

Act Today Mr. President

Four very important things happened in the last forty-eight hours that need to be commented upon. First the passage of the 13th amendment bill, second Sheikh Hasina's speech at Janatar Mancha (in front of the Press Club), third the memorandum of 35 secretaries to the President and finally the request of the Prime Minister to the President to form a caretaker government as soon as possible.

The 13th amendment Bill provides the legal framework for the formation of a caretaker government to hold the next election. It has been passed by a controversial parliament whose legality stands fundamentally questioned because of the widespread rigging on which it is founded. However, we have noticed with interest, the fact that Sheikh Hasina in her speech last Tuesday kept silent about the Bill, and emphasized more on the resignation of the Prime Minister and handing over of power to the caretaker government. This we would like to see as a 'window of opportunity'. We think by remaining silent Sheikh Hasina is giving an indication of a possible amicable solution to the present political crisis if the PM resigns.

With Begum Zia's request to the President to form a non-party government as soon as possible, an action she took with courage and determination in the face of strong objection from powerful party quarters, the readiness of the PM to resign becomes clear. The need for resignation has been made further necessary by the memorandum of the secretaries to the President, in which the secretaries of the Republic have refused to work till a neutral government is in place. The opposition in its press briefing last night has also indicated that PM's resignation will open up the opportunity for solution of all political problems.

We, therefore, feel that the ball is now in the President's court. Without wasting a moment further he should consult with the most recently retired chief justice of the Supreme Court and, assuming that he is agreeable, invite him to form a non-party government and simultaneously ask Begum Zia to hand over power. This should happen by the end of today so that non-cooperation and all other forms of agitational activities can be withdrawn from the following morning. Finally, we see light at the end of the tunnel.

Mr President please do not delay the materialisation of the process even for a moment.

BTV's Autonomy

The Bangladesh Television (BTV) is running short of both programmes and artistes. This is because artistes, responding to the non-cooperation movement of the Opposition parties, have boycotted the national TV channel. The artistes are not to blame. Anyone who cares for self-esteem and personal integrity cannot feel at ease with any association with the electronic medium that has earned considerable infamy for lacking authenticity. The electronic media have been used — better say abused — as a mouthpiece of the government and to some extent of the ruling party. The politicisation of the electronic media was taken to the extreme by Ershad and the BNP government has ably matched the general's feat.

If the BTV has mastered the art of disseminating one-sided information, its inadequacy in the entertainment area is no less glaring. So, here is a medium that has failed the nation on almost all counts. But the compelling fact is that the BTV or the radio are run on people's money. And the same people are given a raw deal — no matter whether there is an autocrat ruling the country or an elected government at the helm. This is absurd. What the people expect is that the national media project their hopes and aspirations.

But we had come close to a solution to the problem when, after the fall of Ershad, the three-party agreement, inter alia, envisaged complete autonomy of the electronic media. The BNP government has not evidently honoured the agreement. Now that there is a universal consensus for a neutral caretaker government to oversee future national elections, it is only in the fitness of things that the radio and TV are granted full autonomy without delay.

To the Editor...

Mujib's role

Sir, I was writing this letter when I was listening to running commentary on our Independence Day parade. I could not help feeling that I am watching Shakespeare's Hamlet without Prince of Denmark. I entirely agree with the commentator that our armed forces people have played a valiant role after Pak army crackdown. But what about similar role played by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his colleagues who throughout their whole lives strives for independence of Bangladesh. How can we remain silent about them? Even after 25 years of independence if we are unable to face truth we are doomed as a nation. History will not forgive us.

country after independence. But there cannot be two opinions on his contribution and struggle to bring Bangladesh into existence. Unfortunately lack of clarity of thought is the hallmark of our nation. This is why even today we cannot distinguish between hartal, aboradh and sit-ins. And the political leaders also do not provide any clarifications. Are they unable or unwilling.

A.K.N. Ahmed Dhaka

Secretariat employees, two mastans and Amanullah tangle

Sir, The bare facts of the case are that Mr Amanullah Aman, newly appointed Minister of State for Education, went to the Secretariat to attend office or whatever it is which is his place of work. There were people accompanying him which is neither unexpected nor undesirable. Mr Amanullah rode an elevator and went away. Some people accompanying the State Minis-

WE may scrap the 6th parliament but can we re-write history? We may force the results of a controversial election upon a nation, but can we live with it? While the entire nation is literally battling with the demon within, it is important to put things in perspective. Small as it may seem, the differing opinion of feuding political parties and their failure to come to a consensus is causing the nation to pay very dearly and leaving behind grave consequences for the next generation.

In every honesty the public is exasperated and unable to rationalise. It will not be wrong to say that majority of public no longer wish to side with any political party under the current circumstances; after all it is clear that this battle is not for people's right but for individual might.

It is ironic that both the government and the opposition seem totally indifferent to the miseries of the common people and to the devastation of the nation; none having any urgency to resolve the current political impasse. Inherent in political leaders is the feeling that the country is an inherited property which seem to justify all their bizarre actions. After all, people never gave anyone the right to throw away crores of public money on so-called elections and referendums or to destroy country's economy by

calling hartals and non-cooperation movement, obviously to achieve individual ambitions. Already this nation has lost millions of dollars in exports and God knows how many more billions of dollars in future business and opportunities!

All are motivated by the lust of power, and nothing short, seems to satisfy them. Democracy is merely a 'cloak' of convenience. How can the entire nation be forced to accept individual's views? How can anyone justify suffocating one's own chest to death so he may obey? Perhaps all are acts of desperation and frustration. Indeed when rationality fails as it does in case of our governments, oppositions resort to unfair means. It is simply infuriating to even think that despite a clear withdrawal of 147 members from Jatiya Shangshad, the ruling party made a complete mockery of the MPs. Constitution had no interest to serve at that time. It is, however, that same Constitution which seems so important and so sacred now; Convenience, of course!

The government has apparently failed to maintain law and order in the country and to protect the lives and property

of its citizens and no attestation is required. Therefore, the government should have tendered its resignation in compliance to its oath of office. Sadly though, such ideologies are merely fantasies. How pathetic it is when a minister of the government whom the nation has entrusted with great responsibility does not hesitate asking the citizens to seek compensation from opposition political parties. It only makes one wonder what will it take for any of us to ever accept responsibility and perhaps resignation.

Today we are on the verge of self destruction; sadly, there is no real enemy, no goal. Some of us are proud of having completed a one-party, rigged election while others feel proud of a so-called movement to oust democratically-elected government, prematurely. It is sickening to even try to comprehend the ideologies which surround our political leadership. How can we destroy this nation's democracy by forcibly legitimising a one party election and how can we force the fall of a government for both parties are irresponsible, immoral and insane?

Bad as it may seem, we must break out of this monster within. Nothing is universally

right for a nation, but we must accept what is good for our nation and for us all. Neither the controversial election nor the Ashofjoq Ardalan was or is good for us and may well have been the wrong thing to do. We are only humans and make mistakes which we can alter but never erase. History will prevail. Despite any cancellation of the 6th-parliament it will remain within us and in our history. People have, over time, learned to reconcile and so should we. Let us all use this as a lesson and pledge never to attempt another one party election in future; perhaps a resolution may be passed in the next parliament with all the political parties as signatories. The world never approved, but after all reconciled with both Japan and Germany on their atrocities during World War II. Let us, therefore, also reconcile for the greater interest of the nation and for our future generation, for they will live to see what we leave behind.

An alparty fair election is unquestionably desired by majority of Bangladeshi citizens. Modalities can not be all that difficult since we have been through similar situations before. After all, we are a nation not without intellectuals and capable leadership. The current government should resign not because the opposition demands so, but because it also feels the nation needs so.

Indian Elections and Illusions

In India, the "hawala" scandal has blown the sanctity and integrity of the electoral vote as a purchasable commodity. In Pakistan, the people have been handicapped by at least three military hiccups, yet its democracy survives in better fettle than India's.

THE India one sees in suggestive advertisements on Zee TV and Soni Channels is far removed from the misery faced by its teeming masses, seen on graphic display on the street and the alleys of most of the mega-cities like Mumbai (former Bombay), Calcutta, Madras, etc.

Unlike in any city of town in Pakistan or for that matter Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, the sidewalk of these urban metropolises, bustling with humanity during the daytime, becomes one giant bedroom for the poverty-stricken who have no other place to put their heads down.

The illusion once seen on TV is meant to camouflage this reality, a stark contrast that escapes public perception since TVs will seldom display such adversity on prime time. This allows people like Sonia Gandhi to talk about a "successful" cultural invasion of Pakistan.

In contrast to this abject mass poverty, Pakistan does have people below the poverty-line but much less in percentage numbers.

The cost-spiral of daily consumer items has certainly reached alarming proportions but at least they are available, in comparison to the common use in many places in India are not.

We have our problems and one should not gloss these over or sit back in complacency but the hard fact of the matter remains that the resources and ability of our masses as well as the environment of tolerance is far better in coping with the vagaries of daily life than so-called secular India's and no amount of brilliant TV commercials can hide this fact.

India's great advantage is the development of its democratic institutions, particularly the Press, mainly because democracy has been in place since its independence. Even here, the "Hawala" scandal has blown the sanctity and integrity of the electoral vote as a purchasable commodity. In Pakistan we have been handicapped by at least three military hiccups and the threat of a number of others, yet our democracy survives in better fettle than India's.

India's vast size gives its enormous business potential, in real terms one can probably sell 120 million bars of soap in Pakistan, in contrast there is a consumer market for 700-800 million bars in India. For a foreign investor, India (like China) is an enormous potential market to be exploited and as such looked at by MNCs

favourably their corporate mouths drooling in anticipation of possible profits.

Pakistan made a fast start in creating a market economy in the early 90s before getting caught-up in domestic political problems. Slow to react in the initial stages, Sardar Manmohan Singh (India's Sartaj Aziz) has virtually copied all of Pakistan plans (pages and cover included) and implemented them in letter and-spirit, using the advantage of India's size to deepen investor interest despite glitches all along the investment route, particularly recalcitrant State Governments not in tune with the policies of the central Government in New Delhi.

powerful regional parties led by charismatic leaders (for their widows), while Bengal is likely to remain communist under a pragmatic leftist government.

At electoral stake is the heartland of India, comprising, UP, Bihar, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Orissa. At this time, except for perhaps Orissa, the Congress is likely to lose in all the other states. The Indian Central Government is most likely to be a patch-up coalition that will have difficulty in running the Union as easily as has been done by one strong Congress Party during the past half-century except for a short pe-

AS SEE IT

Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

Some of the resultant tensions have been papered over but even then Pakistan's private power investment plans remains far ahead of India's despite growing financial constraints due to our worsening foreign exchange reserves liquidity position.

As India approaches general elections in April-May 1996, problems are likely to deepen. For 45 years, the Congress Party has been a monolith that has kept the facade of a united India. That myth is likely to explode in the next 45 days as nation-wide parties that have emerged in the past decade such as Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and to an extent Janata Dal (JD) eat into the Congress Party's once secure solid majority. That may be not so worrying as the fact that regional parties such as Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) in Bihar, DMK (and clones) in Tamil Nadu, Akali Dal in Punjab, etc will not only capture State Governments but take a major chunk of central legislators. This will propel a motley political group into a potent third force in Indian politics holding the balance of power.

For the record, other than the absolute revolt in Indian-occupied Kashmir where elections are scheduled but unlikely to take place except as a stage-managed event, a state of insurrection barely beneath the surface continues in Indian Punjab, Assam, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura, Bodoland, Meghalaya, Manipur, Gorkhaland. Here the bureaucracy will favour a Congress victory. The Indian South has a handful of

riod when Mrs India Gandhi ran afoul of the Courts.

Most analysts blame India's fractious tendencies on the weak leadership of aging PM Narasimha Rao. Nothing can be further from the truth. The Indian PM is a very politician who has conceived, manipulated and cajoled various permutations and combinations of factions within Congress and allied smaller parties to keep a facade of unity going. In actual fact the disintegration of India on ethnic, cultural, religious lines has been an ongoing process for some time, the papering-over process has come undone over the past few years.

No amount of TV commercials can hide the reality that India today is a country beset with a siege from within, an internal crisis that cannot be camouflaged under a world of illusion anymore. In order to be successful in the coming elections Narasimha Rao has moved internally by letting the courts take the initiative in the "Hawala" scandal, a saga of political bribery that reaches deep and touches every major political party, including some sacrificial goats within Congress for good measure. The biggest victim has been the BJP leader, LK Advani, who before the scandal broke was perceived as an holier-than-thou politician, the most likely kingmaker after the coming elections. The likely "rebels" within Congress have been eliminated or scared out of their wits. While on the surface it is the work of India's Central Board of Investigation (CBI);

If it can be proved that the employees are on the wrong side, they are liable to punishment commensurate with the gravity of the offense. Compromise in administrative matter only worsens the situation. But if the government employees are found to be on the right side, the other party should be penalised. This will be justice done by whoever is the authority. In this case the authority seems to be the Prime Minister because a Minister of State is involved directly or indirectly.

My opinion is that compromise will not solve the problem, but fire below will flare up again with the slightest of wind. I have not mentioned the possibility of resignation, because resignation is the privilege of the honourable and we have so long refused to learn the political culture of resignation on principle or policy while others have been resigning with honour even to save themselves and others from embarrassment.

A M Choudhury Dhanmondi R/A, Dhaka

Army Deployment is Not the Answer

by Sultana Nahar

A professor from the United States recently came to Bangladesh for his research work. He called on me at my residence on a reference from his fellow colleague. We were discussing various contemporary topics dominating the world affairs. The political situation of Bangladesh also came up for discussion. At one point the professor whispered in my ear with a tinge of alarm and sarcasm in his voice: "Sultana, your Army Headquarters is in close proximity of your PM's Office." In fact, before hearing such a statement from a foreigner the proximity issue never crossed my mind.

If promptly understood the significance of his comment. Since independence, Bangladesh has experienced a couple of military takeovers. Pentagon, Headquarters of the Defence Services of the USA is located in Arlington, Virginia across the river Potomac, whereas the US capital, the White House and civil ministries are located in Washington DC. Pentagon is housed apart from the civilian centres of the government in part, to maintain a proper distance between the civilian and military administration of the United States.

In the year 1958 when I was very young I came to learn that Martial Law was imposed in the country. The meaning and impact of Martial Law was not known to me during those days. I can still remember that suddenly everything became quiet. People stopped talking loudly. An atmosphere of fear and anxiety prevailed around us. People were stopped by the army jawans and slapped for rolling up the sleeves of shirt. Youths with long hair were forced to be short off their hair. People took such actions of the jawans as a part of the Martial Law regulations.

Since that was the first time Martial Law was imposed whatever the jawans did, we thought that as a part of military drill. We, the children, were very scared and mother compelled us to go to bed early on the threat of arrival of military. Even mosquitoes and flies fled Dhaka for forced cleanliness drive. That was my first experience of military rule. My subsequent experiences of military rule was in 1969, 1975 and 1982. I was then mature enough to understand the meaning and impact of military rule, and today, I am in a position to say a few words about it on the basis of my gathered experience.

Martial Law comes with a bang on the pretext of civilian misrule and ends in a whimper surrendering the honesty and efficiency by being involved in corruption and indiscipline in the process. It is in no way a substitute of civilian rule, however, corrupt and inefficient it may be. As people are the source of all power, the issue should better be left to the people alone to handle and remove such civil administration through political process.

Defence forces of a country are symbol of national unity and are maintained to defend the country from external aggression. It is a national institution and enjoys the love and admiration of the people. It must not be dragged into civil affairs and subjected to question and criticism.

Bangladesh Army is now a patriotic, disciplined force and in professional field it has earned worldwide recognition for its peace-keeping work in different countries. We would like to forget the unpleasant

memories of military takeovers of 1975 and 1982. The nation recalls with pride and gratitude the tremendous service our Armed forces rendered during the aftermath of '91 cyclone.

I read with alarm that the present government has deployed the armed forces to restore law and order in the country. It is of course mandatory for the aid of civil Government when called for. But such mandatory provision should be, in my opinion, invoked only in case of great natural calamity and not for quelling popular unrest against an undemocratic Government.

Political chaos and crisis have engulfed the country. The ruling party and the opposition parties are engaged in an ominous political battle with no side willing to yield an inch from their position. The people have been bearing the brunt. The nascent democracy of this country became the worst victim. People are being killed, economy is being ruined and traffic of people and goods are being hampered but who could care less.

People of eminence of different professions implored upon the government and the opposition parties to settle the political stalemate amicably. The editor of The Daily Star came with a special appeal in his paper before the abortive presidential dialogue. Dr Kamal Hossain gave a pragmatic suggestion that no amount of convincing argument could bring the feuding parties to a negotiating table. The voice of reason has fallen on deaf ears. The country is fast marching towards total ruination.

Deployment of army is yet another blunder. Already it had to face undue and undeserved criticism for its futile drive for recovery of arms. Law and order problem was created by this government by its inept handling of the political situation. It is, therefore, the responsibility of the government to solve the problem politically without involving the army. It must be remembered that a major portion of the budget is spent for the armed forces, which comes from people's pocket. This huge amount should be spent to keep our armed forces on the highest scale of professionalism.

By deploying armed forces to assist civil administration, the self-claimed democratic government has created a still worse situation. Such step has placed the national army against the people's stand. How soon and in which manner does the government intend to restore normalcy in the country with the Army's assistance?

When there is a dispute in a family, the head of the family comes forward and makes concession to keep the family together. Similarly, it is the solemn responsibility of the government to come forward to accommodate the demands of the opposition parties. Such concession if made will not be a defeat of the government or victory for the opposition as the concession is meant for welfare of the country and of the people.

Government simply cannot run the country without the cooperation of the people. Intention to cooperate emanates from the core of heart. To restore normalcy in public life, normal behaviour is expected. Let good sense and patriotism prevail upon the government. Deployment of the Army is not the answer.

Dhaka Day by Day

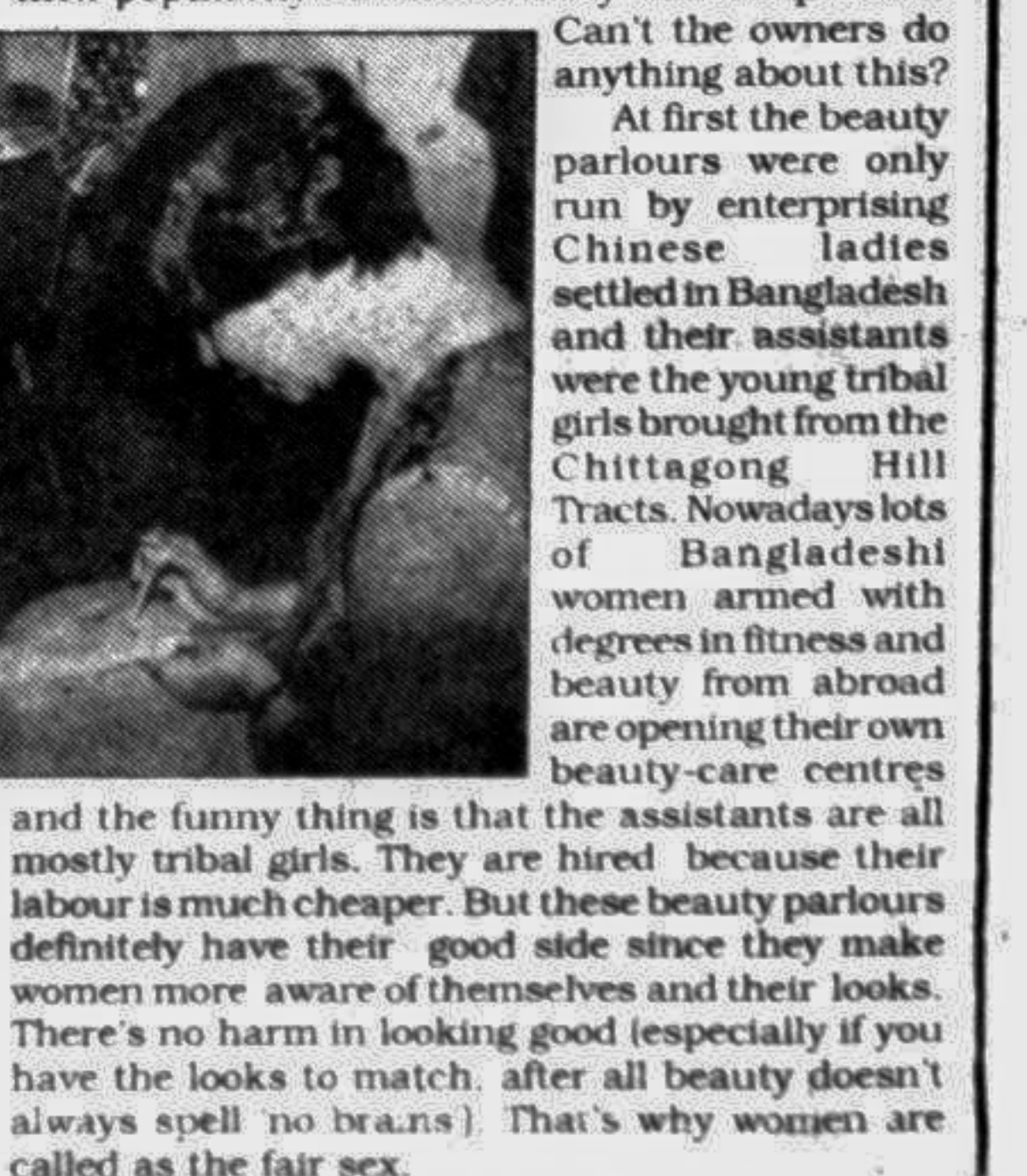
Where Selling Point is Beauty

by Tanya Mahnaz Huq

For the last few years, it seems that awareness for personal beauty and health has reached its peak.

The women of Dhaka have never been as conscious of beauty, health and fashion as they are now (due credit given to the advent of Star Plus, Zee TV etc.). Beauty parlours and fitness centres have been sprouting like mushrooms all over the city and the female of the Dhakaites are enthusiastically waxing, bleaching and plucking and massaging and exercising their way to beauty and fitness. Beauty parlours were there even 20 or 30 years before but then only a select crowd went there to get their hair done. Now almost everyone goes to the beauty parlours to do everything — from hair-do to make-up, to nail and skin care etc. Even brides go there to do their elaborate hairstyles and make-up. And recently some of the parlours also have fitness centres alongside with facilities for exercise, aerobics, yoga, herbal skin treatment etc. They cater to one's need for a healthy and beautiful body.

Of course all the beauty parlours are not of the same standard. Some of the newer ones are nice and clean with all the latest exercise and skin-care equipment. But some of them are so dirty and ill-equipped that it makes one quite scared! For instance, there are one or two well-known parlours in Dhanmondi which are minting money because of their popularity but are so filthy and dilapidated. Can't the owners do anything about this? At first the beauty parlours were only run by enterprising Chinese ladies settled in Bangladesh and their assistants were the young tribal girls brought from the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Nowadays lots of Bangladeshi women armed with degrees in fitness and beauty from abroad are opening their own beauty-care centres and the funny thing is that the assistants are all mostly tribal girls. They are hired because their labour is much cheaper. But these beauty parlours definitely have their good side since they make women more aware of themselves and their looks. There's no harm in looking good (especially if you have the looks to match). After all beauty doesn't always spell no brains. That's why women are called as the fair sex.



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