

SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT PRESS STATEMENT

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Speech by Encik Othman Wok, Minister for Social Affairs,
at the "Metrication and You" Exhibition held at the
Pasir Panjang Community Centre on 20 Jun 75 at 8 pm

In 1970, when the Singapore Government announced plans to switch to the metric system, there were some "Doubting Thomases" who argued that the imperial system of measurement had so far been serving its purpose well and therefore it was not advisable to go metric. Some of them maintained that metric conversion would incur extra costs which in turn increase costs of production and reduce price competitiveness. The success and positive benefits of metrication over the past four years prove how wrong such "Doubting Thomases" can be. It is clear now the apparent unwillingness among some people and organisations to metricate is not so much recalcitrance as the age old human reluctance to accept changes.

2 The metric system has indeed made a favourable impact on all of us in Singapore. People are beginning to realise that an orderly change to the general use of metric units of measurement is in the interests of the consumers, retailers, distributors and manufacturers because it is brief, simple to use, important

for exports and increase the efficiency of our economy.

3 The work of metrication in Singapore went forward at an accelerated pace during 1974 and this year, major developments in conversion, especially in building, retail and standardisation of packaging in metric sizes will be made. Slowly but surely, the metric system has become part of our daily lives. Young children are talking metric at home because it is being taught at school. Housewives shopping in supermarkets are buying things by the kilograms because increasingly, packaged goods are marked solely in rounded metric quantities of 100, 250, 500 grammes, one kilogram, etc. For those of us who lack the feel of metric weights because our brains have been so attuned to the pounds and ounces or the katis and tahils, we must unlearn all these old measurements and establish a new bank of mental images based on metric units. To start with, you can associate metric units with familiar objects around us and this can be easily done because more and more metric packages will be appearing on the shelves and you can pick up a 250 gramme or one kilogram package to get the feel of the weight.

4 Looking at the newspapers, watching television or listening to the radio, you will find that increasingly, information is being disseminated in metric. Thus a metric environment is evolving and it is in our own interest to familiarise ourselves with the metric system as early as possible. I must stress this urgency because the retail trade in Singapore will shortly be selling goods solely in metric units and as from 1st January 1976, the pound, kati, yard and gallon will become illegal for use in trading. Hence, the sooner we get accustomed to thinking in the new units, the easier it will be for us to fit into the new system of measurement, the basic units of which are not many and they are not difficult to remember once you start using them.

5 The aim of this Exhibition is to bring home the metric message to all of us who are affected by the change. There will be visual illustrations showing what are and how to use the three common metric units, namely, the kilogram, metric and litre. The Metrication Board has made available a number of metric aids such as information booklets, pamphlets, conversion wall charts and tables for any of you who wants to know more about the metric system and how it affects you. There are also officers at hand to assist

and explain the system. I, therefore, urge all of you to make the fullest use of this Exhibition to get to know the metric system. If some effort is made to learn it, in no time all of us will be thinking metric.

6 I now have pleasure in declaring this "Metrication and You" Exhibition open.

Thank you.