

FRETILIN proceeds with Gleno rally despite security concerns

From correspondents in Timor Leste



FRETILIN supporters are confronted by petitioners and their supporters as they arrive in Gleno, Ermera district, Timor-Leste.

Source: <http://timor-online.blogspot.com>

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Amidst security concerns, FRETILIN staged a pre-election rally on 17 February 2007 in the football stadium in the town of Gleno in the Ermera district west of Dili. The rally was attended by around 3000 FRETILIN supporters, with security provided by members of the elite Portuguese Republican National Guard and Australian forces. The Gleno rally follows similar pre-election rallies held recently in Baucau and Same and is another example of FRETILIN's continuing strong support throughout Timor-Leste.

FRETILIN supporters stoned and abused

Credible sources from FRETILIN have informed TimorTruth that some members of the "petitioners", the term loosely used to describe army soldiers who deserted their

barracks in early 2006, and their supporters, physically attacked and verbally abused FRETILIN supporters throughout the course of the day. Some of the petitioners involved in these incidents were believed to have been armed with steyr rifles and grenades, although none of these weapons were used.

The attacks by some of the petitioners and their supporters included a stoning attack at Atabae on a convoy of 37 vehicles transporting FRETILIN supporters from the district of Bobonaro to Gleno. The resulting injuries to four people and the safety concerns forced the convoy of supporters to return home without having attended the Gleno rally. Supporters were also attacked as they made their way from Liquiçá to the rally and another group was attacked at Fatubesi as they made their way home. Two people were injured in these attacks.

At the rally itself, a small group of people continuously provoked FRETILIN members and its supporters in an attempt to disrupt proceedings. As with previous confrontations between FRETILIN and anti-FRETILIN forces, it was left to FRETILIN to refrain from retaliating and escalating the situation, despite the extreme provocation.

Security situation at Gleno

Security at the Gleno rally was always going to be a concern for FRETILIN members and its leaders. Ermera district, which does have a strong FRETILIN presence, has over the last year witnessed various anti-FRETILIN and anti-government activities. In early May 2006, a police officer was killed in Gleno when supporters of the army petitioners clashed with members of the Rapid Intervention Unit which were protecting the Secretary of State for Region III on an official visit to Gleno. Last week, local FRETILIN member and caretaker of the party headquarters in the district, Valente Soares was killed. Soares, an orphan, was only 24 years old. A suspect has been identified in relation to Soares' death but has yet to be detained.

Ermera was also, until recently, the cantonment area of rebel leader and key player in the May 2006 crisis, Major Alfredo Reinado and his group of heavily armed men. Reinado and his group were meant to be under strict surveillance by the Australian forces during their cantonment in Aifu, Ermera. However, TimorTruth understands that Reinado and his group disappeared from the cantonment area on 2 February 2007 and the whereabouts of the group have since been unknown to the general public.

Independent observers continue to ask why the Australian media still fails to point out that opponents of FRETILIN who have resorted to violence, including Major Reinado,

continue to escape capture, while FRETILIN leaders accused of any wrongdoing have agreed to subject themselves to the judicial system.



Above: FRETILIN supporters gather in Gleno

Source: <http://timor-online.blogspot.com>



Arriving by the truckload (pictured on the left) and supporters enjoying themselves at the rally despite the security concerns (pictured on the right)

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