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STATEMENT BY DR LEE CHIAW MENG, MINISTER FOR SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY, ON METRICATION - 15.7.75

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1 The Metrication Board was set up in 1971. Since then, significant progress has been achieved in the various economic sectors. Except for certain technical departments, the public sector has completely metricated. Conversions have also taken place in the building and engineering industries. Pre-packed goods in standard metric sizes are also being introduced, prominent examples of which are edible oils, soft drinks and paints.

2 Since 1971 the Board had organised a large number of publicity programmes aimed at conditioning the public to an awareness and understanding of the metric system. The public had also been gradually drawn into the use of metric measures through the metrication of the public sector, the textile trade, the retailing of petrol and sales in the supermarkets. As a result, a large degree of awareness among the public has been achieved.

3 The Government therefore considers that we are now ready to take this final major step of converting the retail trade to the use of metric measures. This conversion will involve the sale of meat, vegetable, textile and sundry goods.

4 To accomplish this conversion exercise the following measures will be taken:-

(a) Amendments are being made to the Weights and Measures Act to make it compulsory to retail in metric measures from 1 January, 1976. Further, closer integration of the functions of metrication and of weights and measures will be effected.

(b) A programme is being planned in conjunction with importers and manufacturers of weighing and measuring instruments for the recalibration of such instruments used in the retail trade, and

(c) An intensive publicity and education campaign is being organised for implementation.

5 The recalibration of the spring scales is a straightforward exercise. It could be done simply by the replacement of the graduated scales reading in imperial or customary units by one reading in metric units. Dealers in this instrument have indicated that this conversion exercise would not be expensive. As for the daching, the Metrication Board had designed and produced a prototype which is being displayed in this room. It incorporates only the simplest possible conversion which ensures that the wooden arm is horizontal at equilibrium and which prevents any unauthorised switch of the counterbalance bob. This has been shown to daching manufacturers. All of them have indicated that they would be prepared to produce the simplified version or a similar one at a reasonable price.

6 The publicity and education campaign will include the use of slides, filmlets, posters, pamphlets, exhibition, transfer agents and the mass media. During the months of September to December, the Mobile Metric Exhibition, which had between March and June 1975 toured 35 constituencies, will continue to visit the remaining 30 constituencies with the objective of educating the public on the use of metric measures.

7 The publicity campaign will culminate in a series of activities to be held between October and December 1975. The major feature will be a zonal metrication programme designed to educate housewives and hawkers on the approximate unit conversion from imperial and customary to the metric units. Hawkers will also be taught on the need to recalibrate or purchase new metric weighing instruments. The zonal market programme will allow the manufacturers and importers to cope with the traders' demand for recalibration or new instrument.

8 Housewives, hawkers and shopkeepers, importers and manufacturers of weighing and measuring instruments and the public in general are therefore urged to give every possible cooperation to make the proposed conversion to metric measures in the retail trade a success. As the cost of conversion is minimal, retail traders are warned not to use this conversion exercise as an excuse for raising the price.