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PRESS RELEASE

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SPEECH BY DR YEO NING HONG, MINISTER FOR COMMUNICATIONS
AND SECOND MINISTER OF DEFENCE, AT THE LAUNCHING OF
THE DIAL-A-WEATHER-FORECAST SERVICE AT THE PSA AUDITORIUM,
12TH STOREY PSA TOWERS, ON WEDNESDAY, 4 JULY '84 AT 4.00 PM

It gives me great pleasure to be here today to launch the Meteorological Department's Dial-a-Weather-Forecast Service. This 24-hour service will provide the public with a 12-hour local weather forecast with the highest and lowest temperatures expected, and times of high tide. The service will augment the existing weather forecasts over the radio and television and in the newspapers. Furthermore, since the telephone forecasts will be updated every six hours, more accurate forecasts can be made. Updating can also be done immediately if there are sudden unexpected weather changes.

Besides the existing information on weather and tides, Ministry of Communications, together with the Police Department, has looked into the possibility of incorporating flood messages in this service. I am pleased to say that the study team of Police officers, meteorologists and Telecoms officers, have found the idea practical. So on a day of heavy rain, before we leave home, we can check the extent and whereabouts of flooding, if any. This additional information will be useful to the travelling public and will help prevent massive traffic jams.

It is easy to poke fun at weather forecasting and many people do. This is because they do not appreciate the complexities of factors that affect the weather. Even with the use of computers and weather satellites, forecasting accuracy has yet to reach 100 per cent accuracy.

Our Meteorological Department in Singapore has kept close to the frontiers of this complex science. This is important for us as we are a major communication centre providing meteorological services to a large number of ships and aircraft in the Asia Pacific Region. Making use of our own main-frame computers together with Japanese and American weather satellites, and observations from other meteorological centres, our service is comparable in reliability and accuracy with those of advanced countries.

Locally, the 24-hour forecasts in newspapers and television are on average, 70 per cent accurate; while the 12-hour forecasts are about 80 per cent accurate. This is quite an achievement, considering that forecasting equatorial weather is difficult. Shower-clouds which are the predominant rain-bearing clouds in our region are small and have short life-spans. These small shower-clouds are sometimes spread in clusters all over Singapore. Hence the necessity to describe such showers as "scattered showers in several areas".

Some of us expect forecasters to know whether it is going to rain at a particular location at a particular time way in advance. No doubt this would be the ideal, but such fine demarcation is not possible. I am sure, many of us have experienced starting a journey in bright sunshine, going through pouring rain a short while later down the road, only to emerge in fine weather again at the end of the journey. Such is the nature of our weather sometimes in Singapore.

The Meteorological Department receives about a million enquiries a year, averaging 2,800 calls per day. This is a measure of the public's confidence in spite of jokes about weather forecasts. To handle such calls quickly and to save on manpower, we have decided to install this automated Dial-a-Weather-Forecast system which I expect will be heavily used.

In conclusion, I would like to congratulate the staff of the Meteorological Department, Telecoms and the Police Department for providing Singaporeans with yet another public service, adding to our quality of life. eeeeeeeeeee