

Ladies and Gentlemen, Good Evening.

Let us settle down, close our eyes, and observe a minute of silence in honour of the late Dr Ong Chit Chung, and Mohamed Rabeek.

Mr Dhanabalan, Chairman of Temasek Holdings

Mr Chiang Chie Foo, Vice Chairman of Victoria Executive Council

Mr Teo Ser Luck, Immediate Past President of OVA

Mr Low Eng Tiong, Principal of Victoria School

Mr Chan Poh Meng, Principal of Victoria Junior College

Fellow Victorians

Good Evening, once again.

The sudden passing of Dr Ong and Rabeek is a reminder to us all that, in life, there is only one thing that is certain, what you choose to do while you are alive and kicking.

On that note, I want to pay the highest tribute to these 2 gentlemen, whom without their knowledge, and for that matter, without anyone's knowledge of the limited time that they have on earth. They, were still working fervently for the good of the family of Victorians.

To Dr Ong, Rabeek, and their families who are here with us today, I salute you.

“Victoria thy sons are we, and we will not forget”

While both are established in their own rights, an elder gentleman versus a younger one, both have at the top of their priorities the good of Victoria School, Victoria Junior College and the affairs of the alumni.

When I first met Dr Ong, which regrettably was also my last, merely 2 weeks before he passed on, I recalled the gentleness in his voice when we spoke of the ongoing challenges that he faced as the Chairman of VEC/VAC.

He spoke not out of frustration, nor desperation. He spoke in a manner that comes across to me, that while everyone is busy doing a lot to keep ***“her flag unfurled”***, there are still much more to be done. And it is gonna be uphill. And, in his eyes, I recalled seeing the urge and encouragement, in a fatherly manner, to a young man, who has just taken over the helm of OVA, to step up and make that difference without turning back.

In his mind, Victoria is one. Both school anthems start with “Victoria in Singapore”. Victoria School and Victoria Junior College is a brand that is spoken in one breath.

In my mind, I couldn’t agree more. Both established institutions, will advance towards greatness, hand in hand, building strength on strength of each other.

Dr Ong and I spoke about resources to manage change, as both schools labours on to address the changing landscape and demand from the local education scene.

In my conversation with him, I mentioned that the OVA’s focus is to raise funds, and to provide unconditional assistance, as much as we can, to both schools, without them asking. I spoke about the events we have lined up, tonight’s Gala dinner, June’s Victorian Concert at the Esplanade and the Inaugural Inter-Alumni Soccer.

He listened patiently and occasionally, flashes a smile that seems to give me, “I eat salt, more than you eat rice” kind of feeling. Eventually, I gather that it is not just about money, it is also about the attitude, and the passion of as many individuals that we can rally and gather to the good cause of Victoria.

Regardless, I recalled him saying, that he is very glad and happy to note the enthusiasm and energy of the new Council. He noted that the average age of

the new Council is less than 40. In a gentle elderly manner, he looked at me, and said “Vernon, we have much to do. We must work together to bring both schools to greater heights.”

In God’s name, I uphold these last words from Dr Ong, and in God’s strength, I asked for abundance in guidance and support to both schools in their ongoing endeavour to be the school of choice for Singapore.

“For Victoria is something more, it is a school that watch us grow”.

Speaking of “grow”, Rabeek as a young man was never afraid to make a statement in the midst of our meetings, on a single point, often than not, simple enough for many of us to miss, but critical enough for everyone’s attention. He doesn’t say much, but he listens and he pays attention to details. I worked with Rabeek since 2006 in the Council. Our first project together is VS130 where we celebrated Victoria School’s 130th Anniversary.

I recalled those days, we were all like a pack of hungry wolves, cubs actually, and we wanted to do everything and eat everything.

We wanted to make a difference like there is no tomorrow. We wanted to do branding exercise for OVA, we wanted to raise lots and lots of money, we wanted to do aggressive recruitment campaign, we wanted to have a social and sports calendar that looks like it came from Singapore Island Country Club with every box filled with a cartoon illustrating an event, every month. We wanted to set up and operate students nurturing and mentorship programmes. The list goes on and on, and the meeting went ballistic like a fish market.

Suddenly, Rabeek in his ever calm self asked softly, “how are we going to do that”. Well, as expected, no one really heard him. So, he raised his voice a notch louder, “guys, how are we going to do that”

It was interesting what happened next. Yes, silence. Everyone looked at him, and guessed what he said next. He said “look, let’s be realistic. We have just taken over the Council let’s not try to do everything for the sake of doing.”

Amen.

While he is young, he is real. He knows what he is talking about. This is the kind of individual that we seek. An individual that is not afraid of his seniority, one with guts and courage to come out and speak of words that is not cheap. At his young age, he displays the maturity in thinking and actions that put some of us, the older one to shame.

That is not the end of the story. Gussed what he said next. Spend a moment, think about it. Having raised a critical question at a critical moment, what would you do next?

He offered a direction to take the next step. He said, "I suggest we spend some time and effort to revamp our OVA website, so that we can start using it to reach out, and create the necessary awareness."

My God, I tell you. Nobody thought about the website. His suggestion was totally out of the blue, but it was such a simple and powerful tool. Guess what is on everyone's mind at that moment yes, the question on everyone's mind is "who do?" But no one dare to volunteer.

Rabeek, in his cool, calm and collected manner, said "I can help you guys get this going. Let me work on it." Today, when you go home, if you have not visited our website. Go check it out.

His selfless, unconditional remark has resulted in a website that is totally professional and more importantly functional. Yes, many others have had a hand in it, James who is now based in Beijing, followed up after the sudden passing of Rabeek and completed the task on behalf of him.

The website is full of activities now. Many of other Victorians are now coming online and blessing us with abundance of well wishes, and support. All this would not have been possible, if we didn't have Rabeek, who asked the fundamental question of "how" and taking upon himself to deliver what he said.

"Talk is cheap. Action is priceless."

We miss you Rabeek. Your short time with us, in your quiet ways, has made the difference where it matters most, in us, and Victoria.

"Victoria we give to you, the honour that you claim"

We have recently lost 2 great sons of Victoria. In their memory and in their strengths, we **will** gain more.

Tonight's auspicious gathering would not have been made possible if we have not had the support from many distinguished and selfless Victorians, both from the past and the present and also, the Parent Support Group of both schools.

In this time of financial uncertainty, hosting a grand gala dinner in the grand ballroom of Ritz Carlton has raised some questions. Largely, a question that centres on the word "why"

Let me share with you now, my personal thought on the significance of tonight's dinner and the choice of location for the celebration.

VS Class of 2008 had done extremely well attaining the L1R5 of 10.5! The school retains its **Band 1** position yet again and the cut off points have gone up to 247 this year! For your information, we have always maintained above 245 in the past 5 years! The cohort had produced outstanding results in Maths and Sciences, with high percentage of distinction in the following: 94.5% E-Maths, 75% in Chemistry, 78% in Physics and 85% in Biology.

VJC, had done extremely well in the 2008 'A' Level results under the revised JC curriculum, achieving 100% in almost all the subjects offered in the new curriculum with most subjects achieving nearly 90% of grades A to C. And, 2 students that were offered 13 Academic subjects had scored 7 distinctions while 5 other students that were offered 12 Academic subjects had scored 8 distinctions!

Are you proud to be a Victorian! Yes! Kudos to the teachers and staffs of Victoria!

OVA, has grown from strength to strength. Under the leadership of Past OVA Presidents, we had membership growing to almost 800 in 2006. Today, I am glad to announce, we have crossed the 1000 mark!

Till date, we have also actively engaged both schools in their activities, continuing the support to their book prizes and bursaries, funding for needy students, school sports events, as well as engaging the PSG to co-organise events for the schools! Yes, through OVA activities in the past 3 years, we have raised close to 400 thousands!

So you asked me, is there a reason to celebrate, YES, A big YES indeed.

The Victorian spirit is burning hot. Victorians arise. The momentum to rally support and create awareness is gaining. It is on this note that we decided to celebrate this year's Gala as well as VJC 25th Anniversary in a big way, and in good style.

It is also opportune time if I may say to host a dinner of such scale in such a grand location. Barely 8 months back, if we were to do this dinner here, we would have blown 2K per table. In crisis, we seek opportunity.

With the support of many well wishers and believers, we made it. As what Dr Ong said, it is not always about the money and what many of us believe. The dinner tonight is a sign of good governance, a sign of unity, and a sign of dedication to the spirit of Victoria.

The Omega Terrace, literally the place and the owner, Mr Ong Teong Pin, has brought together many supporters and contributed much to this evening.

VEC Vice Chairman and VAC Vice Chairman, Mr Chiang and Gen Ng, has rallied their members to contribute selflessly.

OVA Council, together with Ser Luck and Chap Huat, and the great Mr Ho, has rallied tremendous contribution from many past and present Victorians.

Perhaps, it is the current financial crisis that everyone is rallying the contribution to keep our flag unfurled. In Hokkien, we say "buay sai low kuei". Raffles did their min-gathering recently, in Swisshotel with a gathering of 80. Tonight, we have 500, and in Ritz Carlton. Yes, in Hokkien, also we say "ya liao".

On a serious note, while it is an ambitious initiative by OVA, it is your effort and your belief as a Son of Victoria, that has made tonight a success. It is a testimony of your believe in us, and in the Victorian spirit.

On this note, I would like to take the opportunity to say a big thank you to our Guest of Honour, Mr S. Dhanabalan, Chairman of Temasek Holdings to grace the occasion. In this time, your presence here, speaks volumes of your commitment to the existence and purpose of OVA.

We have a long way to go, and we will continue to seek your advice, guidance and support. In appreciation of that, we will present to you, the Honorary Membership in a moment. Once again, thank you Sir!

Finally, I want to say this tonight's event would not have taken off if not because of 3 prime movers! Eng Keat, the Organising Chairman, Carol the Publicity and Talents Manager, and Joo Peng our Hon Gen Sec. You have made that difference, and I attribute tonight's success to you. Also, a big thank you to Mr Chan Poh Meng, Principal of VJC, and Mr Low Eng Teong, Principal of VS, for lending us your support in more ways than one to co-host tonight's event with me. Thank you!

Thank you everyone, have a good evening, God Bless and Take Care!

Nil Sine Labore!