

How Advantageous is the time Advancement?



When the clock was put forward four months ago, there was general chaos. When the government announced that the clock was to be put forward by an hour from midnight May 24, a wail of protest rose from the public. The mornings were pitch dark and the evenings were longer. School times were adjusted to accommodate those who travel from a distance. This resulted in a change in office hours to accommodate the traffic. Train and bus schedules were changing daily. But the confusion reigned only for a few days-weeks at most. Now, people have become used to waking up an hour earlier than before and enjoying an additional hour of daylight in the evenings. People are not complaining any more. In fact, most people are quite pleased with the change.

The reason for the change in time was given as a means of saving electricity during the height of the power crisis, by increasing daylight in the night, when people use more electricity. The Minister of Power and Energy, Anuruddha Ratwatte claimed that because of the advancement of the standard time, the Ceylon Electricity Board saved approximately 0.25 Gwh (Giga watt hours) of electricity every day. Now that the power crisis is all over, the government is reconsidering their move and has recently appointed a committee to look into the benefits and inconveniences of the advanced time. The committee is headed by the Secretary to the Ministry of Power and Energy and has a distinguished panel which includes famous science fiction writer, Arthur C Clarke. Clarke earlier made an interesting proposal that the

standard time be increased only by half hour, so that Sri Lanka would be six hours ahead of GMT, which he pointed out would be easier for international trade.

The change of time affected the working of the industrial and commercial sector also. Earlier, the sector was sharply divided in favour of and against the advanced time.

But today, most of them are happy with the arrangement, where more daylight time could be utilized for enhanced productivity-at factory and management level.

Actually it has not made such a drastic difference in the work place, said a senior manager at Tri-Star Apparels, a company with some ten garment factories across the island. Earlier, our work shift was from 7:30 am to 4:30 pm, but because of the school times we had to change the working hours from 8 am to 5 pm. So the factory still works the same number of hours. He said that if the government puts back the clock once more, it would be difficult for people to clock once more, it would be difficult for people to offices and industries-will have to reschedule once again.

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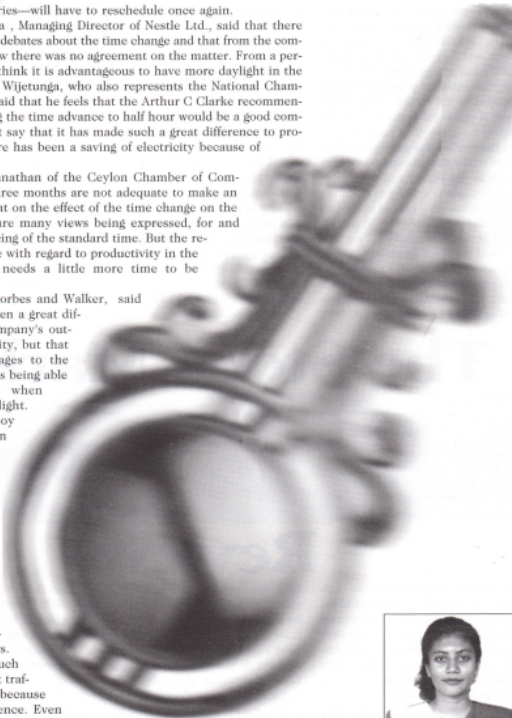
Mr C Wijetunga, Managing Director of Nestle Ltd., said that there have been marked debates about the time change and that from the company's point of view there was no agreement on the matter. From a personal viewpoint I think it is advantageous to have more daylight in the evening, he said. Wijetunga, who also represents the National Chamber of Industries said that he feels that the Arthur C Clarke recommendation of reducing the time advance to half hour would be a good compromise. "I cannot say that it has made such a great difference to productivity. But there has been a saving of electricity because of the move".

Mr Mano Selvanathan of the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce said that three months are not adequate to make an analytical comment on the effect of the time change on the economy. There are many views being expressed, for and against the advancing of the standard time. But the results of the change with regard to productivity in the industrial sector needs a little more time to be analyzed.

Chairman of Forbes and Walker, said that he has not seen a great difference in the company's output and productivity, but that there are advantages to the work force, such as being able to return home when there is still daylight.

People can enjoy more daylight in the evenings, indulge in sports or some similar activity because of the time advance, he said.

Generally, the present time could be regarded as advantageous to upper management level executives and traders. Shops are open much later and late night traffic has increased because of the time difference. Even school children have extra play time in the evening to make up for the dark early morning. With the power cuts well behind us, the advantage of that extra hour of sunlight is indeed great. But of course, there are those who would much rather not lose an hour of sleep. The task of the committee sitting on the matter is indeed not enviable. It is only hoped that the decision they take will reflect on the needs and feelings of the public, who by now have very little to complain of the time factor.



Tharuka Dissanayake is a journalist attached to The Sunday Times. She has also worked as a news reporter and features writer in three national newspapers.

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