

# ONCE UPON

So the story unfolds, that a long time ago, there was no such concept as 'time', nor a need for it. It was only after the emergence of societies that people found a necessity to organise their lives more efficiently. Today, terms like 'time is of the essence' or 'time is money' are intrinsic to our lifestyles. By **Valerie Chew**.

- The first attempt at measuring time is said to have originated from Sumer, the earliest known civilisation discovered in south-eastern Iraq. The Sumerian Sexagesimal System is a system that revolves around the number 60. Hence, the notion of 60 seconds in a minute and 60 minutes in an hour.
- After the Sumerians, the Egyptians were the next to formally divide their day into parts, now known as hours. They did this using the obelisk – a slender, tapering, four-sided monument whose moving shadow enabled people to divide the day into morning and afternoon. Additional markers around the base of the monument indicated further sub-divisions of time. Obelisks were built as early as 3,500 BC.
- The English word 'clock' is collectively derived from Latin, French and German words that mean 'bell'. In the past, hours at sea were signalled by the ringing of bells.
- The Chinese developed mechanised clocks from AD 200 to 1,300. Third Century Chinese clepsydras – devices that measured time using the regulated flow of water through small apertures – drove mechanisms that depicted astronomical events. Chinese inventor Su Sung and his team built one of the most elaborate clock towers: 30 feet tall, it had a water-driven escapement, a power-driven sphere for observations, an automatically rotating celestial globe, and five front panels with doors that showed mannequins which rang gongs and held tablets showing the hour of the day.
- A whopping US\$11 million is the price tag for the most expensive watch sold, according to Forbes.com. A 1933 gold Patek Phillippe with 24 complications was auctioned off at Sotheby's in 1999. The timepiece was highly valued for having the most elaborate complications – these include a calendar with phases and age of the moon, indication of sunrise and sunset, and even a celestial chart depicting the constellation of stars in the sky.

