

Amid continuing militia violence

UN threatens to call off East Timor poll

Peter Symonds
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Just days after Indonesia and Portugal signed a UN-brokered agreement for a vote to determine the future of East Timor, the UN has warned that it would call off the "consultation" scheduled for August 8 unless local militias are disarmed. Francesco Vendrell, a spokesman for UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, said all armed groups would have to lay down their weapons "by early July at least".

The UN warning comes amid continuing violence and intimidation by groups of pro-Indonesian militia against supporters of the pro-independence National Council for Timorese Resistance (CNRT). On Monday, at least five people were killed and an unknown number injured in a series of attacks that targetted the homes of CNRT activists in the capital of Dili. In some cases, the militia groups had photographs of their intended victims, dragged them into the street and shot them at close range.

On Sunday, at least two people were killed. Gunmen firing from a passing vehicle shot a 25-year-old student Antonio Fatima dead outside his house. Another young man Jose Augusto Pinto was killed and others were injured as militia groups clashed with protesting pro-independence supporters from the University of East Timor near a Dili market.

A number of eyewitnesses have testified to the presence of Indonesian police or army units with the militia--either passively in the background or actively participating in the attacks. The very fact that the militia groups are able to roam the city and others areas unchallenged indicates the close collusion with troops and police. The deliberate targetting and execution of particular pro-independence individuals points to the involvement of the military's intelligence agencies.

The latest deaths have taken place despite assurances from Indonesian President B.J. Habibie, Defence

Minister General Wiranto and local militia chiefs that the violence would end. Many of the militia groups have an association with the Indonesian Armed Forces (ABRI) going back to Indonesia's military invasion of the former Portuguese colony of East Timor in 1975. For decades they have acted as auxiliaries to ABRI in their military operations against armed pro-independence groups.

Under the Indonesia-Portugal agreement, between 250 and 300 police will be sent to East Timor as part of the UN team of about 1,000 personnel supervising the August 8 ballot. The UN police, the first of whom arrived in East Timor last weekend, are to have a limited advisory role to the local security forces. The Habibie regime has insisted that its police and troops will be in charge of security arrangements in the lead-up to the poll.

Both the Indonesian military and leading business figures have a substantial economic interest in maintaining Indonesian control over East Timor's resources of oil, coffee and other raw materials. An article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* last weekend by Australian-based Indonesian academic George Aditjondro detailed some of the financial ties:

* Former military strongman Suharto and his family hold an estimated 564, 867 hectares of land throughout the island. Their interests include sugarcane plantations, a monopoly over coffee production and export, three onshore oil wells, and marble deposits. Suharto's son Bambang Trihatmodjo is positioning himself to enter the competition to exploit the huge oil reserves in the Timor Sea. Bambang and his younger brother Tommy also own oil and gas tanker fleets, and are involved in building base camps for oil companies. Suharto's close business crony Bob Hasan holds 50,000 hectares of timber plantations.

* The Indonesian conglomerate Batara Indra, backed by two retired generals Benny Murdani and Dading Kalbuadi who were centrally involved in planning the 1975 invasion, controls the sandalwood forests of East Timor and owns most of the hotels and the only cinema in Dili. The province's large construction companies are either owned by Batara Indra or the Anak Liambau Group, controlled by East Timor's Jakarta-appointed governor Jose Abilio Soares.

* Basilio Araujo, closely linked to the pro-Indonesian militias, is deputy head of the provincial investment board, which dictates who is able to invest in East Timor. The provincial ABRI commander Colonel Tono Suratman has family connections to a pearling company PT Kima Surya Lestari that is co-owned by one of Suharto's children. A number of other top military and civilian leaders have utilised the Indonesian occupation of East Timor to build up their own businesses in the province.

The business interests of the Suharto family are directly threatened by the CNRT, which has reportedly indicated that it may seize much of the family's holdings of land if it comes to power. A number of the CNRT leaders have their own substantial business holdings, including the Carrascalao family, which has connections to the island's lucrative coffee industry.

Despite the ongoing campaign of intimidation by the pro-Indonesian militias, jailed CNRT leader Xanana Gusmao has called on his own Falintil guerrillas to take no action to defend themselves or other East Timorese from attack. Gusmao is calling instead for the direct intervention of UN troops to disarm the militia and to supervise the ballot, which will choose between an Indonesian plan for autonomy and a UN-supervised "independence".

Portugal and Australia, which have been directly involved in the preparation of the UN plans for East Timor, are also jockeying for control of the island's resources. Predominance in a UN administrative force would provide a strategic foothold on the island. Australian, US and other corporations have substantial interests in the offshore oil fields, which, according to some estimates, may be worth \$US11 billion.

The main preoccupation of the major actors in the UN arrangements for East Timor--the Habibie regime, the Australian and Portuguese governments, and the CNRT leadership--is who is to get the lion's share of the

resources. Their last concern is for the well-being and aspirations of the majority of East Timorese people.



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