

## *Chairman's Statement*

2003 has been a year of challenge for both Hong Kong and Asia. The already sluggish economies were further dampened by the impacts of atypical pneumonia known as SARS and servicing industries, in particular, were expectedly hardly hit. Both consumer and investor sentiment fell to the lowest level for decades. The market was full of pessimism to such extent that one could hardly dare to predict, under such circumstances, as to when we could see the light at the end of tunnel.

The V-shape rebound during the latter part of the year appeared to contradict the classical theories. Nonetheless, if one could make a macro view on the historical developments of the Asian economies in the past 2 decades, it would not be difficult to see that fundamental values as hard working, endurance and dedication were truly the factors allowing us to sail through the hard times. Indeed, we would be pleased to see that the solid foundation that we have built in the past was able to withstand the turmoil in the past, and to prepare ourselves to seize the opportunities that come with the market revival in future.

While we remain firmly committed to our business as a financial services provider, 2003 has been a year of strategic realignment both in terms of product emphasis and geographical diversification. Internally, efforts to redeploy our resources will continue so that they could be effectively utilised to generate long term values. On this basis, we are confident of our ability to provide service excellence with prudence and professionalism.

Finally, I would like to extend my appreciation towards the contributions made by our Group management and staff, the support of our business partners and shareholders, and particularly our customers from them collectively we have been able to collect constructive feedback, enhance the standard of our professional services, and to emerge stronger after each economic setback.

**Tang Yu Lap**

*Chairman*