

THE STANDARDS OF WEIGHTS AND MEASURES BILL, 1956

THE MINISTER FOR CONSUMER
INDUSTRIES (SHRI N. KANUNGO):
Madam, I beg to move:

"That this House concurs in the recommendation of the Lok Sabha that the Rajya Sabha do join in the Joint Committee of the Houses on the Bill to establish standards of weights and measures based on the metric system and resolves that the following members of the Rajya Sabha be nominated to serve on the said Joint Committee :

1. Shri M. Govinda Reddy,
2. Shri V. C. Kesava Rao,
3. Shrimati K. Bharathi,
4. Dr. N. S. Hardiker,
5. Dr. W. S. Barlingay,
6. Shri B. K. Mukherjee,
7. Shri Akhtar Husain,
8. Shri M. H. S. Nihal Singh,
9. Shri Bhagirathi Mahapatra,
10. Shah Mohamad Umair,
11. Prof. A. R. Wadia,
12. Dr. Raghubir Sinh,
13. Shri Kishen Chand,
14. Shri Govindan Nair,
15. Shri V. K. Dhage."

Madam, this Bill, as it is placed before the House, is a very simple one in the sense that it lays down by statute the standards of weights and measures. It does not contemplate—at least this particular legislation does not mean—that these standards which are laid down are to be used in the country because the administration of weights and measures is a State subject. Under the Constitution, Parliament is only entitled to lay down standards as that is what the present Bill does. But what is the use of laying down a standard if you do not want to enforce it? Therefore the Government have taken steps to consult the State Governments and their concurrence has been obtained to the policy of adopting the metric system as the standard for weights and measures. Sir, on several occasions this question has been discussed in the other House and the last of it was on a non-official Resolution moved by Shri Achuthan and the Resolution as amended and passed was as follows:

"This House is of opinion that Government should take necessary steps to introduce uniform weights and measures throughout the country based on the metric system."

It will be interesting to recapitulate that the matter has been discussed off and on for almost a century. I believe the document which has been placed in the hands of hon. Members of this House brings together all the discussions on the subject and has been edited by Shri Pitamber Pant. It gives all the details. Suffice it to say that as early as 1870, the standards of weights and measures on the metric system were adopted in this country by legislation. I would urge hon. Members to read the extracts of the discussions which took place at that time and I am sure that convincing arguments will be found as to why it is in the interests of our country that we should adopt the metric system which after all, is a system which is a gift to the world by India. It is a historical fact that the decimal system was invented in India and the world is indebted to India for the decimal system. Apart from the historical facts that the *Weights and Measures Act* became a statute in 1870 and was a law of the land till it was repealed by the *Standards of Weights Act, 1939*, I would submit that lately, that is in recent decades, the matter has been considered by progressive elements in the country on many occasions. To give a few instances, in 1940 the *Manufacturing Sub-Committee* of the *National Planning Committee* recommended that the metric system should be adopted. The *Indian Standards Institution* set up a special Committee with the concurrence of the Government to recommend to Government standards of weights and measures. Dr. J. C. Ghosh was the Chairman of that Committee and after a thorough examination of the problem, the Committee recommended the adoption of the metric system with a transition period of 11 to 15 years divided into three stages. The *Indian Science Congress*, if I am not mistaken, on more than one occasion has expressed its opinion that in the interests of the country, the metric system of weights and measures should be adopted. As hon. Members are aware, the first stage has already been covered in the sense that our coinage and currency is now based upon the decimal system. When that Bill was being discussed, it was made clear that the reform in coinage and currency would be incomplete unless the standards of weights and

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measures were also based upon the decimal system. About the justifiability of adopting the metric system, I cannot put forward any other argument than the findings of the National Sample Survey which has recorded that there are 143 systems of measures and weights, 150 of volume, and 180 of land area. They found as many as 100 different maunds varying in magnitude from 280 to 8,320 tolas. The seer varied in magnitude from 8 to 160 tolas; the chhatak varied from 1 to 8 tolas; the candy from 1,600 to 32,000 tolas and the palam from 1 to 16 tolas. The point that I want to emphasize here, apart from the diversity of weights and measures in the country, is that the words 'seer' 'maund' etc. have got widely different connotations and widely different contents in different parts of the country.

SHRI H. P. SAKSENA (Uttar Pradesh): But the tola remains the same.

SHRI N. KANUNGO: I am not too sure that the tola remains the same in the sense that there is no basis for the tola. What is the content of tola? The content of the tola is not the same everywhere. The fact remains that today we have no standards of weights and measures in spite of the legislation of 1939. In other words, to have uniform standards of weights and measures in this country, we have to adopt something which is not current in this country and I beg to submit that all the systems which are prevalent in this country or elsewhere, other than the metric, system are not scientific. I venture to mention this before the hon. House because competent authorities, competent scientific bodies, over the last hundred years have come to the conclusion that the metric system of weights and measures is the only scientific system.

The question has been mentioned in some places, what is the hurry? There are a hundred and one other priorities why this urgency for this particular bit of reform? I would only draw the attention of the hon. Members to the situation which has arisen in the United Kingdom. Apart from the various other occasions, as late as 1950, a committee was appointed by the Government of U.K. and they recommended that the metric system should be adopted in spite of all the difficulties which had been pointed out from time to time, because in the ultimate interests of the economy of the nation, that would be

the best. The U.K. has not been able to adopt it officially, because being a highly industrialised country, it has built up its machines, its factories and its engineering industries based upon the foot and pound system and today it finds it difficult to change over. Hence, the urgency. We are today embarking upon the first stages of industrialisation and unless we do it now, we will be leaving a legacy to our future generations which will be a burden on them, which it will be difficult for them to get over. Get over they must, they have to; but it will cost them much. The sooner we do it, the better for the future generation. Therefore, I submit, comes the urgency of this legislation; and more than the legislation, the implementation of the standards of weights and measures throughout the country is not too easy.

Government have no illusions about the thousand and one difficulties which stand in the way of implementing this policy. But when the argument is trotted out that the bulk of our population is illiterate, that the bulk of our population has low I.Q. and it will be difficult for them to comprehend a new system, a complicated system, that it will mean a great hardship to the bulk of our population, I very humbly submit to this House that we rather underestimate the capacity of our people. As an example, I quote the acre; and decimal is the current value which is comprehended by every one in this country from Cape Comorin to Kashmir. *Bigha Gunta, Mana* and others are used no doubt, but I challenge anybody to go to any ryot anywhere in the county and find out. He perfectly understands, not only understands but comprehends the contents of an acre and the contents of the cent. After all, to people of our generation who are used to a particular system of counting and classification, any change will be difficult, particularly at an advanced age, but competent authorities have said that there cannot be a simpler system than the metric system.

I may be pardoned for a little personal reference, but the only thing which had attracted me to the metric system is that at least half the pages of the arithmetic text books will be eliminated and the burden on boys in schools and colleges will be considerably lessened, and that is because I was rather a dunce in arithmetic. Apart from it, the world has become too small these days and if we keep ourselves tied down to

the foot and pound system or try to invent something of our own—say, the *pal* system, or the *masha* system or the *tola* system, or whatever it is—we will find ourselves exactly in the same position as U.K. finds itself now. Almost all the countries, at any rate, all the industrially advanced countries have adopted the system and even in U.K. and U.S.A. where they have got the foot and pound system, the metric system is permissible and is also adopted, except that they have to keep two systems. For example, U.K. has got to sell its machinery all over the world. She cannot afford to sell it only to countries where the foot and pound system is prevalent; and that circle is getting smaller and smaller. Therefore, all their quotations, all their specifications have got to be in foot and pound and also in the metric system. So also in the United State. As for our conditions, we have, for some time to come to purchase capital equipment from all over the world. We have to explore the places where we can get things to our best advantage and, therefore, our specifications, our requirements should be expressed in the metric system, so that we will have the widest world to cover for our purposes. Apart from that, we are not going to be purchasers only, buyers for all time to come. We also want to sell all over the world. We hope to sell much more than we can think of today; and if we have to sell in the wide world, we have to adopt a system which is understood by all the world and the world, I submit, has adopted this system. I am not too sure of the number but almost 72 or 73 countries have adopted the metric system as the only legal system. And the question of changeover, wherever it has happened, has been tackled successfully by the various countries which have adopted it. Therefore, in the matter of implementation also we are not going into any uncharted seas. We have the experience of various countries which have handled that changeover. Of course, no one says that any changeover is easy, but at least we have the advantage of learning from the difficulties which other countries have faced. To give you an example, within this current century, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics had planned to change over to the metric system in ten years. Hon. Members will realise that in the U.S.S.R. which spreads out from almost the borders of India to the middle of Europe there were hundreds of weights and measures. Yet, though they had planned to complete that changeover in

ten years, they were able to do it in a much shorter time. Thailand, our neighbour, took thirteen years and completed it. Italy finished it in ten years, Czechoslovakia in four years, Turkey in three years and in Syria somehow or other they have managed to change over without any transition period. But, as I have said earlier, we have no illusions that the changeover is not going to be difficult. The choice before us today is, shall we tolerate this multiplicity of weights and measures or shall we have a uniform system? If we have a uniform system, can we adopt any system which is prevalent in the country and which is scientific? I submit, Madam, there is no other system which is scientific, there is no other system in our country which can be universal, at any rate which is prevalent over a large area of our country. Members would know that even within a distance of ten miles they can come across two or three types of weights and measures. Therefore, if we have to change over, as we must, then we must adopt a system which is universally acknowledged as the most scientific system. Therefore, I submit there cannot be any doubt regarding the principle of adopting the metric system. The difficulty comes in about the transition. Now the transition period as envisaged in the Bill is ten years, that is the entire changeover should be completed in ten years. It may be argued that various committees have said that the transition period may be spread over ten to fifteen years, while the Bill contemplates ten years. I submit, Madam, it has been done deliberately in the sense that the sooner we get over it the better for everybody concerned.

PANDIT S. S. N. TANKHA (Uttar Pradesh): Then why wait for ten years?

SHRI N. KANUNGO: Ten years is the maximum. No one will be more happy than myself if we could achieve it in five years. We know the difficulties. At any rate we have to realise that most of the States have not got a good administrative organisation for weights and measures. Huge quantities of weights and measures have got to be prepared, certified and put into circulation. The minds of the people have got to be prepared for it. A large educative campaign of familiarising the people with the contents of it has got to be undertaken. Therefore, the period of ten years has been mentioned. As a first step, the Government of India have appointed a Standing Committee to work out the

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stages of implementation in which all the Ministries of the Government of India are represented. All the State Governments have got their special organisations, namely special committees presided over by the Ministers concerned or by senior officer of the State Governments, and they are now working out the difficulties and the possible solutions of those difficulties in carrying out the changeover.

Madam, I do not think I will take more time because the question has been discussed all over the country at various times and also the whole thing, at least by implication, was discussed when the Bill regarding coinage and currency was being discussed, and therefore I commend that the House do accept the motion to join in the Joint Committee which will go through the Bill.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRIMATI SHARDA BHARGAVA) : The question is :

"That this House concurs in the recommendation of the Lok Sabha that the Rajya Sabha do join in the Joint Committee of the Houses on the Bill to establish standards of weights and measures based on the metric system and resolves that the following members of the Rajya Sabha be nominated to serve on the said Joint Committee:—

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13. Shri Kishen Chand,

14. Shri Govindan Nair,

15. Shri V. K. Dhage."

The motion was adopted.

MESSAGES FROM THE LOK SABHA

I. INDIAN POST OFFICE (AMENDMENT) BILL, 1956

II. PUBLIC DEBT (AMENDMENT) BILL, 1956

SECRETARY : Madam, I have to report to the House the following two Messages received from the Lok Sabha, signed by the Secretary of the Lok Sabha :

I

"In accordance with the provisions of Rule 133 of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha, I am directed to enclose herewith a copy of the Indian Post Office (Amendment) Bill, 1956, as passed by Lok Sabha at its sitting held on the 1st September, 1956.

The Speaker has certified that this Bill is a Money Bill within the meaning of article 110 of the Constitution of India."

II

"In accordance with the provisions of Rule 133 of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha, I am directed to enclose herewith a copy of the Public Debt (Amendment) Bill, 1956, as passed by Lok Sabha at its sitting held on the 1st September, 1956."

Madam, I lay these two Bills on the Table.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRIMATI SHARDA BHARGAVA) : The House stands adjourned till 11 A.M. on Monday the 3rd September.

The House then adjourned at five of the clock till eleven of the clock on Monday, the 3rd September 1956.