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SPEECH BY MR S DHANABALAN, MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND
MINISTER FOR CULTURE, AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF
THE INTERNATIONAL SPORTS SCIENCE CONFERENCE,
AT SHANGRI-LA HOTEL ON WEDNESDAY, 25 MAY 1983 AT 9.30 AM

Ten years ago, the number of people who were regular exercisers were relatively few. Today, many people of all ages jog regularly or take part in physically active sports and games at recreational or competitive levels. Much of this positive and healthy change in the attitude and lifestyle of people in Singapore can be attributed to the "Sports for All" policy - a policy actively promoted by the Singapore Sports Council since it was established in 1973. The main objective of this national policy is to provide opportunities for people in Singapore to participate in sports, games and other physical activities to help them maintain or improve their overall health and physical fitness. With the increasing emphasis on preventive health care, the "Sports for All" policy will play an even important role in the daily lives of people in Singapore in the future.

Most experts on health and physical fitness agree that to achieve a good and desirable level of overall health and fitness, the mere abstinence from unhealthy practices such as smoking and over-eating may not be enough. We must also exercise regularly and judiciously. This International Sports Science Conference, which is being held in Singapore for the first time, is therefore a good opportunity for those responsible for the "Sports for All" policy to be exposed to the latest discoveries and thinking in the world of Sports Science, Physical Education and Sports Medicine.

The advantage of applying the system and objectivity of the scientific approach to Sports, as in other human endeavours, is self-evident. The involvement of Medicine in particular is inevitable in Sports, because too much, too little or the wrong type of exertion in sports all affect the health of the individual and the population and thus become a natural interest of Medicine. But one cannot but be disturbed by what has emerged in certain countries which have applied Science and Medicine to sports. Sportsmen have become the object of scientific and social experiments to prove the superiority of the country's social and economic system. Once a potential champion is identified, he or she becomes a mere laboratory specimen subject to special drugs or techniques - all aimed at winning honours for the country. The sportsman becomes a political tool to proclaim the superiority of his social system. The purpose of the "Sports for All" policy is not to prove the superiority of any system or society. It is a means of bringing about a healthy population which means healthy individuals and not just impressive statistics.

Those who are responsible for "Sports for All" programme should benefit from this conference. With the presence of several leading experts from many developing and developed countries, you will be provided with the latest information in Sports Science, Physical Education and Sports Medicine. You should thereafter be in a better position to recommend the most effective and safe way to maintain or improve the health and fitness of different groups in the population, including our senior citizens. Furthermore, you will have the opportunity to learn from each other and to discuss ways to resolve problems and improve on the practice of these important fields in your respective countries. If, in the process of such exchanges of knowledge and expertise, you are able to help the competitive sportsmen and sportswomen achieve higher standards and performances, this should be a side benefit, a bonus, and certainly not in conflict with the "Sports for All" policy.

Judicious participation in sports, games and other physical activities to help in the maintenance or improvement of a person's overall health and fitness is particularly important for Singapore. Urbanisation, automation, mechanisation and computerisation mean that many in our population are not required to physically exert themselves to any significant degree while at school, at work or at home. Furthermore, with increasing standards of living, the diseases often associated with the affluent and sedentary societies such as coronary heart disease are already reaching alarming proportion in Singapore today.

One good and effective way to combat these problems is to encourage our people to exercise regularly, to get fit and stay fit. Increased occupational productivity and the ability to live better, and perhaps even live longer, are other important benefits of improved physical fitness.

Exercise has also been shown to be able to help reduce the problems associated with excessive mental stress, which is becoming a cause for concern in our fast-moving society.

Social workers are also familiar with the influence of sports in combating anti-social activities among youth such as vandalism or even unhealthy and dangerous practices such as drug-taking. If I go on further, I run the risk of making Sports the panacea for all social evils. But sports has benefits which are recognised and it is not necessary for me to list them all at this function.

In conclusion, I would like to congratulate the Singapore Sports Council on its Tenth Anniversary this year and commend the organisers of this Conference for preparing a comprehensive programme, which should be of interest and relevance to all those who believe in the "Sports for All" policy. I have great pleasure now in declaring open this Sports Science Conference. May I wish you a successful Conference.

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