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SPEECH BY MR TEO CHEE HEAN, MINISTER FOR DEFENCE AND PRESIDENT OF THE SINGAPORE NATIONAL OLYMPIC COUNCIL, AT THE 15TH ASIAN GAMES MAP AWARD PRESENTATION AND TEAM SINGAPORE APPRECIATION DINNER, ON 1 FEBRUARY 2007 AT 8 PM AT THE VIVOCITY ATRIUM.

Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports
Mr. Teo Ser Luck,

Distinguished Guests,

Athletes,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Singapore National Olympic Council and the Singapore Sports Council, I extend a warm welcome to all of you to this Multi-Million Dollar Award Programme (MAP) Award Presentation and Team Singapore Appreciation Dinner in celebration of our Team's success at the 15th Asian Games Doha.

In Doha, we were represented by 132 athletes and 80 officials and supporting staff competing in 16 disciplines. In the fourteen days of competition our athletes contested with the best in Asia and won 8 gold, 7 silver and 12 bronze medals, this is our best Asian Games performance ever, congratulations to the medal winners. Tonight is your night; revel in the attention of the media, fans and well-wishers, you earned it.

We should also spare a thought here for those who did not win medals, for many of them battled tenaciously in their matches, displaying great sportsmanship and fighting spirit against their stronger opponents despite losing eventually. We are equally proud of all of you.

I remember the Bowling Men's Team of Five who came from 10th position and supposedly an insurmountable 304 pins behind the leaders after the first block of games to fight their way back only to lose the bronze medal on the last throw of the ball by a mere 3 pins. Then there was Xing Aiyong's (World rank No. 51) gritty court battle in the Badminton Women's Quarter Final match against her South Korean opponent World ranked 21, which captivated many Singaporeans' attention including our Prime Minister. There were other courageous performances by our non medal winning athletes that perhaps went unnoticed, such as young Choo Tze Huang's performance in the golf

competition. After four full days of competition he finished joint third, but had to concede the bronze medal on count back which I'm sure is heartbreaking for him.

I applaud all of you for your courage and fortitude, for sticking in there when you battled with your bigger and stronger opponents. In defeat you flew our flag high, we are all proud of you. I know it can be heartbreaking in defeat, but great athletes pick themselves up, persevere to come back winners. I am confident you will take up the fight, walk over the edge and return as winners the next time.

Tonight we will be presenting MAP awards to the 50 medalists, this has been made possible through the generous sponsorship of the Singapore Totalisator Board & Singapore Pools, and Asia Pacific Breweries Singapore, Tiger Beer. The Singapore Totalisator Board & Singapore Pools have been our MAP sponsor for the Olympic Games, Asian Games, Commonwealth Games and South East Asia Games since 1995, while Asia Pacific Breweries Singapore, Tiger Beer for the Asian Games since 1994. Thank you Singapore Totalisator Board & Singapore Pools and Asia Pacific Breweries Singapore, Tiger Beer, we hope you will continue to support MAP as our athletes pursue sporting achievements at the highest level for our nation.

MAP is important to the athletes as they put their hearts and soul training for sporting excellence at the regional, continental and Olympic Games. Many athletes also put aside their studies and employment to train full time and take the challenge which comes once in two years or four years. In the course of their training and competitions which take years, they experience frustration, injuries and disappointment before they finally beat the best at the Games. Many try but only a few will succeed, and for the few who succeed MAP is only a small reward for the sacrifice and pain they have gone through over the years.

I also wish to thank the sponsors of Team Singapore for the 15th Asian Games, and the people behind the scene supporting the athletes. These will include the team managers, coaches, parents, employers, NSAs, SSC, the media, secretariat and medical team, and the supporters who flew all the way to Doha. All of you played a part in the overall success of Team Singapore at the 15th Asian Games.

Tonight is your night just as it is for the athletes. Have an enjoyable evening.