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Subject: (EMBARGOED) Speech by Mr Abdullah Tarmugi, 30 June 2000, 4.30 pm

Singapore Government

MEDIA RELEASE

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SPEECH BY MR ABDULLAH TARMUGI MINISTER FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND SPORTS AT THE SPORTS AWARDS FOR CORPORATIONS AND EMPLOYEES PRESENTATION CEREMONY FRIDAY, 30 JUN 2000 AT 4.30 PM BALLROOM 3 (LEVEL 2) SINGAPORE INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION & EXHIBITION CENTRE

It is my pleasure to join you this afternoon at the presentation ceremony for this year's Sports Awards for Corporations and Employees.

2 These Awards are presented annually by the Singapore Sports Council (SSC) to give national recognition to organisations and individuals who have taken an active role in promoting sports and fitness to their employees. Twelve organisations will be receiving these prestigious Awards this year. I would like to highlight seven things they have done in general to support employee fitness:

- First, they have organised a Sports or Family Day that has sporting or physical activities
- Second, they have organised in-house exercise and sports activities
- Third, they have encouraged employees to participate in events organised by SSC and the various National Sports Associations

- Fourth, they have sponsored internal and external sports events
- Fifth, they have provided paid leave for their staff to participate in sports and fitness activities
- Sixth, they have subsidised the cost of renting of sports facilities or even providing such facilities at the work place, and
- Seventh, they would have allocated at least 15 minutes within office hours for staff to exercise

3 I congratulate all these 12 Sports ACE recipients and I would strongly urge other companies to follow their example. The SSC has set a target of getting 50% of Singaporeans to exercise at least once a week by 2005. Part of the SSC's strategy to reach this target is to encourage companies through the Regional Sports and Fitness Centres (RSFC) to promote employee fitness. Each RSFC has an Olympic-sized swimming pool and a ClubFITT gymnasium with the latest high tech gym equipment. I am told that the equipment and programmes offered in the RSFCs are good enough to rival those of private country clubs. I would encourage companies should take advantage of the excellent facilities and programmes offered at these Centres.

4 We invest in technology and in educating and preparing our work force to cope with the demands of the fast-paced, knowledge-based new economy. The majority of employers have policies and funds for staff training to give them a competitive edge over their business rivals. However, not many employers pay attention to the physical and mental well-being of their employees.

5 A company wellness survey was conducted in 1997 by the SSC, involving 2,757 private sector organisations with at least 50 employees. It was found that a resounding 96% of the survey participants agreed that "a healthy workforce will lead to better morale, reduce absenteeism and result in higher productivity". Yet, only 61% regarded it the company's "responsibility to promote health and fitness regardless of its business performance". This mindset should change.

6 It is common for companies to subject prospective employees to a health check before employment. This is to ensure that the potential employee is physically fit to perform their duties. It makes sense therefore that having ascertained that an employee is healthy when he or she begins work, the company should encourage the employee to stay healthy and fit.

7 Progressive and forward-thinking employers should no longer regard employees' fitness as a good-to-have but rather as a necessity. For many of us, the work place has become almost a second home and it is not uncommon for most of our waking hours to be spent at our work place. What limited time we have left is usually spent with family and friends. Playing sports or exercising is therefore often given low priority. There are so many other competing recreational and leisure activities to lure us away from keeping fit and healthy. If companies regard employees' health and fitness to be very important to their operations and success, then they should be prepared to initiate and promote sports and fitness programmes and schemes for their employees.

8 Let me conclude by again congratulating the 12 organisations and 4 individuals receiving the Sports ACE Awards. I hope the Award will spur you to continue with your good effort in promoting sports and fitness at the workplace.

I wish you a pleasant afternoon.

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