

# New democracy needs supportive neighbour

There's more, much more, to the East Timor crisis than bad governance, says **Sahe Da Silva**

THE political unrest in East Timor has left the front pages of Australian newspaper and some stability appears to have returned since the appointment of new Prime Minister Jose Ramos Horta last week.

But there is still much work to be done to ensure the fledging democracy develops into a strong, and peaceful, neighbour.

For many Australians, drawn to the plight of the East Timorese during their campaign for independence, the recent violence might be puzzling.

It has been easy for the Australian Government and the media to simply blame former prime minister Mari Alkatiri for the breakdown of law and order in East Timor but the crisis goes much deeper and the issues take in race, personality and oil negotiations.

This year's uprising was the fourth attempt to destabilise the East Timor Government since the Fretilin party won power in 2001, in what was declared a free and fair election by the international community. Fretilin won 55 of the 88 parliamentary seats, with others taken by the Democratic Party (seven seats), the Social Democratic Party and the Social Democratic Associations (six seats each), and another seven by minor parties.

Now former interior minister Rogerio Lobato, along with Alkatiri, has been accused of creating a death squad in order to intimidate Alkatiri's political opponents. The main evidence is 11 weapons, surrendered with much pomp and fanfare on July 12 by Vincente de Concecao (Commander Railos) to the Prosecutor-General.

When the matter comes to court, the Prosecutor-General is bound to ask which political opponents Railos had been ordered to threaten.

Think about it. Does it make sense that Fretilin would waste time and energy harassing such a disparate and disjointed opposition?

Moreover, most of the 150,000 internally displaced persons are Fretilin supporters whose houses were burnt down and whose lives were threatened by young hoodlums organised to destabilise the country.

These same Fretilin supporters were asked by the leadership of the party to refrain from retaliation as confrontation could escalate into civil war. As in previous destabilisation in 2002, 2004 and 2005, it rested with the Fretilin members to act responsibly under the most extreme provocation.

If Railos was, as he has claimed, employed by Fretilin to intimidate opponents, where was he when its members were under siege in Dili?

If, as has been reported, Railos's group handed in 11 rifles (but no ammunition) on July 12, where are the other 19 rifles that ABC reported Liz Jackson showed us on her *Four Corners* program? Jackson reported that Railos had 30 men under his command all armed with weapons handed over by Lobato on the orders of Alkatiri. She presented a list of the guns' serial numbers as proof that Railos was genuine.

And the camera never lies?

Let us say that Lobato will have his day in court and evidence will be presented to support his claim that the Heckler and Koch 33 automatic rifles were given to Railos and his men in January 2004 in order to assist and train the Border Patrol Unit in bushcraft and guerrilla tactics.

As for former prime minister Alkatiri, he resigned on June 26 to forestall the threatened resignation of President Xanana Gusmao, which would have precipitated a deeper crisis for Timor-Leste.

He did not resign because of the relatively small protests or the allegations made against him by Railos. (In any event, Railos's allegations against Alkatiri remain just that. Alkatiri to date has no case to answer and has only been summoned by the Prosecutor-General to provide evidence in relation to Lobato's trial.)

In response to the crisis, Fretilin made its position very clear during its 20,000 strong rally on June 28-30.

During that rally, Fretilin sent a message to the President and to the nation calling for peace, the rule of law, the end of violence and respect for the Constitution.

The Fretilin rally, 10 times larger than any anti-Government rally, was entirely peaceful. However, in retaliation, anti-Government thugs burnt down homes of Fretilin leaders in Dili and other businesses linked with Fretilin, and then attacked the main TV and radio station to ensure that it did not broadcast reports of the Fretilin rally.

It is Fretilin and its leaders that deserve the strong support of all democratic people and organisations in Australia, to help Timor-Leste recover from this serious crisis.

East Timor needs Australia's support to ensure that the next elections are constitutional and free of manipulation and that its democratically elected government retains power through these early teething problems.

**Sahe Da Silva is the Fretilin representative for NSW. He will speak at Politics in the Pub tonight (6.30pm) at the Hamilton Station Hotel.**

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