

# One Year after Pinochet his Shadow still Looms

Luis Tricot writes from Santiago

**Just 12 months ago 17 years of harsh military dictatorship ended in Chile when General Augusto Pinochet stepped down and a 17-party coalition took over. Today the government of Patricio Aylwin remains popular, but the shadow of Pinochet still looms and the question of human rights haunts people.**

ONE year ago, Chileans held their breath as General Augusto Pinochet handed power to Patricio Aylwin, their first democratically-elected president in 17 years.

Aylwin, a lawyer and leader of a broad coalition of democratic parties, stood, clearly moved, before a crowded House of Parliament. The Parliament building had not been finished in time.

It was perhaps a symbol of the peculiar type of transition process from dictatorship to democracy taking place in this country: unfinished Parliament building and unfinished political business.

For although General Pinochet and the armed forces are theoretically out of power, their shadow still looms. They are conspicuous in every important political issue.

So much so that the new Government has been extremely careful not to offend the military, and has gone to great lengths to "de-activate" potential times-bombs that may affect the prestige of the armed institutions.

A committee was set up by Parliament to investigate obscure business transactions involving the army and Pinochet's son. The son received a payment of nearly a million dollars from the army for an industrial complex he had acquired. Many thought the firm bought by the army was not worth half the sum paid.

The committee found no evidence either to condemn or absolve the younger Pinochet. It was clear that the government—pressured by the army—influenced committee members to prevent the investigation going further.

Some of that pressure came on December 19, when the army carried out what it called

"communication exercises", a euphemistic way of saying that troops had been confined to barracks and kept on maximum alert.

Government and other political leaders were caught completely by surprise. When finally, at 1 am, Minister of Defence Particio Rojas said "these are only routine manoeuvres and everything is under control," no one believed him.

It was a long night: the army had unequivocally warned the country it would not accept any accusations of corruption or of violating human rights.

The human rights question is one of the most delicate issues for the government. Aylwin set up a committee headed by Raul Rettig "to investigate all cases of violation of human rights resulting in death that took place between the 11th of September 1973 and the 11th of March 1990.

After nine months the Rettig report has been published. Its pages detail over 2,000 cases of torture, summary executions, kidnappings and disappearances.

Human rights groups and some political sectors—mainly the left—have criticised the committee's terms of refer-

ence because it did not consider cases of torture not resulting in death. Perhaps 90 per cent of those arrested

during the years of military rule were cruelly tortured. The report also did not contain the names of those responsible for

the crimes. That leads many to ask. What is the point of such an exercise? The government seeks to put the past behind it and works towards a much-needed "national reconciliation." Most political parties, including past and present supporters of the military regime, support this position.

However, human rights activists see the government move as an indirect way of decreeing a concealed amnesty for torturers and murderers. This is immoral, they say, when 300 political prisoners are still in Chilean jails.

Those who fought to restore democracy are deprived of their freedom and those who tortured and killed walk freely on the country's streets.

The Government will push forward its human rights policies in spite of opposition from minority groups. It still commands substantial popular support, enabling it to carry out its political, economic and social programmes with little difficulty.

The last opinion polls showed about 55 per cent support for the government and Aylwin's performance, down from 68 per cent six months earlier.

The government coalition, led by the Christian Demo-



cratic Party, has strengthened its political position. To clean their image, right-wing parties have distanced themselves from the former military government and want to win the Presidential elections three years hence.

The Left-wing parties have been greatly weakened by divisions and internal disputes. Many people may not like the Government, but see no alternative. As 26-year-old cab driver Carlos Trejo said: "Aylwin has not fulfilled his election promises, the minimum wage was raised from 18,000 pesos a month, to 26,000 pesos per month (about 80 dollars). This is a cruel joke... but it is better to be poor under a democratic regime than under a military one."

After initial apprehensions, businessmen and industrialists now seem "happy" with government handling of the economy. After all, little or nothing has changed.

There was little economic growth last year and inflation reached 30 per cent, but the future looks better. The flow of North American, European and Japanese capital is substantial.

After a year of Aylwin, Chileans do not appear particularly jubilant. Instead they seem apathetic toward politics and the exercise of democratic rights.

The presidential campaign slogan was: "If Aylwin wins, the people win." At a public rally to commemorate the first anniversary of the election victory, President Aylwin asked the audience: "Have the people won?" The reply was a deafening "No." -GEMINI NEWS

[ Exchange rate: \$1=337 Pesos ]

LUIS TRICOT is a Chilean journalist writing and broadcasting on Latin American affairs.

## Kuwait's Reconstruction : How Can We Contribute

To say that Kuwait can never be the same again is not only to say the obvious but also to wish a bright and democratic future for a country that has suffered a brutal aggression. Sometimes a national crisis can be turned into an opportunity for moving forward in new directions that perhaps an uninterrupted continuation of the past would never have permitted. That is not to say that the war was good, but only to point out that events have overtaken wishes, and that many sacred premises have been rendered obsolete. It is also to point out that ignoring this reality and to try and rebuild Kuwait on the basis of outdated assumptions would be to let down Kuwaitis who fought in the resistance, as well as the international community that so generously gave people and resources to restore Kuwait's sovereignty.

Following her independence in 1961, Kuwait got off to a good start with a quasi-democratic constitution promulgated the following year. It provided for elections, a national assembly and a government somewhat responsible to the electorate. It was this constitution and the six subsequent elections for national assemblies held under it, that gave Kuwait the image of being the most liberal and democratic of Gulf States, leading to its becoming a major centre of trade and banking in the region.

Now that Kuwait is reborn as a sovereign state, so must its democratic institutions. We are much too aware of the traditions of these emirates to suggest any drastic change. But our own attachment to democratic values is too strong to permit us to be mere onlookers. The restoration of the '62 constitution could be a starting point — only just that. To it must be added an enlarged franchise which will be far larger than the 65,000 men who are the only ones now allowed to vote because they trace their citizenship from 1920 or earlier. Women must also be allowed to vote as also those who have been living in Kuwait for a long time. A better deal for guest workers must also be in the cards. The prosperity that Kuwait enjoyed prior to being invaded was in no small degree due to the intellectual and physical inputs of the foreign workers.

Bangladesh as an active participant in the liberation of Kuwait naturally looks forward to being an active partner in her reconstruction. The shattered economy will have to be set in order. Roads, bridges, offices, schools, hospitals and probably everything else will have to be rebuilt. Here Bangladesh can make her humble contribution. Our construction companies can do as good a job as any and at competitive prices. The capacities of our professionals are well known in the region and should be made use of in this critical stage of Kuwait's history.

In this connection an initiative by the interim government in the form of sending a high level delegation to Kuwait to look into the possible areas where our expertise and manpower can be of use, may prove to be very useful. Better still the prospective head of the elected government may undertake a trip to Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, and look into the possibility of Bangladesh's involvement in the reconstruction of these two countries. If some progress can be achieved, it will definitely go well with the public as another feather in the new leader's cap.

## Forty Thousand Divorces

A report from Netrokona last week said over 39,800 marriages were terminated in three years in the 67 upazilas of the greater Mymensingh district alone. Non-payment of dowry was cited as reason number one for the marriages to fail.

Both demanding and accepting dowers are illegal. Punishing the wife for failing to deliver against such illegal and immoral demand should have been doubly criminal and should have, as such, called for particularly harsh punishment. But in reality we hear of no one being punished on the score while the whole society converts itself into a dowry chasing monster with its lolling tongue salivating in anticipation and its teeth gnashing to threaten and frighten. Law has in this case failed to inject sanity and consideration in an unrelenting process of dehumanisation of our society. Simply because there's no agency keen enough on the enforcement of dowry-inhibiting laws. It cannot be said that government, the prime enforcer of all law, has a flattering record in this regard.

The problem is inherently more amenable to social rather than legal action. And the dangerous spread of the dowry disease is symptomatic of not only a society incapable of standing up to such crippling social erosion but of one eager to give in and capitulate to inhumanity, to all things that destroy society. This should be addressed as such and no less. Not by government alone but more at the social level—if we are still left with something of that, that is. With the fair wind of democracy blowing again, this should become the political activists' basic work together with their work on the literacy front. It should have been first of all a business of the cultural people—writers and musicians, those in drama and in the media. The trendsetting elite at every station of life could set examples of dowry-less marriages.

The report from Netrokona sheds light on an important albeit unappreciated aspect of the marriage and family problem. An overwhelming proportion of marriages among the rural poor are never registered. It is very easy for the man to come out of an unregistered wedlock. That, according to the report, accounts for the second big reason for many weddings stopping short of fruition. The poor ones do not simply have the money to pay for the registration. And the report makes a plea that the rate of fee be brought down in view of that. We strongly endorse this to government for consideration and early action.

## Will Iraq See a Bright Future Again?

by Shamsul Abedin

IN this modern age war has been examined in terms of grand strategy. It is classified by type — land, sea, air warfare; by extent — limited and total warfare; by means — nuclear, conventional, chemical, biological warfare; and by method — guerilla warfare. Commando activities and intelligence network are also factors, and considered as back-up performance for major military cooperation. Above all is use of nuclear weapons by application of modern and advanced technology. However, our combat experience is limited to two bombs dropped on Japanese cities in the World War II. In the Third World War (we obviously wish not occur) the catastrophe may just be unimaginable. In any case civilized nations are deadly against any large scale conflict positively to avert bloodshed, high war operation costs, destruction and post-war economic setback. Therefore diplomatic fronts are preferred to the war fronts to settle disputes. Superpower like Soviet Union reconciles the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe without embarking on any confrontation.

For centuries Middle East has served as a bridge between the three continents of Asia, Europe and Africa. In the twentieth century the area's importance has been further enhanced by the discovery of vast oil resources. Till 1990, the Gulf rulers maintained safe distance from any major conflict of other Arab nations with Israel over Palestinian cause. Nevertheless the warring Arab nations received financial assistance from oil producing Gulf nations to meet their cost of war operation against Israel. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the Islamic revolution in Iran and 1980 war between Iran and Iraq unleashed destabilising forces in the Gulf — a region the western world crucially depends

upon. During eight years of war with Iran and following it, Iraq emerged as the largest military power in the area with financial backing of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. President Saddam Hussain, one year after the termination of hostilities with Iran, without restructuring the shattered economy of his country, staked his regime's survival and his country's economic future on August 2, 1990 in one of the most unexpected gambles of Middle East history by ordering a full scale invasion of Kuwait.

President Saddam has been in politics for nearly three-and-a-half decades and on balance it is very difficult to conclude whether his military adventure in Kuwait was a cold blooded operation or he had been trapped by his own political opponents. As it was a clear cut case of aggression and breach of International peace United Nations Security Council passed several resolutions seeking Iraq's unconditional withdrawal from Kuwait. A number of former Heads of the governments of developed countries visited Baghdad to persuade the Iraq leader to honour UN Security Council resolutions. Last moment approach by French President Francois Mitterrand and UN Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar also went unheeded. Disobliged to be the Soviet President Gorbachev.

### Destruction allowed

President Saddam Hussain of Iraq has allowed destruction of his country, and under his leadership the destiny of 17 million innocent resourceful inhabitants is uncertain and bleak. Iraq has lost its international prestige too. What benefit President Saddam derived for his nation from the occupation of Kuwait and out of the war with the US-led coal-

ition forces? Many of the major cities of Iraq including Baghdad are partly or totally in ruins. The human, material and moral destruction is beyond comprehensions. Entire population of Iraq is suffering the ravage of aftermath — food shortage, disease, lack of sanitation, and dislocations. Iraq's military capabilities have substantially been reduced. Civil administration has already collapsed and the country is likely to face a severe crisis of basic necessities. Iraqi leader is now facing political turmoil inside his country. Post-war civil commotion is turning into a civil war and may cost another 100 thousand casualties.

Desert is a 'paradise' for tank and ground battle as there is no natural defence which create obstruction to major offensive and aerial bombardment while without air and in cases naval support, any military success is impossible despite the numerical superiority and quality of ground forces. But from the very beginning of the hostilities Iraqi Air Force was inactive and their inferior naval force almost destroyed. After almost six weeks of unabated aerial bombardment the objective of coalition forces was virtually achieved and with almost unresisted ground offensive the ultimate independence of Kuwait was restored. It's a lesson for any country assuming itself as powerful to grab or invade its small neighbour by force of arms, to check the temptation.

### Economic progress

Till 1980 the economic progress of Iraq was significant. The post World War I period witnessed striking advance in Iraq's economic importance based overwhelmingly on oil production and its emergence into international affairs as a leading Arab state

and a factor in East-West rivalry. There seemed to have been far more progress after President Saddam became de jure ruler than had been achieved during his eleven years of nominal power sharing which ended in July 1979 when President Ahmed Hasan Al Bakr bowed out on ground of ill-health. After war with Iran it had been anticipated that Iraq would again be a major oil producer. In 1980 it was forth in the world, and second only to Saudi Arabia. Whatever happens, oil for many years remains the backbone of economy. And Iraqi oil is generally excellent in quality, higher than average Middle East crudes. There are other important resources too. For thousands of years the fertile alluvial plains of the Tigris and the Euphrates basins made it one of the wealthiest lands. In addition, its large and relatively educated population provided an indigenous labour force few of its neighbours could ever hope to match. The country was self-sufficient in consumer goods such as textiles, food-stuff, paper, sugar, tobacco products and many construction materials. Between 1971 and 1980 some 21 billion US dollars was spent on industrial development. Trucks, cars, diesel engines were indigenously manufactured on a substantial scale. Agriculture which Saddam likes to call "perpetual oil" was certainly one of the brightest feature of Iraq's economic future. The main crops are wheat, barley, cotton, rice and the famous dates of which Iraq is the largest producer. All in all Iraq's prospects of reaching a self-sufficiency in the foreseeable future was certainly better than any other major oil producer. Education was receiving considerable emphasis, and enrollment in five universities in 1980 was 90,000. Overall a disciplined nation Iraq's civil

administration was efficient and more or less free from corruption in comparison with other third world countries. The country has produced high calibre scientists, physicians, bankers and engineers.

Positive response to 15th January deadline from Iraqi dictator was much more better than present unhappy submission, and he missed chance of a face saving situation either. Saddam Hussain's loyal elite Republican Guards (raised from his district) — better paid and better cared, and well equipped than other regular forces of Iraq, is the last resort for survival of his regime. In addition to mass destruction President Saddam Hussain of Iraq cannot also escape the responsibility for disunity in the Arab world.

### Hope for future

Within a couple of months Kuwait will again be exporting oil. The tiny Sheikdom has got friendly ties with almost all the countries of the world. On the contrary, if the policy of Iraq's leadership remains the same reconstruction of Iraq will be a tremendous and lengthy task. Let us hope, with the passage of time, change of Iraq's internal and external policy would ease its joining the peace-loving nations in the Gulf as well as utilization of potentialities to flourish again. Then, most likely Iraq will be another Japan within next few decades as it has territorial ambitions as well. Mr. Slobodan Milosevic, its communist president, wants to incorporate into the republic those surrounding areas inhabited by Serbian minorities. This would lead to a Greater Serbia. It would mean that Serbia would control the political agenda, a goal which the late President Tito spent 35 years trying to frustrate.

Maintaining that integrity can no longer be sustained, or justified, in the face of military intimidation, human rights abuses and territorial ambitions. If Yugoslavia is to continue as a viable state, and move closer towards Europe, which is a desirable direction, confederation seems the only option.

In such a confederation, certain powers, including foreign policy, taxation, and defence, would be devolved to the republics. The army would remain this. The republics would have to make compromises by agreeing to a national currency, a central bank empowered to influence monetary policy and a federal body equipped to implement Yugoslavia's international commitments. All the republics would have to respect the rights of all the ethnic minorities.

As the weeks pass, foreign investors are staying away from the instability. That instability could spread across the Balkans. The time has come for Yugoslavs to choose between a loose confederation and civil war.

— Financial Times, London

## To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

### Kiddy affair

Sir, The first world summit for children at the UN Headquarters in New York was an assurance by the world guardians like "Hey kids, we're with ya."

No doubt the world does care about the children, which is what every child needs, desires, and deserves as did the today's grown-ups years ago — a universal truth that will hopefully be a tradition

from now on. Better yet, by all judgments, the occasion was a very spirited and optimistic altogether, unparalleled in the civilized world so far, and should have been brought about long ago. "better late than never" is the only consolation for the present.

However, the UN backyard was the venue for the grand gala of the multi-cultural children of the world, who demonstrated their

national/ cultural aspects — a unique show by its own standard. Bangladesh presented Monipuri (one of her sub-cultures) and was naturally acclaimed by the audience. But, indoors, she projected her smarter diplomatic developments at the get-together and seems to have gained a great deal for Bangladeshi children "who will inherit the earth tomorrow" — no kidding!

Bangladesh is working hard with such zeal for her children to be leaders in the world of tomorrow, and the evidences are the Shishu Academy, Kachi Kan-dha, Chander Hut, Mukul Fouz, Ershad Shisu Paribar, UCEP, SOS, and so forth. But .... never mind.

It's only a "Kiddy Affair". "Really"?

M. Rahman  
Zila School Road  
Mymensingh 2200

### Drug addicts

Sir, It is known to all of us how bad drug addiction is for health. This is not only confined to the person affected with the habit, but often its extended result may be extremely harmful to those who come in contact with them.

A recent news item said that a person, found to be a drug addict, killed his brother by locking him in the boot of his car and setting fire to it. The reason given by him was the

brother's continuous coughing.

I am sure that a person in his senses would not have done such a thing. For coughing is something which is usually not under a person's control, and if someone is doing it to tease others, I am definite that the punishment is not death.

He called his brother's death a barbecue, which a sane person would hardly think of. This incident took place in Australia.

Rima Taher, Banani.