

WELCOME ADDRESS BY GUEST OF HONOUR, MR TEO CHEE HEAN, DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTER FOR DEFENCE, AND PRESIDENT SINGAPORE NATIONAL OLYMPIC COUNCIL AT THE FLAG PRESENTATION CEREMONY FOR THE 25TH SOUTH EAST ASIAN GAMES, 6 P.M., 9 NOVEMBER 2009 AT NANYANG POLYTECHNIC ATRIUM.

Minister for Community Development, Youth and Sports,
Dr Vivian Balakrishnan,

Chef de Mission to the 25th South East Asian Games,
Mrs Jessie Phua,

Team Singapore Officials and Athletes,

Friends from the Media,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

A very good evening.

1 In exactly one month from today the 25th South East Asian (SEA) Games will open in Vientiane, Laos.

2 This year's SEA Games in Laos is significant for two reasons. Firstly, Laos is hosting it for the first time in the history of the Games.

As ASEAN neighbours, we should all take pride that Laos is making its debut as SEA Games host this year.

And, secondly, 2009 marks the 50th anniversary of the SEA Games, which have been held every two years since 1959.

3 The Games have been a unifying force in South East Asia, bringing neighbouring countries together in friendly competition.

The first South East Asian Peninsular (SEAP) Games was held in December 1959 with 7 countries participating, namely Thailand, Burma (now Myanmar), Malaya (now Malaysia), Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam and Singapore.

There were 12 sports and 527 athletes participating.

4 In 1977 in Kuala Lumpur, with the inclusion of the Philippines, Brunei and Indonesia into the games, the SEAP Games became known as the South East Asian Games or SEA Games.

Timor-Leste joined the 2003 SEA Games in Vietnam.

5 Team Singapore to the Laos SEA Games will comprise 195 athletes and 99 officials, 294 in all.

They will participate in 18 of the 25 sports from the 10th to 18th December 2009.

This is our smallest contingent to the SEA Games in a very long time.

It was thirty years ago in Jakarta at the 10th SEA Games in 1979, that we participated with a team of 225 athletes and officials.

After Jakarta 1979 our teams have always exceeded 300 athletes and officials.

6 Our biggest contingent yet to any major games was at the last SEA Games in Thailand.

We sent 423 athletes and 214 officials, 637 in all, and participated in 35 out of 44 sports.

We also had our best gold medal haul in an away SEA Games, with 43 gold medals in Thailand.

7 Our Team Singapore contingent to Laos is smaller, mainly because some of the sports where Team Singapore athletes have done well in previous SEA Games such as sailing, bowling and gymnastics will not be featured.

This will also affect our overall medal tally.

Nevertheless I encourage our athletes, especially those where we have done well consistently, to continue to do their best and keep Singapore's flag flying high in table tennis, swimming, water polo and shooting.

8 Interestingly in Laos we will see the return of our boxers to the SEA Games, with two boxers taking part in the games.

We last competed in boxing 14 years ago at the 1995 SEA Games in Chiangmai.

Wrestling will be making its first appearance for Team Singapore in the SEA Games, where we will send 3 men and 1 woman to compete in Laos.

The National Sports Association for wrestling was set up recently to prepare our young athletes for the Youth Olympic Games, and we must give full marks to the National Sports Association for getting a team of four senior wrestlers to qualify for the SEA Games in such a short time.

9 I encourage those NSAs who have not succeeded in fielding any athletes who could qualify for the Laos Games to do better.

I hope the NSAs, especially those who have fielded athletes for previous SEA Games, will seriously raise their standards of their programmes, and plan a return for their athletes to this regional competition.

The SEA Games represent a great opportunity for athletes to test themselves at a regional competition before they go on to the more competitive continental Asian Games, Commonwealth Games and ultimately the Olympic Games.

10 For the athletes going to Laos, I urge you to aim high.

Your results here may decide your entry to the Asian Games and Commonwealth Games to be held next year.

Make use of the competition to spur yourself to do your best, and better the Asian Games and Commonwealth games qualifying marks.

In the next few months before the SNOC selection you may not have many more competitions or opportunities for the region's best athletes to push you to better your performances.

If you can achieve this, it would be a great accomplishment for yourself and your NSA.

11 Every athlete who takes part in the Games is competing not just for himself or herself, but for Singapore, and for all those who have helped him or her to get this far.

Every athlete is competing not just against the other athletes in the field, but also to better his or her previous best performance.

So go out there, do your best, for yourself, all those who have supported and helped you, and also for our country, Singapore.

12 I would like to take a moment to thank the sponsors who have come forward to support our team to the SEA Games.

The Totalisator Board, for sponsoring the team to the games.
Sunrise & Co, for the Yonex outfit for the athletes and officials.
Nestle, for the "Cheer-on Team Singapore with Milo" campaign".
And last but not least Nanyang Polytechnic for hosting this Flag
Presentation event.

13 It leaves me now to wish Mrs Jessie Phua, Chef de Mission to
the 25th SEA Games, the athletes and officials all the very best at
the games.

I look forward to seeing you in Laos.

Do your best.