

PLEASE EMBARGO TILL AFTER DELIVERY
PLEASE CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

OPENING CEREMONY OF THE TRADE AND INDUSTRY
GO METRIC EXHIBITION AND FAIR

SPEECH BY DR LEE CHIAW MENG, MINISTER
FOR SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

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Singapore National
Sports Stadium

1 Since the policy of metrication was adopted by the Government in 1971, we have seen almost 5 years of metric conversion. At the outset, the target was to achieve complete metrication of the public sector by 1975 by which time it was expected that 75% of the industrial sector would also have been converted. Retail trade was to be metricated at a more leisurely pace depending on the progress made by the layman. As 1975 is drawing to a close, it is perhaps timely and appropriate that an appraisal is made of the success achieved so far.

2 In the public sector, complete metrication has been achieved except for certain technical departments where complete conversion is not possible because corresponding changes in the private sector has yet to be effected. The Postal Department is now assessing mail by the grams, roads are measured in kilometres and trade documentation has now to be completed in metric. HDB flats in the Ang Mo Kio New Town are designed and constructed in metric units. New born babies are weighed in kilograms and measured by the metre and medicinal drugs in Government hospitals are dispensed in metric. Whereas electricity had traditionally been sold by the kilowatt hour, water and city gas are now sold by the cubic metres. In the schools where our future lies, children are not only learning in metric but also taking their examinations using that system of weights and measures.

3 These illustrations are but a handful of what had actually been achieved and I would loathe to spend the rest of the evening trying to impress upon you other examples of metric conversion in the public sector. Many of you would probably have felt the impact of these changes by now.

4 Moving on to the industrial sector, I am pleased to say that we have made significant progress. The 75% target had been achieved if not surpassed. The precision optical industry is almost wholly metric. In the electrical and electronic industries about 75% had gone metric while in industries manufacturing consumer products some 65% have undergone conversion. Even the packaging industries are in the process of changing. In the construction industry, metrication has also made its mark. Bricks are now produced in metric sizes while plans for new buildings in the private sector are all drawn up under this new system of measure. Architects and engineers are presently studying into the introduction of metric modular co-ordination as a more effective and efficient way of construction.

5 Although the retail trade was originally planned to proceed at a more leisurely pace, significant progress had been achieved. Textiles are now sold by the metre in most of the larger departmental stores and petrol are now dispensed entirely by the litre. Supermarkets went metric successfully on 1 July last year. Although the conversion in supermarkets had so far been restricted to the sale of loose items, plans are now afoot for the complete metrication of supermarkets in the coming year. Further, it is envisaged that in the near future when the general public is better acquainted with metric measures, efforts would be made to metricate the retail trade completely.

6 This evening, I am pleased to note the number of metric products on display. This goes to confirm the statements that I have made earlier on the achievement of metric conversion in the industrial sector. Like all entrepreneurs, industrialists are pragmatists and have that in-built flexibility and ability to rise and meet new challenges. Today, more than two-thirds of the world are using metric. The rest including major economy such as the United States, Canada, Britain and Australia are already in the process of conversion. As most of these nations are our major trading partners we must, out of necessity, convert if we are to maintain these markets.

7 Apart from the necessity arising from marketing our products, metrication brings along with it certain other advantages. For those who have already converted, you will appreciate that metric standardization brings about rationalisation of production. This means lower production cost, higher profit margins and more competitive products. The advantages are obvious. For those industries which have not converted I would like to urge that they re-examine their production rationale against the benefits of metric conversion. Unless constrained by requirements of your markets, I am sure you will find it in your interest to plan for eventual conversion.

8 In encouraging industries to convert I would like to stress that this is motivated entirely by the benefit that conversion will bring. The Government is fully aware of the problems associated with conversion that certain industries may face and of the importance of export to non-metric markets. In appreciation of these problems, the Metrication Board had been extremely flexible in the implementation of its policies. In this connection, the Board had exercised commendable flexibility in permitting import of such non-metric equipment where the metric version has been found unavailable or unsuitable. Recently we even lifted the import controls of non-metric industrial gauges and equipment. Fortunately, this problem is diminishing as more and more new capital equipment purchased are in metric as industrialists phased out their non-metric mode of production. As for the latter problem, manufacturers are encouraged to produce in metric only for the local market while for exports they are free to produce according to the demands of their markets. Where manufacturers have encountered problems of supplying in metric to the local market because of dominant production for non-metric export markets the Board had been compassionate in its consideration of the problems of these manufacturers. In fact, certain industries by nature of their export market had been completely exempted from this metrication exercise. Finally, I would like to urge manufacturers and the Metrication Board to establish closer liaison in the hope that this will lead to a better understanding of common objectives and work towards the solution of common problems.