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SPEECH BY MS GRACE FU, SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE, MINISTRY OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE SINGAPORE SCHOOLS SPORTS COUNCIL, NATIONAL SCHOOL GAMES ON MONDAY, 1 FEBRUARY 2010 AT 2.55 PM AT RAFFLES INSTITUTION (SECONDARY)

Miss Sum Chee Wah
Director, Education Programmes

Mr Goh Ek Piang
Deputy Director, Co-Curricular Activities Branch

Mr Lim Lai Chuan
Chairman, Singapore Schools Sports Council

Principals, Vice Principals

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Boys and Girls,

Good afternoon

Milestone for Singapore Schools Sports

1. Today marks a significant milestone in the history of Singapore Schools Sports with the first ever Opening Ceremony of the National School Games organized by the Singapore Schools Sports Council's (SSSC). It is a reflection of the importance placed on sports by the Ministry of Education in charting the young lives of our students in schools.
2. From 2010 onwards, the National Inter-School Championships will begin with an 'Opening Ceremony' and culminate with a 'Closing Ceremony' that will coincide with the National Colours Presentation Ceremony in September each year. This start and end point will provide a new significance to the 162 national championship titles up for competition each year. The National Inter-School Championships for the 27 sports within the SSSC Sporting Calendar will now collectively come under the umbrella name of the **'NATIONAL SCHOOL GAMES' (NSG)**. For the first time in its 50 year history the Singapore Schools Sports Council will light a Games Flame that will burn for the 211 days of competition, which involves 33000 student-

athletes in 183 schools, 2500 sports officials, 1900 school officials, 250 organizers and 18 sports advisors. The lighting of the Games Flame in today's inaugural Opening Ceremony of the National School Games marks the coming of age of sports development in schools and signifies the commitment to the sporting values in the holistic education of every student in Singapore.

Holistic Development for All

3. Sports provide an excellent way of equipping our youths with the right skills, mindsets and values for a world of continuous and dynamic change. Through participation in sports, our youths learn important values such as **honesty, teamwork, fair play, respect, adherence to rules, discipline, perseverance, resilience and a strong sense of purpose**. Sports also teach young people how to deal with competition, how to cope with both winning and losing and much more. The ability to take defeat in their stride, to reflect and improve for the next round, and to have the courage to try again are not skills that can be easily learnt in the classroom. I believe that we can and must develop these important soft skills through sports.

Reaching Out, Reaching Beyond Through Mass Participation

4. Sports also has a significant part to play in nation building by encouraging life-long participation in physical activity and a healthy lifestyle for all. To develop a sporting culture in Singapore, we must go beyond the competitors to reach the common people in the streets. Our schools provide an excellent opportunity for us to encourage our young people to adopt a healthy and active outlook to life. And we hope that our students do not stop exercising and engaging in sports when they leave school.

5. At MOE, we are also looking into this aspect of sports development for the masses. PERI and PAL (Programmes for Active Learning) are just the first steps in that direction. Recently at the 12th Appointment Ceremony for Principals, our Minister announced the setting up of the Physical Education and Sports Teacher Academy (PESTA). The aim of which is to raise the competencies and expertise of PE and Sports teachers as drivers for sports promotion and soft skills development. The next step involves exploring with multi-tier sports competitions for the masses.

MOE Supports YOG 2010

6. The development of sports programmes for the masses will supplement and grow in tandem with our sports excellence initiatives

towards a Sporting Singapore. YOG 2010 this year will be a good test bed for our sports excellence programmes.

7. To ensure that our athletes and supporters are in full force, ready and primed to do their best, we will ensure that the best school athletes are available to represent the nation. We will put nation first by releasing student athletes fully for YOG training. I would like to thank all schools involved for supporting their athletes' involvement in the YOG. That these students are selected to represent Singapore is an honour for both the athletes and their schools.

Youth Sports Academies

8. To encourage sports excellence, I am also pleased to announce today the setting up of the Youth Sports Academies, YSA for short. The YSA provides an articulation from the Junior Sports Academies (JSA) by providing the same high level of training, in centralised training facilities for the talented athletes studying in our secondary schools and JCs. As the YSA is an extension of the JSA, the sports offered in the YSA will be aligned to those in the JSA. This will provide an articulated pathway for students' talent development in sports within the school system.
9. The YSAs will be housed mainly in selected schools that are able to provide suitable environment to groom the athletes. For a start, we will set up three academies in the following - Bedok View Secondary for badminton, Meridian Junior College for Wushu, and the Table Tennis Academy which will be located at the Co-curricular Activities Branch. For the first year, these academies will cater to the students in secondary 1. Schools will be notified of the selection trials for the YSA which will be held in March.

Symbolic Events

10. All these sports development programmes will enhance the experiences of our children in the education system here. It is envisaged that our students will have positive experiences through the National School Games that will eventually build a 'Sporting Singapore'.
11. To this end, the lighting of the flame of the games, reciting of the Athletes Oath, and the starting of the first official game of the season, will remind us of the true meaning of sports. Sports have a unifying aura and meaningful purpose for all who don their sporting gears. Let the flame of the games always remind us of the true values of sports and the meaning of sportsmanship. Let us all recite and mean what is

said in the Athletes' Oath. And let us enjoy and play the games in the spirit of the Olympic Values of Excellence, Friendship and Respect.

Conclusion

12. In closing, I wish to extend my appreciation to all the organizers of not only this Opening Ceremony, but also of all the National Schools Sports Competitions that will begin from today. Without their dedication and tireless efforts behind the scene, our student athletes will never have a chance to do their best and shine.
13. Thank you and Let the National School Games begin.

The End

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