

Pakistan to advance clock by an hour for 'daylight saving'

It's like moving from 'Musharraf time' to 'Zardari time', says a retired government official as Pakistan adopts Daylight Saving Time (DST) on June 1 and advances the clock by an hour.

According to a government notification, the country will advance its time on the first day of the next month and will be six hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) instead of the present five hours.

DST is being introduced to reduce power consumption and maximise the use of daylight. During DST, the sun appears to rise one hour later in the morning, and sets an hour later in the evening, seeming to stretch the day longer.

The experiment with DST is not happening for the first time, as the military government of President Pervez Musharraf tried the same in 2002.

However, the scheme was not repeated the next year as millions of illiterate people, and those living in the rural areas, simply refused to advance their watches.

Even in the cities, the move led to many hilarious and confusing situations with some organisations and institutions following the DST system but anti-Musharraf groups still going by the 'old time'.

The innocuous question 'What is the time?' would lead to another question, 'In which system, real or Musharraf?' And now terms like 'Zardari time' are already in circulation as he is the leader of the ruling Pakistan People's Party (PPP).

'This is rubbish...more than 40 percent people in the country still adjust their work plans according to the sun and they are never bothered about clocks,' Hafeez Ahmed, a retired government employee, told IANS.

The decision was taken by the federal government to curtail power usage as Pakistan is facing a massive electricity shortfall of nearly 4,000-megawatt that is expected to increase in the summer season.

Scheduled power cuts of five to six hours in urban areas and 8-10 hours in rural areas are a way of life in most parts of the country.

'Adopting DST is illogical, it will create a lot of problems, especially for people who say prayers five times a day,' says Umer Afridi, a prayer leader in Islamabad.

The midday prayers are usually at 1.00 p.m. throughout the year and Afridi thinks that it will create a huge confusion on the 'correct' time to pray, especially among the elderly.

Attempts to adopt this system have been under way since 1994, when the then government decided to go for daylight saving. However, the cabinet decision was put off only a day before the scheduled day of implementation following suggestions that it may get too complicated.

The experts suggest that the system may be working in 80 countries but does not work in Pakistan

as the government fails to educate the masses on the benefits - and the rationale - behind the move.

In order to justify the move officials are pointing out that a number of other Muslim countries like Iran, Turkey, Egypt and Syria also follow the system.

Officials, however, say at this stage the scheme is just experimental and being adopted just for one year, and a decision to continue with the system will be taken after assessing the pros and cons in October.

Nevertheless, it is certainly going to be an interesting experience for the people in Pakistan who are not used to this kind of change.

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