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**SPEECH BY MR ABDULLAH TARMUGI
MINISTER FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
AT TIONG BAHRU UNITED FOOTBALL CLUB
FUND-RAISING DINNER
CONCORDE BALLROOM, CONCORDE HOTEL
FRIDAY, 19 APRIL 1996, 8.00 PM**

I am very happy to be here this evening for this fund-raising dinner organised by Tiong Bahru United Football Club. This is a very unique occasion in that this is the first such dinner organised by a football club in Singapore.

Your Club, together with the other seven clubs in the S-League, is set to make history by being part of the first-ever attempt to start a professional football league in Singapore. The S-League, as you know, is to bring back the thrill and excitement of competitive soccer previously provided by the Semi-Pro and Premier Leagues and the Malaysian Cup competition. Professional soccer, properly managed and promoted and adequately supported, will also help to raise the standard of the game. The Government has so far put in about \$10 million to get the league going. S-League officials and club managers have also worked very hard to get the league off the ground.

I am very sure everyone is keen to see how the S-League will develop. A lot of interest has been built up in the S-League. I can sense the eager anticipation among football fans, looking forward to have their thirst for good football quenched by the League. Expectations are therefore high. The pressure on S-League and Club officials and on the players is therefore high.

At the same time, there are also the cynics who cannot see the S-League succeeding. Their cynicism stems from, inter-alia, their belief that the competition cannot arouse the same interest as the Malaysia Cup or the Semi-Pro League, the small following and spectator base that each of the eight S-League Clubs will inevitably have and the small number of clubs participating.

As in any venture, success cannot be guaranteed. The ultimate measure of success will be the crowds that come to see the S-League matches and the revenue collected to sustain the clubs. But other success criteria are equally important; like a corruption and drug-free league and no soccer violence like those in some countries. All these will ultimately have to depend on everyone: the footballers, club officials and the spectators and fans. Let us together make the S-League a success.

Tiong Bahru United FC, judging by the performance of your predecessors Tiong Bahru CSC and Tiong Bahru FC, will enter the league backed by solid experience and tested talent. But I urge you not to rest on your past achievements. This year, all eight teams in the S-League will be playing in an entirely new atmosphere and setting of expectations, rewards

and rules. All the teams have foreign players and have not pitted their new combinations and strategies against each other. It is not impossible for past champions to suddenly find themselves near the bottom of the S-League table.

I understand that the Club hopes to raise \$200,000 from tonight's dinner to meet the targetted amount of \$1.2 million. I commend your efforts, but I also urge you to do more than this. In the past, our footballers had helped to raise funds for charity, as their fame and popularity were often strong attractions to get Singaporeans to participate or contribute. I hope you will continue this tradition.

Many players will become popular; even celebrities in their own right. They then become role models. I was especially touched by the gesture of Steven Tan from your Club who found time to visit and to show care and concern for an eight-year -old fan of his, Nur Ilyana, who was suffering from and finally died of a rare blood disease. Steven's a good example that should be emulated. Please remember that fame and popularity often carry their own responsibilities and expectations.

To conclude, I would like to wish Tiong Bahru United FC every success in your fund-raising activities and call on all of you once again to work hard to make the S-League a success. I also wish your Club success in the S-League. I hope you have a pleasant evening.

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