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Subject: (Embargoed) Speech by Ng Ser Miang, Chairman of Singapore Sports Council, 15 jan 2000

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OPENING ADDRESS BY MR NG SER MIANG, CHAIRMAN OF SINGAPORE SPORTS COUNCIL AT SPORTS 21 @ SSC AT THE GRASSROOTS CLUB ON SATURDAY, 15 JANUARY 2000

Mr. Abdullah Tarmugi, Minister for Community Development,
Your Excellencies,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,
Good morning.

At the dawn of the new millennium, on behalf of the Singapore Sports Council, I wish to extend to all of you our best wishes. We wish you good health and good fortune. I would also like to thank you for your presence and participation at our Sports21 at SSC Conference. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Mr Abdullah Tarmugi, Minister for Community Development for taking time off his busy schedule to grace this special occasion and to deliver the keynote address.

Introduction

2 The Sports Council has a simple wish list for the 21st Century. We would like Sports to be a significant part of the lifestyle of all Singaporeans. We want more Singaporeans to treasure their fitness and enjoy playing sports regularly. We also want our athletes to win more medals at major international competitions. How do we achieve this? This is what we will be sharing with you at this conference this morning. We need all of you, who are stakeholders of Singapore Sport, to work together to help us shape and refine our plans and strategies. We need to work closely to achieve our objective of making Singapore a Sporting Nation.

Our Achievements

3 The Sports Council began the task of laying the foundation of Singapore's sports policy some 25 years ago by developing and managing sports facilities for Singaporeans. These facilities have been made easily accessible and affordable to all Singaporeans. The thrust to give sports greater prominence occurred within the last decade. The launch of our two national sports initiatives - SPEX 2000 and Sports For Life has been central in allowing Sports Council to bring sports into the forefront of the Singapore lifestyle.

Sports Excellence 2000

4 In Dec 1993, the Sports Excellence 2000 or SPEX 2000 programme was launched with three main objectives:

- to raise the overall standard of sports and the competitive spirit of Singaporeans by building a tradition for excellence in sports;
- to produce national, regional and international champions; and
- to maximise athletes' potential to excel.

5 The strategy of SPEX 2000 was to focus our support on a number of sports which could excel at the SEA Games level and beyond, bearing in mind our limited resources, particularly our small base of sports talent.

6 The extensive list of schemes under SPEX 2000, provides support to both athletes and the National Sports Associations, especially the Core and Merit sports. Subsidies are for:

- establishment of professional management
- development of coaching expertise
- grooming athletes
- support for elite athletes for local and overseas competitions and training
- scholarships for exceptional talents
- financial assistance for SPEX 2000 athletes and for those training full-time for the Major Games
- managing a youth development scheme

7 SPEX 2000 has been successful in establishing an infrastructure for the development of sports excellence. Through SPEX 2000, the overall standard of sports in Singapore has been raised and our athletes have managed to achieve considerable success at major regional and international competitions. Over the past 6 years, our athletes have won a total of 79 Gold, 81 Silver and 139 Bronze medals at the 1995, 1997 and 1999 SEA Games. At the 1994 and 1998 Asian Games, our athletes won a total of 3 Gold, 4 Silver and 14 bronze medals. We have also produced champions at the Asian and World level and our next step for the future is to better these achievements and work for success at the Commonwealth and Olympic Games.

Sports for Life

8 The medal-winning exploits of our sports heroes and heroines have contributed to a higher profile for sport. At the same time, I believe that the Sports Council's Sports for Life initiative has also been instrumental in encouraging more Singaporeans to exercise and play sports regularly. Launched in September 1996, Sports for Life aims to change the mindset of Singaporeans so that they will develop a love for sports and physical activity. One of Sports Council's strategy has been to integrate and upgrade existing and new sports facilities into Regional Sports and Fitness Centres or RSFCs. RSFCs offer comprehensive sports facilities and programmes for people of ages and all walks of life. RSFCs are customer-focused and have the autonomy and flexibility to introduce programmes tailored to the specific needs and demands of the local community. The RSFCs have been highly successful in reaching out to the community. Singaporeans interested in learning a sport can choose from a buffet of 31 sports under the Learn to Play scheme. The significant work of the Constituency Sports Clubs (CSCs) and grassroots organisation volunteers in helping to promote sports to the

community should be strongly commended. In the past year, the Sports Council, together with the CSCs and grassroot organisations, had organised more sports and fitness related activities than ever before, drawing an estimated 1.5 million participants. A total of 655,000 attendances were recorded for our highly popular ClubFITT gymnasiums in 1999. The Employee Fitness programme has also succeeded in highlighting to employers, the importance of playing an active role in promoting health and fitness to their employees. Healthy employees are more productive and incur less in medical expenses.

9 SSC's three Sports For Life physical fitness assessments, ie the Sports For Life Walk, the Run and NAPFA (National Physical Fitness Award) Challenge have been increasingly popular among Singaporeans. Adapted from the popular Finnish UKK Walk test, SSC's Sports Medicine and Fitness Division conducted a validation study to eventually develop our SFL Walk. The study ensured the accuracy of the test for aerobic fitness for the local population. The other test, NAPFA Challenge was totally developed by the Sports Council and till today, is commonly used by army personnel and students in schools.

10 Judging from the achievements of the Sports for Life and Sports Excellence 2000 programme, we are on the right track to developing a sound infrastructure for Singapore's sports delivery system. More can be done and will be done.

New Mission and Objectives

11 The Sports Council regularly reviews its programmes and services to keep up with the changing Singaporean lifestyle and to remain relevant. Through this, the Sports Council will develop more innovative solutions and new strategies to meet its objectives and continue to provide leadership for the building of our sports culture.

12 In the past year, the Sports Council conducted a Strategic Management Review. From this review, we have formulated a new mission statement, "Towards a Sporting Nation" and four main objectives to guide us in our work. They are:

- To promote Sports As A Way of Life among Singaporeans by encouraging regular participation in sports and fitness activities.
- To promote Sports Excellence through identifying, cultivating and nurturing a pool of potential high performers to win in regional and international sports competitions.
- To provide adequate and quality sports facilities to keep up with the changing trends and needs of Singaporeans.
- To educate the general public and promote greater awareness on adopting a sporting lifestyle.

Strategies for Sports for Life

Facilities

Marketing sports & More RSFCs

13 The Sports Council will double its effort to market sports aggressively to the 66% of

Singaporeans that are still leading a sedentary lifestyle. We will increase the number of RSFCs from the existing seven to fifteen by 2002. These highly successful RSFCs will be used to reach out to more people. They will have modern sports and recreational facilities that rival those of private country clubs, with programmes that meet a wide variety of interest and demand, catering to the young and old. The Jurong East and Choa Chu Kang RSFCs are examples of these third-generation sports facilities.

Programmes

Triple One Formula to build a vibrant sports community

14 The Sports for Life initiative has a target to increase the percentage of Singaporeans who exercise once a week. The Sports Council is confident of achieving its set target of 40% by this year, and 50% by 2005. As for Singaporeans who exercise at least three times a week, statistics show that 14% do so. This is a mere 1% short of our target and we intend to increase this to 20% by 2005. In order to build a vibrant sports community, we hope to encourage all Singaporeans to adopt what we have termed the Triple One Formula. This one-one-one formula aims to have all Singaporeans exercise at least once a week, adopt at least one sport for lifelong enjoyment and have their physical fitness assessed once per year. This is a simple and effective formula. The Sports Council will work with its strategic partners and these are the NSAs, People's Association, Ministry of Health, National Trade Union Congress (NTUC) and the Singapore National Employers Federation to achieve our target. At a later stage, the Sports Council intend to revise the 1-1-1 formula to a more ambitious 1-2-1, to motivate Singaporeans to exercise at least twice a week.

CSC and Grassroots assistance

15 We will continue to work closely with the CSCs and grassroot organisations to organise more activities to reach out to Singaporeans. We also aim to recruit and train more volunteers to promote greater activism in sports at the community level.

Catering for an ageing population

16 We are aware that by 2030, a quarter of our population will be above 60 years old. In anticipation of this, we will introduce more programmes for Senior Citizens such as the SwimFIT 55+ scheme. SwimFIT55+ was introduced last year to encourage more senior citizens to swim because swimming does not put stress on our joints and is an excellent form of exercise. Folk Dancing, Taiji and Gateball are popular sports among senior citizens. The Sports Council will continue to source and introduce more of such sports.

Reaching out to women through the Women and Sport Working group

17 In March 1999, the Sports Council organised the first national Women and Sport Conference to discuss issues pertaining to women and sport. Subsequently, a Women and Sport Working Group (WSWG) was formed by the Council in November to encourage more women - girls and grandmothers alike - to take up physical activity for a healthier lifestyle. Chaired by SSC Council Member Ms Annabel Pennefather, the Women and Sport Working Group aims to achieve this

objective through collaborations with the SNOC, the Ministry of Education, the People's Association, and any other individuals or organisations. Six sub-committees have been formed to plan activities, undertake research and collect and disseminate information to all women of all races, age groups and professions. The sub-committees are:

- Adult Women's Sport
- High Performance Sport
- School and Junior Sport
- Education and Research
- Leadership in Sport
- Communications

The Women and Sport Working Group will spearhead our efforts to convert the 74% of women who do not exercise at all.

Public education programme

18 The Sports Council will intensify our public education programme to support and effectively implement our new mission in making sports a part of the Singaporean lifestyle, and ultimately transforming Singapore into a sporting nation. The use of internet and IT will be maximised to ensure the timely and extensive dissemination of information to sports enthusiasts and members of the public. We seek continued support from the media to help us get more people to play sports regularly and to encourage our athletes in their pursuit of sports excellence.

Strategies - Sports Excellence

A Focused Approach

19 The Sports Council will continue its strategy of adopting a focused approach in supporting deserving NSAs in their quest for sports excellence. Two days ago, the Sports Council released a statement on the third review for SPEX 2000 and a subsequent change in the list of core and merit sports. For the NSAs that have met the criteria and proven themselves as Core and Merit sports, they will receive enhanced support. Badminton, Football, Sailing, Swimming, Table Tennis and Tenpin Bowling form the new list of core sports; while the merit sports are: Billiards and Snooker, Hockey, Sepak Takraw, Shooting, Silat, Squash, Taekwondo and Wushu. As you already know, the list of core and merit sports is dynamic. NSAs in the list move up and down, based on their performance and development. Three core sports, namely, badminton, football and sailing that have set special targets will receive additional attention.

Individual Athletes

20 I would also like to emphasise that athletes from any sport will still continue to receive SSC's support so long as they demonstrate their commitment and potential to excel.

Talent identification and youth development

21 With a small population base, sports talent is one our most precious resource. Every talent not identified is a talent lost. Every talent identified but not nurtured to its fullest potential is a talent lost. Sports Council will as a matter of priority, work with the NSAs to develop our own talent identification instruments. These instruments can then be used by NSAs to identify young potentials in schools on a nationwide scale. There must be a coordinated and systematic approach to identifying and developing sports talents.

Holistic Approach to Athlete Development and Management

22 The Sports Council, together with the NSAs, will adopt a holistic approach in the management and support of exceptional sports talents who are prepared to give their long term commitment to train towards winning an Asian and Olympic medal. In addition to a well-tailored plan to maximise the potential of these talents, the Sports Council will also work with the NSAs, and parents to map out their lifestyle after their sports careers. One other possible form of support under this approach will be an endowment fund to be established to look after the education and career of these athletes.

Centres of Excellence

23 Centres of Excellence will be the important focal point for athletes to be groomed to become champions in their respective sport. Centres of Excellence have already been established for Sailing, Swimming and Shooting. Jalan Besar Stadium is being developed to house the Football Academy and a Centre of Excellence for Badminton will be developed.

Use of Sports Medicine and Sports Science

24 Sports science and sports medicine will be employed in a greater degree to help our athletes be better physically and mentally prepared to compete with their rivals. Our team of sports scientists which include sports psychologists, sports biomechanists, sports nutritionist, strength and conditioning specialist, etc. will work closely with the athlete and their coaches to ensure that their training is tailored to bring our their best performance in competitions.

The Sports Council will continue to support the development of:

- professional management in NSAs
- training of high level coaches
- youth sports talents

Role of NSAs

25 The Sports Council will give its full support to NSAs through SPEX. In any successful sports delivery system, the NSAs must ultimately deliver the goods. Six years ago, 7 core and 7 merit sports were selected based on their potential to excel at the SEA Games and beyond. Six years has been a reasonable period of time for NSAs to have proven themselves by:

- Building strong leadership and succession plan

- strengthening their management
- developing expertise in coaching
- developing a sound base of sports talent through systematic talent identification and youth development.
- producing elite athletes that managed to win medals at the SEA Games and beyond.

26 For those who have performed up to expectations, we congratulate them and assure them that they will continue to receive our full support. For those who have failed, we urge their leadership and members to do some thorough soul-searching and to find the changes that are needed to bring about improved performance so that they can qualify as a core and merit sport.

27 Competitions at any level from SEA Games to Olympics only get tougher every year. Pursuit of excellence is like going upstream in a rapidly flowing river. If you do not move forward, you will be pushed backwards.

28 NSAs, especially those in the core and merit sports are encouraged to conduct strategic reviews of their plans and performance with their major stakeholders: athletes, parents, coaches, officials and sponsors. All must work together to find new ways to achieve sports excellence and the Sports Council will be with you all the way.

Summary

29 The Sports Council is totally committed to the promotion of Sports For All and Sports Excellence. We look forward to work hand-in-hand with all our partners in sports towards making Singapore a Sporting Nation.

Thank You.

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