY23F before recovering in FY24F. With share price down 7% in the past three months and forward EV/EBITDA valuation at -1.5sd below historical mean, there could be downside support. Key risks: Competition, regulatory setbacks, and execution.
- **ESG framework update.** As there is greater focus on the E pillar due to critical climate change issues, we have tweaked our ESG weightage. Henceforth, we assign a weightage of 50% to the E pillar, followed by 25% each to the S and G pillars. Further details are in our 2 May thematic research note titled <u>Envisioning a Better Future</u>.

Forecasts and Valuation	Dec-21	Dec-22	Dec-23F	Dec-24F	Dec-25F
Total turnover (MYRm)	25,901	27,522	24,418	26,489	28,846
Recurring net profit (MYRm)	1,326	1,587	894	1,305	1,777
Recurring net profit growth (%)	53.2	19.7	(43.6)	45.9	36.2
Recurring P/E (x)	20.20	16.88	29.95	20.53	15.07
P/B (x)	1.5	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.1
P/CF (x)	2.64	4.69	2.04	2.44	2.17
Dividend Yield (%)	3.2	4.7	3.4	3.4	3.4
EV/EBITDA (x)	4.00	2.89	2.27	1.68	1.13
Return on average equity (%)	1.7	(16.3)	1.9	3.4	5.0
Net debt to equity (%)	48.0	58.7	25.0	8.4	net cash

Source: Company data, RHB

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Neutral (from Buy)

Target Price (Return):	MYR3.25 (9.8%)
Price (Market Cap):	MYR2.96 (USD5,873m)
ESG score:	3.08 (out of 4)
Avg Daily Turnover (MYR/USD)	8.02m/1.80m

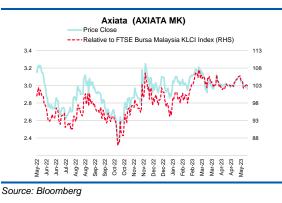
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Share Performance (%)

	YTD	1m	3m	6m	12m
Absolute	(4.2)	(1.7)	(7.2)	(2.3)	(7.2)
Relative	2.0	(0.1)	(3.5)	3.4	1.5
52-wk Price low	/high (MYF	R)		2.36	- 3.25



Overall ESG Score: 3.08 (out of 4) F: GOOD

Axiata is committed to the progressive reduction of its overall carbon footprint via proactive measures to increase the efficiency of its networks. The group publishes annual emission metrics across its operating companies. Edotco Group, its tower company subsidiary, is one of the pioneers in the development and construction of environmentally friendly structures, ie carbon fibre and bamboo towers **S: GOOD**

By virtue of its regional footprint across 11 countries/markets, Axiata has the largest headcount of a listed integrated telecommunications entity in Malaysia, with over 12,900 employees from 38 nationalities. The group offers a world-class working environment, embraces a high-performance culture, and aspires to be Asia's top talent factory. Axiata's Young Talent Programme, which started in 2011, has benefitted over 2,100 students. G: EXCELLENT

The Board is made up of nine directors, of which six are independent and two are females. Axiata fully complies with best practises in relation to the tenure of independent directors not exceeding a cumulative term of nine years. An investor relations team facilitates one-on-one meetings and calls between management and the investment community, with annual Investor Days held.



Financial Exhibits

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Asia	Financial summary (MYR)	Dec-21	Dec-22	Dec-23F	Dec-24F	Dec-25F
Malaysia	Recurring EPS	0.15	0.18	0.10	0.14	0.20
Communications	DPS	0.10	0.14	0.10	0.10	0.10
Axiata Group	BVPS	1.99	2.64	2.63	2.63	2.63
AXIATA MK	Return on average equity (%)	1.7	(16.3)	1.9	3.4	5.0
Neutral						
	Valuation metrics	Dec-21	Dec-22	Dec-23F	Dec-24F	Dec-25F
Valuation basis	Recurring P/E (x)	20.20	16.88	29.95	20.53	15.07
Sum-of-parts (SOP) methodology	P/B (x)	1.5	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.1
	FCF Yield (%)	14.0	(5.2)	22.5	20.9	25.8
Key drivers	Dividend Yield (%)	3.2	4.7	3.4	3.4	3.4
Stronger than expected earnings, operational	EV/EBITDA (x)	4.00	2.89	2.27	1.68	1.13
efficiencies and higher than expected dividends	EV/EBIT (x)	13.79	151.55	9.72	7.09	4.70
Kovricko						
Key risks	Income statement (MYRm)	Dec-21	Dec-22	Dec-23F	Dec-24F	Dec-25F
Competition, weaker than expected earnings, regulatory setbacks and execution	Total turnover	25,901	27,522	24,418	26,489	28,846
Cydiatory Selbaons and Execution	Gross profit	25,901	27,522	24,418	26,489	28,846
Company Profile	EBITDA	11,404	12,434	11,311	12,331	13,471
Axiata is a leading regional telecommunications group	Depreciation and amortisation	(8,095)	(12,197)	(8,668)	(9,403)	(10,240)
with key mobile assets in Malaysia, Indonesia, Sri	Operating profit	3,309	237	2,643	2,927	3,231
Lanka, Cambodia, Bangladesh and Nepal. It also owns	Net interest	(1,414)	(1,714)	(1,977)	(1,807)	(1,637)
edotco Group, one of the largest tower infrastructure	Pre-tax profit	1,665	(2,092)	665	1,125	1,601
services providers in Asia and digital financial services	Taxation	(897)	(1,061)	(110)	(161)	(219)
provider, Boost	Reported net profit	310	(3,421)	455	819	1,184
	Recurring net profit	1,326	1,587	894	1,305	1,777
	Cash flow (MYRm)	Dec-21	Dec-22	Dec-23F	Dec-24F	Dec-25F
	Change in working capital	1,045	(3,944)	3,910	624	710
	Cash flow from operations	10,139	5,714	13,133	10,987	12,325
	Capex	(6,400)	(7,100)	(7,100)	(5,400)	(5,406)
	Cash flow from investing activities	(6,400)	(7,100)	(7,100)	(5,400)	(5,406)
	Dividends paid	(860)	(1,267)	(905)	(905)	(905)
	Cash flow from financing activities	1,359	15,696	(905)	(905)	(905)
	Cash at beginning of period	7,194	6,969	7,452	9,019	10,187
	Net change in cash	5,098	14,310	5,128	4,682	6,014
	Ending balance cash	12,292	21,280	12,581	13,701	16,202
	Balance sheet (MYRm) Total cash and equivalents	Dec-21 7,017	Dec-22 7,452	Dec-23F 15,776	Dec-24F 18,833	Dec-25F 22,607
	•	26,975	27,201	21,016	16,947	12,344
	Tangible fixed assets Total investments	258			15,610	12,344
	Total assets		15,595	15,600		
		72,550	81,635	81,539	80,943	80,588 5,596
	Short-term debt	4,231	7,096	6,596	6,096	
	Total long-term debt Total liabilities	14,819	18,338	16,838	15,338	13,838
		47,485	50,992	50,853	50,113	49,560
	Total equity	25,066	30,643	30,686	30,831	31,028
	Total liabilities & equity	72,550	81,635	81,539	80,943	80,588
	Key metrics	Dec-21	Dec-22	Dec-23F	Dec-24F	Dec-25F
	Revenue growth (%)	7.0	6.3	(11.3)	8.5	8.9
	Recurrent EPS growth (%)	53.2	19.7	(43.6)	45.9	36.2
	Gross margin (%)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
	Operating EBITDA margin (%)	44.0	45.2	46.3	46.6	46.7
	Net profit margin (%)	1.2	(12.4)	1.9	3.1	4.1
	Dividend payout ratio (%)	277.3	(37.0)	198.6	110.5	76.4
	Capex/sales (%)	24.7	25.8	29.1	20.4	18.7

Source: Company data, RHB



OTHER HIGHLIGHTS

Delayering, monetisation, and optimisation

• XL Axiata (EXCL IJ, BUY, TP: IDR3,140) recently announced the carving out of the Indonesian fibre assets to Linknet, which will be positioned as a network company (NetCo), with XL transforming into a retail and service company (ServeCo). Linknet will assume the capex to roll out fibre networks to c.8m homes over the next five years, relieving XL of the burden. The transaction mechanics (related-party transactions) are being worked out, and from the outset, the shift to an asset-light model is expected to be an earnings accretive for XL.

Digital banking venture may see Boost losses rise

Axiata's mobile and digital banking business with RHB Banking Group (RHBC MK, NR) is slated to take-off by 2024. We see gestation
losses from the venture to prolong the turnaround of the group's digital financial services arm Boost – initially targeted for end-2022.
Boost recorded LBITDA of MYR132m and LAT of MYR165m in FY22. For 1Q23, it posted LBITDA of MYR42m and LAT of MYR52m
with high interest cost a key drag. Media reports stated that Boost is exploring another round of funding, which in our view could
potentially result in a stake selldown by Axiata.

Figure 1: Results review table

FYE Dec (MYR m)	1QFY22^	4QFY22^	1QFY23	QoQ(%)	YoY(%)	
Revenue	6,470.0	7,087.1	5,378.8	(24.1)	(16.9)	Stronger showing across most operating companies (OpCos) with the exception of Robi Ncell, Dialog and ADA.
Operating expenses	(3,571.5)	(3,766.1)	(2,962.1)	(21.3)	(17.1)	· · ·
Core EBITDA	2,898.5	3,321.0	2,416.7	(27.2)	(16.6)	
EBITDA Margin (%)	44.8	46.9	44.9			Cost optimization.
Depreciation	(1,860.5)	(6,355.4)	(1,812.9)	(71.5)	(2.6)	Goodwill impairment of MYR4.1bn on Ncell, XL, and Dialog in 4Q22.
EBIT	1,037.9	(3,034.4)	603.8	(119.9)	(41.8)	
EBIT Margin (%)	16.0	(42.8)	11.2			
Finance income	36.7	99.5	83.9	(15.7)	128.3	
Finance cost	(403.3)	(591.4)	(536.9)	(9.2)	33.1	Higher debt from inorganic acquisitions.
Forex gain / (loss)	(235.7)	395.4	(19.4)	(104.9)	(91.8)	Mainly from USD denominated debt at holdco and Dialog.
Jointly controlled entities	(2.0)	(1.8)	1.2	(169.6)	(162.0)	
Associates	3.2	(43.0)	113.3	(363.6)	3,495.5	
Pretax profit	253.2	10,286.2	269.0	(97.4)	6.2	
Pretax Margin (%)	3.9	145.1				
Тах	(262.5)	(223.8)	(127.1)	(43.2)	(51.6)	
Effective tax rate (%)	103.7					
Minority interests	(33.7)	(95.0)	(68.1)	(28.3)	102.1	
Net Profit	(43.0)	9,967.4	73.8	(99.3)	(271.8)	
Core Net Profit	369.9	509.5	85.7	(83.2)	(76.8)	Below expectations.

Note: ^Comparative quarters include Celcom and may not be comparable

Source: Company data

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Figure 2: SOP valuation – Axiata Group

Operating companies (MYRm)	Stake	Valuation	Value per share	Valuation methodology
CelcomDigi (CDB)	33.1%	17,862.4	1.95	CDB TP of MYR4.60
XL Axiata (Indonesia)	66.3%	8,193.1	0.89	TP: IDR3,140
Linknet (Indonesia)	79.5%	653.1	0.07	4x EV/EBITDA
Robi (Bangladesh)	61.8%	5,684.3	0.62	5x EV/EBITDA
Dialog (Sri Lanka)	83.0%	3,629.7	0.40	5x EV/EBITDA
Ncell (Nepal)	80.0%	2,038.8	0.22	4x EV/EBITDA
Smart (Cambodia)	72.5%	3,610.5	0.39	5x EV/EBITDA
edotco (infrastructure/towerco)	63.0%	9,214.0	1.00	8x EV/EBITDA
Enterprise value (FCFF)		50,885.9		
Adjusted net debt (HoldCo)		(11,809.0)		
Equity value		39,076.9	_	
Number of shares (m) SOP valuation		9,176.8 4.26		
ESG premium/(discount)		0.09		
Discount		1.09		
TP (MYR)		3.25		
Implied FY24 EV/EBITDA (x)	L_	4.1		

Source: RHB, Company data





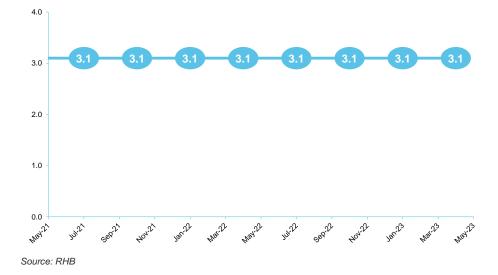
Recommendation Chart



Date	Recommendation	Target Price	Price
2023-02-24	Buy	4.37	3.19
2022-12-06	Buy	4.13	3.09
2022-11-28	Buy	4.22	3.03
2022-08-28	Buy	3.73	3.03
2022-05-26	Buy	4.08	3.15
2022-04-21	Buy	4.76	3.58
2022-02-23	Buy	5.03	3.91
2021-11-28	Buy	4.84	3.90
2021-08-29	Buy	4.75	4.04
2021-06-22	Buy	4.75	4.01
2021-05-26	Neutral	3.80	3.50
2021-02-26	Neutral	3.90	3.55
2020-11-29	Neutral	4.00	3.73
2020-08-28	Buy	3.50	3.01
2020-07-21	Neutral	3.50	3.23

Source: RHB, Bloomberg

ESG Rating History



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See important disclosures at the end of this report Market Dateline / PP 19489/05/2019 (035080)



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