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Singapore Government

PRESS RELEASE

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KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY MR. ABDULLAH TARMUGI MINISTER FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AT SPORTS 21 @ SSC AT THE GRASSROOTS CLUB, ON SATURDAY, 15 JANUARY 2000 AT 9.00 AM

HE Mr Murray Mclean, Australian High Commissioner
Mr Ng Ser Miang, Chairman, Singapore Sports Council,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Good morning.

I am honoured to address this important conference on new directions
for sports in Singapore.

Progress in the Sporting Arena

2 Let me begin by outlining the history of sports development in
Singapore. Details of some parts of this history have been given by Mr Ng Ser
Miang earlier on. Our "Sports For All" policy, implemented 25 years ago,
encourages all Singaporeans to participate actively in sports. A key thrust under

this policy is to make sports facilities easily available to everyone. The government has spent \$582.2m putting in place the physical infrastructure for sports in Singapore. Today, almost all Singaporeans can enjoy the convenience of a swimming complex, a stadium and an indoor sports hall within 3 km of their doorstep. For a country with a small population, Singapore has some of the best and most accessible sports facilities in Asia and, possibly, the world. Good planning and management by the Singapore Sports Council (SSC), ensured that these facilities are well-maintained, accessible and affordable to all.

3 In 1993, SSC launched SPEX 2000 to develop a sound infrastructure for sports excellence. One year after SPEX 2000 was implemented, Dr Benedict Tan won a gold medal in sailing at the Hiroshima Asian Games. It was Singapore's first gold medal after 12 long years; the last being Ang Peng Siong's gold medal at the 1982 Delhi Asian Games. Two more gold medals were won at the 1998 Bangkok Asian Games by our Men's and Women's Laser 420 teams. Our Table Tennis players have developed into a major force in the Commonwealth Championship and our bowlers have won medals at both the Asian and World championships. At the SEA Games level, our South East Asian neighbours have improved tremendously and the standard of competition has increased. Still, we have managed to keep pace. We have consistently met, and even surpassed, our medal targets.

4 Subsequently, the Sports for Life programme was launched in 1996. We have since seen more Singaporeans embracing a fit and healthy lifestyle through sports participation. SSC's National Sports Participation Survey conducted in 1997 found that 34% of Singaporeans participated in sports at least once a week, an increase from 24% in 1992.. I am confident that the Sports Council will meet its target of getting 50% of Singaporeans to exercise at least once a week by 2005.

Role of Sports in Singapore

5 Let me move on to the role of sports in Singapore. Sports is a powerful channel for fostering national pride and community bonding in a multi-racial society. Many of our sports heroes serve as role models. Singaporeans take immense pride in seeing our athletes win in regional and international competitions.

6 Sports such as football are popular among Singaporeans of all races and walks of life. When Singapore won the Malaysia League and the Malaysia

Cup double in 1994, the resulting euphoria stirred the patriotic feelings of thousands of Singaporeans across communal and socio-economic lines. It brought us closer together because of the shared national triumph. Now, I am not suggesting that we re-enter the Malaysia Cup. But sports can certainly enhance social cohesion and national pride.

7 Participation in sports also promotes healthy living and opens up another dimension for Singaporeans to excel. In a fast-paced society like ours, sports plays a vital role in helping Singaporeans to relieve stress and to have fun. Sports also help develop well-rounded and healthy Singaporeans with a competitive and adventurous spirit as well as a sense of teamwork.

8 Beyond these roles, sports can also help to put Singapore on the regional and world map. One way we can do this is to position ourselves as a venue for selected prestigious sporting events. Sports tourism is something relatively new for us but, certainly, something we can consider promoting. By attracting prestigious sporting events to be hosted in Singapore, we may also inspire more Singaporeans to be actively involved in sports.

9 To sum up, I see our sports policy as aiming to make Singapore:

- a) a nation where sports excellence strengthens national pride;
- b) a society where sports bonds our multi-racial community;
- c) a people who exercise regularly and enjoy sports for a healthy lifestyle; and
- d) an attractive destination for the hosting of selected international sports events

Ministry of Community Development and Sports

10 What I have just outlined are the desired outcomes of sports in Singapore. The Singapore Sports Council has established a firm platform for Singaporeans to become a sporting people. But much more can and must be done, if we are to realise the goals I have just described. To tap the full potential of sports, the Government has decided to give sports a higher priority. **To signal this new emphasis, my Ministry will be renamed the Ministry of Community Development and Sports (or MCDS) with effect from 1 April 2000.**

11 The role of MCDS will be to provide policy direction for sports

development. The Ministry will work closely with the SSC and other partners in the sports arena to develop the “software” – that is the people, policies and programmes – to match the “hardware” or physical facilities that the Council has developed over the last 26 years and those that may be built in future. Besides Sports Excellence and Sports For All, I would like to see a special emphasis on **sports programmes which promote the wholesome development of our youth and which will provide them with the opportunity to bond with their fellow Singaporeans from diverse backgrounds.** I hope to speak more on the key directions of my Ministry in Parliament in March during the debate on the Ministry’s budget.

12 The Singapore Sports Council will continue to play the **important role of ensuring a successful sports delivery system.** New programmes and strategies will continue to be developed, implemented and managed by the Council to ensure the effective realisation of the government’s sports policy. I am acutely aware that the desired outcomes of sports cannot be achieved by the Government alone. My Ministry and the Singapore Sports Council will seek to work closely with the various players in the sports scene. We can only realise our shared goals if every stakeholder plays its part, and **we can only win if we play as Team Singapore.**

Role of National Sports Associations

13 While the government will focus its resources on providing clear directions and fostering a conducive environment for the further development of sports, the National Sports Associations or NSAs must play their part in developing their particular sport and in grooming our sporting talent. NSAs are the basic operational units in the sports sector. They are the bodies with direct and closest contact with the sportsmen and women. What they do or not do will therefore greatly determine the type and quality of sportspersons that emerge. They are therefore an important component of the sports sector. They must adopt a professional approach and strive to improve the methods and quality of managing the sports and sportspersons under their wings. They have also to be accountable to their sponsors, to their athletes and to their sport. Each sportsman and woman must be nurtured to ensure that they are strongly motivated and provided with the opportunities to develop their fullest potential. They must be professionally managed to win for Singapore. To be candid, some NSAs are better managed than others. We cannot afford to let our athletes down on account of poor management in their NSAs. This is a matter which my Ministry and the Singapore Sports Council would want to look into in the

months ahead.

Role of Sponsors

14 Another major player in the sports arena are the corporate sponsors. They have a significant role in supporting the development and promotion of sports. The few corporate sponsors we have today are indeed a committed lot and I want to commend them for their support. But they remain small in number whilst the demand for their support is high and growing. I would like to urge more companies to play their part as good corporate citizens and support our sports industry.

15 Corporate sponsors have a right to expect accountability in the use of sponsored funds. Apart from the SSC, the Singapore Pools is a major source of sports funding. As a corporate sponsor, Singapore Pools also expects accountability on the use of their funds. Singapore Pools and SSC will therefore work closely together to enhance coordination in the funding of sports programmes and activities and to ensure that the distribution of sponsored funds is in line with our national priorities. NSAs that require funding must chart-out long-term plans with clear and objective targets which support our national objectives. Continued funding must be contingent on performance and whether the NSAs contribute to the desired outcomes of sports in Singapore.

Role of Media

16 The media too plays a critical role in sports development. I would like to commend our local media for their contributions. Other than providing factual information on sports, the media plays an educational role. It can encourage and motivate Singapore athletes and hold out good role models. It also plays a “watchdog” role. The launch of the new sports channel, SportsCity, by TCS is timely as it would provide more and better sporting news to create greater interest in sports among Singaporeans.

Role of Athletes

17 Finally, the role of athletes themselves. Although Singapore can hardly be described as an formidable force in world sports today, it may surprise many Singaporeans to know that we do have a tradition in sporting excellence. Singapore produced an Olympic silver medallist in Tan Howe Liang for Weightlifting. Ong Poh Lin and the late Ismail Marjan were world class

badminton players in an era when badminton was, unfortunately not an Olympic sport. Singapore also had regional champions and several world title holders. Bowler Adeline Wee won the World Cup in 1985; Sheikh Alauddin and Abdul Kadir won the world title in Silat on separate occasions. We have Asian gold medallists like sailors Ben Tan, Siew Shaw Her and Joan Huang. Several of our young athletes have also won honours at the world youth level. We had the late Wong Peng Soon, who won three consecutive All-England Badminton Championships from 1950 to 1952 and again in 1955. He was also a member of the victorious Thomas Cup team.

18 Winning for Singapore is an opportunity that not all Singaporeans can have. Talented athletes should be dedicated and commit themselves to the task and they must strive to give their best. Some people say that our athletes lack the X Factor to succeed; the “hunger to win”. I would like to urge our sportsmen and women talent to prove these people wrong: dare to try, hungry to win.

Role of Foreign Talent in Sports

19 Let me now move on to a topic that has been hitting the sports pages of the media recently: foreign talent. The grooming of sports talent and the development of a sport is a process which takes time and requires proper planning. Foreign athletes can potentially give our sports a boost and lift it them a higher plane. But we will have to be selective. We must also come out with well-designed programmes so that each imported talent is developed to his or her fullest potential. We must be clear about our objectives. Foreign sports talents are imported not only to win medals for Singapore but also for the purpose of interaction and sparring with our local athletes to partner, challenge and motivate the latter to excel.

20 We must also bear in mind that there is a difference between foreign sports talent and foreigners who come here to contribute to the economy. While most foreigners who come here to work are transient and may not sink roots, the foreign sports talent we bring in must, under current rules first become our citizens before they can don our national colours. We must therefore take a long term view and be very selective, particularly for sports talent who are eventually offered Singapore citizenship. They must be able to integrate into our society and we will have to ensure that they will be able to support themselves once their sporting days are over.

21 Given the focused approach of SPEX 2000 our policy is to accord

preference to the Core and Merit sports which wish to bring in foreign sports talent. For practical reasons, priority is also given to individual rather than team sports. We also encourage NSAs to bring in younger athletes who have longer sporting careers ahead of them and who can integrate better into Singapore society. Those recruited must eventually help to elevate the standard of the sport in Singapore.

22 What is important is to remember is that foreign talent is not intended to replace our local talent. As a key objective of SPEX 2000 is to instill national pride, winning would be hollow if the entire team consists only of foreigners. It is therefore imperative for us to have sound strategies and programmes to develop our own local talent

23 The Singapore Table Tennis Association or STTA has shown that with proper planning, foreign talent can work together with local talent to achieve synergy and impressive results. Jin Jun Hong and Li Jiawei are good examples. Jun Hong arrived in Singapore in 1991. She married a Singaporean in 1993 and became a mother in 1998. She won 6 Gold medals at the SEA Games and at the 1997 Commonwealth Table Tennis Championships. Jiawei first came to Singapore 4 years ago when she was only in her teens. Since then she has already won 3 SEA Games gold medals and a gold medal at the 1997 Commonwealth Table Tennis Championships. Today, she is ranked 18th in the world. Jiawei has also motivated her team-mates and the other players and helped to raise the standard of table tennis in Singapore. STTA has also planned for Jiawei's education so that she can settle comfortably in our society after her table-tennis career is over. Both Jun Hong and Jiawei are now Singaporeans and have settled well into our society.

24 Our local talents like Tan Paey Fern and Lee Su Hui have benefited greatly from sparring and competing with the foreign talents. So, in recruiting foreign talent, STTA has not neglected our own talent. NSAs who have the resources to recruit foreign sports talent would do well to look to the experience of STTA.

25 Singapore has a number of best's – the best airport, the best airlines and even the busiest container port. Singaporeans are known to be achievement oriented.. We should apply this ethos to our pursuit of sporting excellence. But at the same time, we must be realistic about our ability to excel in the world sporting arena. The money we spend will have to take into consideration what we are able to achieve, realistically.

26 Finally, we must not lose sight of the fact that the broader purpose of sports is nation building. Our goals are national pride, community bonding, well-rounded youth, a healthy lifestyle as well as an attractive city with world-class sports events and amenities. Sports is a metaphor for life. Skills and talent are vital. They need to be nurtured. But to triumph, we need dedication, passion, sacrifice, teamwork and leadership. Our accomplishments in sports will add to the pride of being Singaporean and bring us closer as a nation. With the support of all Singaporeans, I am confident that we can succeed.

27 I wish you a successful conference.

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