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**SPEECH BY DR NG ENG HEN, MINISTER FOR EDUCATION AND 2ND
MINISTER FOR DEFENCE, AT THE SINGAPORE SCHOOLS SPORTS
COUNCILS' 50TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION AT GRAND
BALLROOM, ORCHID COUNTRY CLUB ON FRIDAY, 28TH AUGUST
2009 AT 7.45 PM**

Mr Masagos Zulkifli, Senior Parliamentary Secretary

Miss Ho Peng, Director-General of Education

Miss Sum Chee Wah, Director, Education Programmes Division

Mr Lim Lai Chuan, Chairman, Singapore Schools Sports Council

Mrs Lee Hui Feng, Chairman, Singapore Primary Schools Sports Council,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. It gives me great pleasure to join you in celebrating the 50th
Anniversary of the Singapore Schools Sports Council (SSSC) and

Singapore Primary Schools Sports Council (SPSSC). This would be an appropriate occasion to look back at our progress and achievements, as well as look forward in reviewing the role of sports and other CCA in holistic education for our students.

BACKGROUND - SINGAPOREANS AND SPORTS

2. Our starting point must be to accept the role that sports play in the lives of Singaporeans. We recognize that some countries have a much stronger sporting culture eg Australia, NZ, USA. where the whole town practically comes to a standstill when their home team plays in the national league or when an international competition is held there. We are a relatively young nation, of migrant stock and a strong sporting culture will take time to develop. Further, the climate here – hot, humid or wet - is less conducive than temperate countries to encourage prolonged outdoor sports. We accept these limitations and challenges but even so, the sporting life in schools today is certainly more vibrant compared to that 50 years ago. Then, competitions were held on an ad-hoc basis. In 1959, under the then Minister for Education, Mr Ong Pang Boon, the two Councils were formed with the explicit aim of using sports to help students integrate

through mass participation as well as to achieve sporting excellence¹. These aims remain valid as educational and social outcomes.

3. Today, the offerings have increased with 26 sports for secondary schools and junior colleges and 20 sports for primary schools. In the 1980s, 20,000 students participated in the inter-school sports tournaments. Today, more than 55,000 students from all schools participate in inter-school competitions each year.

4. Much has also been achieved for sporting excellence. In fact, many of the local household names in sports started competitive sports in schools. Fandi Ahmad represented Yio Chu Kang Primary and Serangoon Secondary and won the National Inter-Schools Soccer Championships before breaking into the National team at the age of 16. Ang Peng Siong was making big waves at Anderson Secondary before his debut at the 1977 SEA Games at age 15 and becoming the world's fastest for 50 m freestyle in 1982.

¹ Speech by Mr Ong Teng Cheong, Minister without Portfolio, on the occasion of the 25th Anniversary Dinner of the the Singapore School's Sports Council on 6 July 1984.

5. The recent Asian Youth Games provided a platform for our young sporting talent to shine. Singapore finished third in terms of total medals – nine gold, six silver and 15 bronze medals, thirty in all - just behind China and South Korea. This was a significant achievement considering the relative size of our population. The swimmers led the charge and collected five gold, two silver and five bronze medals. Quah Ting Wen from RI won four gold medals and became the Games' most successful athlete.

6. We can rightly congratulate ourselves for having made progress these past 50 years. I would like to pay tribute to the school leaders, coaches and parents for their contributions to the development and promotion of the various sports and games programmes of the Councils. Many took on added roles as officials, games convenors and office-bearers, carrying out their duties with commitment and passion. They went the extra mile despite their school responsibilities and heavy work schedules to help make our school sports scene what it is today.

7. I am also thankful that the media is committed to promote sports. The Straits Times carries a weekly roundup of school sports. School sports received air time on national TV with the Mediacorp broadcast of the “Schools Nationals”. I hope that these programs will continue as they are important platforms to deepen the sporting culture in Singapore.

LOOKING AHEAD - DEVELOPING A STRONG SPORTING CULTURE IN EVERY SCHOOL

8. What of the future? As educators, all of us realize that sports and CCA are powerful tools to build character, promote an active and healthy lifestyle, and provide opportunities for students to develop soft skills. Sports also provide a common space for students of different races and cultures to interact and build lasting friendships.

9. MOE will step up the opportunities for more students to participate in schools. One recent initiative was the Sports Education Programme (SEP) in partnership with SSC and launched in 2007. The programme has been very popular with the schools. Under the SEP, schools receive funds for students to learn basic games skills and play the game at intra-school competitions. In FY08, SSC disbursed a total of \$2.3 million to 94%, or 342 of our primary and secondary schools and junior colleges. In FY09, 380 schools have registered to take part in the programme. This will grow the talent pool for sports and schools, and SSSC and SPSSC can reap the rewards.

10. These resources allow for more ground-up activities to meet the diverse interest of students. And this is already happening. For example, a

fencing club has worked with Edgefield Primary, Greendale Secondary, CHIJ St Joseph's Convent, RI and Yishun JC over the past few years to promote fencing. Students are taught to hone their bodily awareness, concentration and instinct. A year ago, Teck Whye Secondary School contacted a private archery club to set up the range on the empty space in front of the school. Now, students from nearby schools like Pioneer Junior College and Unity Primary train there as well.

11. MOE is also enhancing the sporting facilities in schools. One ongoing major project is to provide every school with an indoor sports hall and eighty schools with synthetic turf pitches for soccer and hockey. To date, 76 indoor sports halls and 26 synthetic turf pitches have been completed.

12. To encourage excellence and to raise the quality of sports training, in 2008, MOE piloted four Junior Sports Academies (JSA) for P5 and P6 pupils. A total of 259 young athletes have been trained in badminton, netball, swimming, table tennis, wushu and, track and field thus far. This year, 8 new JSAs were set up and another three sports, soccer, shooting and fencing have been included. Young athletes who are identified for the different sports will receive training at the JSAs, where resources are collectively harnessed to provide systematic training, in order to realise the athletes' full potential.

FURTHER REVIEW

13. MOE intends to do more. Ms Ho Peng, DGE is leading a study to find ways to enhance sports, CCA and aesthetics to achieve the desired outcomes of a well rounded education in schools. One clear need is to provide better career pathways for sports and aesthetic educators. Greater specialization of such officers, both in training and deployment will improve the delivery of such programs in schools. A body of such professionals can also do much in promoting their craft as well as raise standards in schools, as they share best practices and engage with like-minded professionals overseas.

14. Sports and aesthetic programs must be seen as integral parts of each school day, and certainly not as of secondary importance. We must provide the time and space for PE and aesthetic teachers to deliver these core programs, as we do academic subjects. As Primary Education Review and Implementation (PERI) Committee recommended, we have already incorporated such activities into curriculum time. The ISHs will provide certainty that PE could be conducted as scheduled, and not held hostage to weather conditions. DGE is reviewing what added facilities are required – either at the school level or centralized facilities.

ASIAN YOUTH GAMES & YOG

15. The inaugural Asian Youth Games (AYG) served as a very useful international platform to showcase our efforts and gauge our own progress. I know that officers within MOE worked very hard and played an instrumental role in the organization of the games from taking charge of the Games Village, to organising the culture and education programmes and Ceremonies. Our schools also adopted the sports venues and provided support to the running of the competitions at the venues. As part of the AYG Culture and Education programme, students from 108 schools contributed much time and effort at the Asian Culture Booths. 45 schools took part in the torch relay and in all, some five thousand student volunteers, performers, HQ officers and teachers pitched in. I have received wonderful feedback from all participants about the learning lessons and rich experiences they encountered, as well as the new friends they made from far away places.

16. Next year, Singapore will host the inaugural Youth Olympic Games from 14 to 26 August 2010. The YOG will require more effort and commitment from all Singaporeans, particularly our youths. On our part, MOE will be spearheading the Olympic Education and Friends@YOG, the Friendship Camp and the Sports Conferences. This will be an important

page in the history of Singapore sports and it needs all of us to play our part to ensure its success.

CONCLUSION

17. Both SSSC and SPSSC have played key roles in developing the sports scene in schools over the last 50 years. Much remains for the Councils to be done to bring sports to the masses and nurture our sports talents to another level of sports excellence. These efforts are integral to our efforts to provide a well rounded education to students as well as to provide the social glue for our citizens.

18 Finally, let me extend my heartiest congratulations to all the awardees for their participation and achievement in their respective sports.

19. Have an enjoyable evening and thank you.

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