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Political developments leading to the referendum

Dionisio Babo Soares

B.J. Habibie was appointed President of Indonesia after student demonstrations ousted the former President, Soeharto, from power in 1998. On 27 January 1999, Habibie agreed to hold a ‘consultation’¹ with the East Timorese where they would be asked to choose between wide ranging autonomy within Indonesia and independence. The consultation or referendum was conducted by the United Nations under its mission in East Timor, UNAMET (United Nations Assistance Mission in East Timor) and saw a 99 per cent turn out on the ballot day. 94 388 East Timorese representing 21.5 per cent of voters supported the proposal for wide-ranging autonomy within Indonesia while 344 580 East Timorese representing 78.5 per cent of voters rejected it. The army-led pro-Indonesian militia, who were already responsible for earlier violence in the territory rampaged throughout East Timor, burning houses, killing hundreds of people and forcing the evacuation of a large number of East Timorese into West Timor.

This chapter deals primarily with the political developments before the referendum. It is divided into various parts. The first part highlights

¹ ‘Consultation’ was the preferred term and the one insisted upon by Indonesia to use instead of the term ‘referendum’ throughout the process. Although Indonesia gave little reason to show the difference between these words, many do not see the difference between the two when it comes to implementation. The word ‘referendum’, instead of ‘consultation’, will be used throughout this chapter.

political developments in the 1970s and analyses how past and current events have shaped East Timor's political climate. The second part describes events which took place prior to and after the historic announcement of 27 January 1999. The third part explores political developments after the 5 May Agreement between Indonesia and Portugal as well as developments leading to the ballot day, 30 August 1999. The fourth part examines the development in the aftermath of the ballot announcement and underlines necessary measures to prevent further bloodshed in the future.

The dynamics within the resistance

In the aftermath of the 1974 *Flowers Revolution* in Portugal, five political parties emerged in East Timor: *União Democrática Timorense* (UDT), *Frente Revolucionária de Timor Leste Independente* (Fretilin), *Associação Popular Democrática Timorense* (Apodeti), *Klibur Oan Timor Ass'wain* (KOTA) and *Trabalhista*, the Labour Party. The three major parties – UDT, Fretilin and Apodeti – were quick to declare their political visions and other small parties, KOTA and *Trabalhista*, whose political visions were unclear, sought to form coalitions with each of the three major parties. UDT advocated a period of continuing affiliation with Portugal as a means toward achieving full independence, Fretilin supported immediate independence, and Apodeti sought a transitional autonomy within Indonesia before independence (Singh 1998).²

In August 1974, UDT launched a surprise coup aimed at quelling the other four political parties and controlling the territory. Fretilin reacted quickly to this event by launching a counter-attack and successfully overthrew the remaining Portuguese government in the territory. The leaders of UDT³ and some members of its army, after resisting briefly, withdrew into West Timor, part of the Indonesian province of Nusa Tenggara Timur. The evacuation included approximately 40 000 refugees, most of whom were unaware of

² Apodeti's political platform (political manifesto) states that East Timor would need a period of transition with Indonesia, not integration, before having its own independence.

³ UDT leaders were Francisco Lopes da Cruz, Indonesia's former roving ambassador for East Timor, João and Mario Carrascalão and Domingos Oliveira.

political circumstances in Dili, the capital of East Timor. The leaders of KOTA and Trabalhista were also evacuated to West Timor, while the president of Apodeti, Mr José Osorio Soares, was later captured and killed by Fretilin forces (Dunn 1996; Singh 1998).

The evacuation into West Timor and subsequent takeover of East Timor by Fretilin forces sparked further political chaos in East Timor. Subsequently, the Portuguese government in Timor including its governor, Lemos Pires, withdrew from Dili in August 1975. Fretilin declared the independence of East Timor on 28 November 1975. The Indonesian military responded quickly to this 'power vacuum'⁴ by launching an invasion of East Timor on 7 December 1975, and annexation followed six months later. Fretilin forces retreated into the mountains and began the 24-year-long guerilla war against the Indonesian army (Dunn 1996).

In 1979, after three years of brutal war, Fretilin's president and leader of the armed forces, Nicolau Lobato was killed. Xanana Gusmão who replaced Lobato took a new approach in Fretilin's campaign for independence. He abandoned the conventional tactics used by his predecessor and converted the party into a guerilla force, employing hit and run tactics and successfully penetrating the Indonesian army's intelligence circles, thus setting up regular contacts with sections of the Indonesian army for information and weapons transactions.⁵ This new approach, coupled with the people's determination, helped the resistance to survive Indonesian military campaigns until 1986. In the early 1980s, Xanana successfully forced the Indonesian military to accept a ceasefire, but the ceasefire was later violated by the Indonesian army, causing a breakdown in further military negotiations. Colonel Purwanto upheld the ceasefire in the

⁴ After the Portuguese abandoned East Timor, Indonesia believed that there was a power vacuum in the territory. It responded quickly to this event with a military invasion several months later despite the fact that Fretilin was the '*de facto*' administration in the province (see various publications by the Indonesian Information Ministry 1980-90).

⁵ In 1996, I interviewed a university student in his mid-20s who admitted that in the 1980s he was working as a negotiator for 'weapon transactions' between the resistance and Indonesian officials. He admitted that the army official, with whom he had a well-planned and regular contact, agreed to accept around Rp 4 000 000 or US\$1 750 (the exchange rate was Rp 2,285 = US\$1) for four rifles and a box of ammunition.

early 1980s in Lariguto on behalf of the Indonesian army. When General L.B. Moerdani replaced General Mohammad Yusuf as the Indonesian Minister of Defence, he dismissed the 'ceasefire agreement' and continued the war.

In the early 1980s some political parties successfully formed an umbrella body known as *Convergencia Nacional Timorense*, the National Pact for East Timor. This body, which consisted of all but Apodeti, failed to survive the differences over national interest that prevailed among its leaders at the time. The fact that Fretilin continued to assert its presence on the ground as *de facto* administration made other parties feel uneasy, particularly when it came to the issue of 'who represents the resistance'. UDT viewed Fretilin as using the body to legitimate itself as the only voice of the resistance.⁶ KOTA and Trabalhista⁷ also sought to disengage themselves from the pact quietly.

From 1975 to 1986, the resistance remained divided and no measures were taken to form a single body. In 1987, Xanana Gusmão and José Ramos Horta, the spokesperson for the resistance, quit Fretilin and formed CNRM (*Conselho Nacional da Resistencia Maubere*). UDT, however, continued to reject the legitimacy of this body, claiming it was another metamorphosis of Fretilin. The heart of these disputes centred on the term MAUBERE. Literally, *maubere* refers to a common name found among the Mambae people, the largest ethnic group in East Timor (see Traube 1986). During the Portuguese colonial period, *maubere* was generally used to distinguish the native East Timorese from the upper class, educated Portuguese and, to a certain degree, the *mestizos*, the half caste group. 'Maubere' was often employed as a synonym for the illiterate, uneducated and, to some degree, uncivilised (see Traube 1986).

Fretilin, being a proletariat-based political party,⁸ identified itself with

⁶ Pers. comm. with a refugee from East Timor in Portugal, October 1998.

⁷ The party, 'Trabalhista', seems to have disappeared from the political scene in East Timor by the late 1970s.

⁸ Being a proletariat-oriented political party does not necessarily make its ideology identical with Marxism, as was widely assumed among liberal democracies. Nevertheless, there is a still unanswered question on the issue of 'communism' and whether the Fretilin of the 1970s did identify itself with Marxist ideology. 'Communism' was an issue used by Indonesia in the late 1970s during its military campaign in East Timor to discredit Fretilin, at the height of the Cold War between the US and the former USSR.

the term *maubere*. It indeed attracted many supporters among the common people who saw themselves as victims of colonialism. On the other hand, parties such as UDT, which advocated continued affiliation with Portugal, and KOTA, the feudal-oriented political party, rejected the term *maubere*. The same argument was used when these political parties rejected Xanana and Ramos Horta's CNRM whose aims were to:

- unify factions within the resistance, which had remained divided until that time;
- set up a body that represented this umbrella organisation as the voice of the resistance abroad;
- represent the resistance as comprising not just Fretilin but other political parties that included pro-integration supporters who later joined the resistance;
- develop the three main aspects of the resistance: the diplomatic front, the underground movement and the military arm (Falintil).

The resistance became more united when in 1997, in Peniche, Portugal, all factions agreed to change CNRM into CNRT (*Conselho Nacional da Resistência Timorense*). Preparation for a new government was the main agenda of CNRT as developments in support of East Timor reached their height in the 1990s. The Santa Cruz massacre in 1991, the Nobel Peace Prize in 1996 to Bishop Ximenes Belo and Ramos Horta, the renewed debate on East Timor in the UN, and support from solidarity groups around the world helped bring the cause of East Timor onto the world stage.

Democratic changes in Indonesia had started to unfold and public awareness of East Timor had increased. East Timor, long a 'pebble inside the shoe' of Indonesian international diplomacy, had come to influence Indonesian politics both domestically and internationally, and Indonesian leaders had to put extra effort into minimising the harm to Indonesia's international credibility. The departure of former dictator Soeharto opened new prospects for a political solution to be found to the question of East Timor. President Habibie paved the way for a popular consultation in 1999.

Falintil's role in the resistance

Forças Armadas de Timor Leste (Falintil) is the armed wing of CNRT. Formerly, Falintil was the armed wing of Fretilin, which had fought Indonesia from 1975 until 1985. On 20 August 1987 when Xanana Gusmão restructured the resistance movement, Falintil was changed

from the armed wing of one political party into a national army. Falintil constituted one of the three major elements of the resistance organisation throughout the years of struggle against Indonesia. The other two were the clandestine movement led by several leaders⁹ and the diplomatic front represented by Mr José Ramos Horta. Xanana Gusmão assumed the leadership of the resistance movement and served as the commander of Falintil.

When Xanana was captured in 1992 by the Indonesian forces, the leadership of Falintil was handed over to José Antonio da Costa who was known as Ma'Huno (*nom de guerra*). Only two months later, Ma'Huno was also captured by the Indonesian army. He was replaced by commander Nino Konis Santana. When Konis Santana came to the leadership of Falintil, the structure of the resistance was maintained allowing Xanana to continue to play a leadership role from his prison in Jakarta. Nino Konis Santana died in 1998 and was replaced by Taur Matan Ruak who assumed the role of local commander of Falintil until the popular consultation was held in August 1999. Under Taur Matan Ruak, Falintil was structured as follows:

- Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão as the Supreme Commander;
- Taur Matan Ruak as the Vice Commander of Falintil and Commander of Region II (Baucau, Manatuto and Dili);
- Lere Anan Timor as the commander of Region I with authority over Los Palos and Viqueque;
- Falur Rate Laek as commander of Region III with authority over Same, Ainaro and Suai;
- Ular, commander of Region IV with authority over Liquiça, Ermera, Bobonaro, Suai and the enclave of Ambenu.

Newly emerged political organisations

During the 1990s various political organisations were formed in East Timor. Most of these organisations operated under the banner of resisting Indonesia's presence in the territory. Students studying in Indonesia set up the first wave of such organisations. The first was

⁹ Being an underground organisation and to avoid enemy detection, the names of these leaders were not disclosed to the public.

RENETIL (*Resistencia Nacional dos Estudantes de Timor Leste*),¹⁰ the largest East Timorese students underground organisation. Other groups followed, such as *Frente Clandestina Estudantil de Timor Leste* (FECLETIL) and *Liga dos Estudantes Patriotas* (LEP).

The second wave took place in East Timor. The most important of these groups were *Organisacão da Juventude Catolica de Timor Leste* (OBJECTIL) which later became *Organisacão da Juventude de Timor Leste* (OJETIL), FITUN (lit., 'star') and OPJLATIL (*Organisacão Popular Juventude Lorico Ass'wain Timor Leste*). Another group which called itself *Republica Democratica de Timor Leste* (RD'IL), surfaced in East Timor politics in the mid-1990s, taking Fretilin's declaration of independence on 28 November 1975 as its political platform. This group believed that there was no need for a referendum since East Timor was already an independent state, invaded by Indonesia in 1975. It insisted on the Indonesian army withdrawing from the territory, and East Timor being returned to its status as an independent state.

Other groups came later and affiliated themselves with the resistance movement, such as MOBUDAN (*Movimento Buka Dalan Foun*), a movement yet to announce its political platform, and PPA (*Persatuan Pemuda Apodeti*), a group comprised of the children of the former Apodeti party members. However, the activities of such organisations were hardly seen in public until the referendum day.

Interestingly, most of these organisations did not convert themselves into political parties nor did they identify themselves with the existing political parties of the resistance. Only FECLETIL, in the late 1990s, declared itself as *Partido Socialista de Timor* (PST) and became a new contender in East Timor politics. One of its leaders, Avelino Coelho, known as Salar Kosi, was trapped in the Austrian embassy in Jakarta for more than a year when seeking political asylum there. He was not allowed to leave, according to Ali Alatas, because of the alleged crimes he had committed. Earlier, a new political party was formed in Portugal, a breakaway from UDT, called UDC (*União Democratica Christã*). A former leader of the independence movement turned integrationist,

¹⁰ This organisation was led by Fernando de Araujo who is known as Lasama. He was a student in the Linguistics Department of the University of Udayana Bali in Denpasar (1985-91) but was captured in 1991 and imprisoned in Cipinang prison in Jakarta for his political activities. He was released in 1998, seven years after his arrest.

Abilio Araujo, formed another new party in Dili just a week prior to the referendum: *Partido Nacionalista Timorense* (PNT).

Developments prior to and after 27 January 1999

Soon after his appointment as the President of Indonesia, B.J. Habibie sought to introduce political reform in his country. One of his most active campaigns was to resolve the issue of East Timor and improve Indonesia's image abroad. In his first ever interview with foreign media (CNN) after his appointment, Habibie surprised many by announcing a policy shift on East Timor, promising to grant a broad autonomy package to the province.¹¹ Nevertheless, this sudden announcement was received with caution by the sympathisers and proponents of East Timor independence. Xanana, as the leader of CNRT welcomed the decision but argued that President Habibie did not go far enough. He challenged Habibie to put his words in action.¹² Like other resistance leaders, he expected this shift of policy in Indonesia would mark the beginning of a lasting solution on the question of East Timor.

Since 1988, Xanana had begun to receive regular visits from representatives of various nations around the world. When he was moved to a house a year later, Xanana continued to receive regular visits by high profile leaders from friendly nations such as the US representative for Asia and the Pacific, Stanley Roth, and former President Nelson Mandela from South Africa. These visits made Xanana a particularly high profile prisoner.

Such developments, coupled with the changing environment in Indonesian politics, helped place the East Timor case at the centre of the Indonesian political debate. Leaders of newly emerging political parties such as Amin Rais (PAN, the National Mandate Party) and Abdurrahman Wahid (PKB), who was later elected President, while proposing their own agenda, called for a referendum in the territory. As the race to improve Indonesia's political image was at its height, President Habibie and Foreign Minister Ali Alatas proposed a referendum package before a cabinet meeting, in October 1998. Habibie and Alatas' proposal surprised the commander of the armed forces,

¹¹ The interview was conducted in June 1999 in Jakarta.

¹² *Kompas*, July 1999.

General Wiranto, who insisted that 'ABRI (now TNI), the Indonesian armed forces, was not prepared to face a sudden policy change'.¹³

Although there was no ensuing action by the military to prevent further division over the East Timor issue within the cabinet, the period between October 1998 and January 1999 witnessed two major changes as far as the military operation in East Timor was concerned. One was the reorganisation of the existing three semi-paramilitary groups: Tim Alfa in Los Palos and Saka and Makikit in Baucau became 'Civil Defence Units' (Keamanan Rakyat: KAMRA). Los Palos and Baucau are located in the eastern region of East Timor. The second change was the establishment of two new paramilitary groups in central and western Timor, Mahidi (Dead or Alive for Integration) and Halilintar (Lightning) in Maliana.¹⁴ Cancio Carvalho, the leader of the Mahidi militias stated in an interview with Australia's ABC in April 1999 that his group was set up in December 1998.

Coincidentally, in December 1998, the Australian Prime Minister, John Howard, sent a letter to President Habibie asking him to reverse Indonesia's policy on East Timor, a policy that former Australian Foreign Minister, Gareth Evans, once dubbed 'irreversible'. When President Habibie announced that his government would allow the East Timorese to choose between autonomy within Indonesia and independence in January 1999, Mahidi responded immediately by killing several people in the village of Cassa, Ainaro district and in the sub-district of Zumalai. The victims included a pregnant woman and two teenage boys. In the same interview with the ABC, Carvalho acknowledged the killings and justified his actions by arguing that the pregnant woman was the wife of a Falintil (East Timorese Liberation Army) fighter.

Reaction to Habibie's proposal also came from different parts of the world. While the international community welcomed it as

¹³ Pers. comm. with an East Timorese resistance leader in Darwin, 27 September 1999.

¹⁴ Such paramilitary groups were led by the following personalities: Tim Alfa was commanded by the mayor (*bupati*) of Los Palos, Edmundo Conceição; Saka (Baucau) and Makikit (Viqueque) were commanded by a Timorese-born sergeant who was a member of TNI, Joanico Belo; Mahidi was commanded by the son of a traditional landlord in Cassa, Ainaro; and Halilintar was commanded by João Tavares, the commander of pro-integration forces, who is now in West Timor.

an unprecedented democratic gesture that showed the President's willingness to distance himself from Soeharto's past wrongdoings, Habibie's proposal was received with mixed reactions in Indonesia and East Timor. Megawati Sukarnoputri, the leader of the PDI-P (Indonesian Democratic Party in Struggle) rejected the proposal arguing that the President did not have the mandate to reverse Soeharto's decision of incorporating the territory into Indonesia.¹⁵ The same reaction came from sections within Indonesian society, particularly from Muslim leaders. They argued that Habibie's lack of consideration in tackling the issue of East Timor might not help but only exacerbate the situation. It was widely perceived among the Muslim circles in Java that the East Timorese, the majority of whom are Catholics, would vote for independence, thus laying the foundation for renewed secessionist movements in Indonesia. Likewise, some members of ABRI showed their discontentment with Habibie, claiming the President's announcement could create a 'domino effect', thereby setting a precedent for other provinces such as Aceh and Irian Jaya to follow suit.

In East Timor, the pro-independence group welcomed Habibie's statement with doubt. On the one hand, José Ramos Horta, the spokesperson for the CNRT, argued that despite being happy with the announcement, much remained to be seen since Indonesia had never kept its promises with regard to East Timor in the past. On the other hand, the CNRT leaders responded quickly to Jakarta's change of heart by reorganising its campaign across the territory. In Dili, the students at the University of East Timor (Universitas Timor Timur, known as UNTIM) took the initiative to 'socialise' Habibie's proposal. These students went to remote villages all over the territory to campaign for independence.¹⁶

In the meantime, the pro-integration group which, despairing over Habibie's announcement, and with much to lose if the United Nations proceeded with a referendum in the territory, felt threatened.

¹⁵ She later reversed her statement arguing that she would accept the results, whatever the people chose.

¹⁶ Three prominent students who helped organise this activity were Antero Benedito da Silva, Aderito and Francisco da Costa, who set up an organization called DSMPPT (*Devan Solidaritas Mahasiswa dan Pelajar Timor Timur*), an acronym for The Solidarity Board of Students of East Timor.

With the help of the Indonesian army, the group set up the second wave of militia groups to add to the strength of groups like Mahidi and Halilintar:

- Aitarak (Thorn) led by Eurico Guterres in Dili;
- Naga Merah (Red Dragon) led by Miguel Soares Babo in Ermera;
- Darah Merah (Red Blood) led by Lafahek Saburai in Ermera;
- Besi Merah Putih (Red and White Iron) led by Manuel de Sousa in Liquiça;
- Laksaur (Eagle) led by Olivio 'Moruk' Mendonça;
- ABLAI (Struggle for Integration) was set up in Same led by Nazario Cortereal;
- Dadurus Merah Putih in Bobonaro (leader unknown) plus
- Hametin (Bobonaro) (leader unknown);
- Sera (Sera Malik) (leader unknown);
- Rajawali (leader unknown);
- Jati Merah Putih (Real Red and White) in Los Palos (leader unknown);
- Mahadomi in Manatuto led by Vital Doutel Sarmiento and Aquino Caldas;
- Pana (Liquiça) (leader unknown);
- Sakunar led by Simão Lopes in Oecussi.

The violence carried out by such militia groups took place simultaneously several weeks after Habibie's offer of a referendum and resulted in the killings of a number of pro-independence supporters. Mr Rui Lopez, the former *bupati* of Covalima, claimed in a television interview (*SBS*, September 1999) from his hiding place in Macau that there were 443 people killed in his area alone prior to the referendum. Mr Lopez himself was a militia leader who defected after disagreeing with the military's overall plan to eliminate both the independence supporters and the clergy in East Timor.

Some defectors from the militia¹⁷ and accounts from eye witnesses confirmed that:

It is rare for the military to appear in the front line during militia operations. Their tactics are pushing the militias who use the traditional arms such as

¹⁷ Mr Rui Lopez and Mr Tomas Aquino Goncalves defected to safety in Macau and have given accounts of military and militia planning.

machetes, *parang* and sword to attack a defenceless population. They normally stand behind the militia to protect them in the case of counter-attack but also normally engage in shooting using automatic weapons.¹⁸

There were two attempts initiated by the Catholic church to reconcile the two opposing factions, pro- and anti-independence groups. The first, known as Dare I, took place soon after the January announcement in an old seminary on the outskirts of Dili. The meeting brought together a number of both pro- and anti-independence leaders and aimed at forging close links, starting a dialogue and eventually, halting all violence between the two sides. Indeed, the meeting, which took place over two days, resulted in both sides issuing a statement pledging their commitment to a non-violent campaign. In practise, militia activity continued unabated.

The climax of events surrounding militia activities was the 5 April massacre in Liquiça, a district located 45 km to the west of the capital, Dili. Militia, backed by the military, shot and hacked to death more than 40 defenceless civilians who were gathering in a churchyard (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 April 1999).¹⁹ Interestingly, while accounts by church clergy and other witnesses confirmed that the military was behind the attack, no action was taken to launch an inquiry or to investigate the killings. The TNI persisted with its claim that the deaths resulted from a clash between pro-independence and pro-integration groups.

By June 1999, UNAMET with its international CIVPOL (Civil Police) had set up a local presence throughout the territory. Yet they failed to bring peace to the territory. As the tense situation continued, violence by the militia was directed not only at civilians, but also toward NGOs, humanitarian agencies and human rights activists. Consequently, the call for a Multinational Force (MNF) gained much publicity. In an attempt to safeguard the 'fragile' 5 May Accord, Jakarta rejected any call for a MNF to be deployed in East Timor and maintained that its army could handle security in the territory.

It was understood that the violence perpetrated by the militia and

¹⁸ Interviews with four UNAMET local staff working in Suai namely, Eusebio da Costa, Artur Lopez, Alipio Baltazar and Simão Barreto in Darwin, 2-4 October 1999.

¹⁹ Reference can also be made to other major newspapers in Australia (6 April 1999) such as *The Age*, *The Australian*, *The Canberra Times* and others.

members of the Indonesian armed forces (TNI) aimed to achieve the following objectives:

- To lure Falintil to respond to provocation and thereby legitimate the argument that there was an internal conflict in East Timor;
- To use this conflict as the basis for the TNI to intervene and prevent the push for the presence of an international force in East Timor;
- To picture East Timor as an area of conflict and therefore insist that any international supervised referendum would be doomed to failure.

Fortunately, such provocations failed to draw Falintil into the conflict and hence provide justification for the claim that a conflict was taking place in East Timor. In the meantime, international pressure on Habibie to implement his promises grew even stronger.

In another development, the Indonesian government also set up its own team to oversee the referendum and to guarantee that the 5 May Agreement was implemented accordingly. One of the team's members was General Zacky Anwar Makarim, the former head of BIA (Indonesia's Army Intelligence Unit) who had worked previously in East Timor in the 1980s. General Zacky Anwar was known for his organised terrorist-style attacks²⁰ on the leaders of the pro-independence movement in the territory and is believed to have been involved in the killings in Aceh and Irian Jaya prior to accepting his post in East Timor.²¹ Major-General Syafrie Syamsuddin, a TNI officer who had just completed his work in Aceh province, joined Anwar just prior to the ballot. According to an eyewitness, Francisco Kalbuadi, General Syamsuddin was seen at the scene of the militia's attack on Bishop Belo's house where more than 25 people were killed, just days after the ballot result was announced, an accusation flatly denied by General Syamsuddin (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 11/10/99).

Developments after 5 May 1999

Despite continuing violence, Indonesia and Portugal, under the auspices of the UN, reached an agreement on 5 May 1999 to give the UN a mandate to consult the people of East Timor, whether to accept or

²⁰ The most notorious of these was the Ninja-style attacks conducted in the mid-1980s and early 1990s.

²¹ See reports compiled by *TAPOL* and *Amnesty International* from June to September 1999.

reject Indonesia's offer of autonomy. Based on that agreement the Secretary-General (SG), Kofi Annan, after consulting the Security Council, set up a special mission for East Timor (UNAMET) in the same month. The mission initially planned to conduct the ballot on 8 August 1999. Increasing army-backed militia activity forced the UN to postpone the ballot on two separate occasions.

While negotiations were taking place in New York, sporadic violence continued on the ground. In a public display before the eyes of the Jakarta appointed governor, Abilio José Osorio Soares, the leader of the Aitarak militia, Eurico Guterres, pledged to hunt and kill the opponents of integration. His words were followed by action hours later with the murder of several people including the son of a pro-independence leader, Manuel Carrascalão. Torture, terror and abduction, as widely reported by foreign media, were carried out systematically. Targets were chosen carefully. They included CNRT leaders, students, people working for NGOs (non-governmental organisations) and those considered to have some influence in the society.

David Jenkins, a veteran Asia correspondent, argued that the method adopted by the Indonesian army followed the tactics of the US Phoenix program in the Vietnam war, which killed tens of thousands of peasants and much of the indigenous South Vietnamese leadership. This tactic had been used previously by the Contras in Nicaragua. Jenkins said that the state terrorists were 'not simply going after the most radical pro-independence people, but ... the moderates, the people who have influence in their community' (*The Guardian* [UK], Tuesday, 02/10/99).

Indeed, well before the referendum, the commander of the Indonesian military in Dili, Colonel Tono Suratman, in an interview for Australian ABC television in June 1999, warned of what was to come:

If the pro-independents do win ... all will be destroyed. It will be worse than 23 years ago. An army document of early May, when the international agreement on the referendum was reached ordered that massacres should be carried out from village to village after the announcement of the ballot if the pro-independence supporters win. The Independence movement should be eliminated from its leadership down to its roots (*The Guardian* [UK], Tuesday, 02/10/99).

In a theatrical show, the Indonesian armed forces commander, General Wiranto, flew from Jakarta to Dili and staged a reconciliation meeting between the leaders of pro- and anti-independence groups.

Again, just hours after Wiranto left Dili, the anti-independence militias returned to the streets and started beating, torturing and even killing people who they claimed to be pro-independence sympathisers. Meetings between the two Timorese factions took place several times in Jakarta. Domingos Soares, the leader of FPDK (*Forum Persatuan Demokrasi dan Keadilan*), the anti-independence faction together with the head of the Third Way Movement, Abilio Araujo met Xanana Gusmão in Jakarta to discuss the reconciliation process (*Lusa Broadcasting Corporation*, 30/08/99). Other subsequent meetings also took place between leaders of pro- and anti-independence groups both inside and outside East Timor. However, none of these meetings bore the fruit of true reconciliation. A workshop held by the Australian National University in Canberra in late April 1999, despite bringing together leaders from the two different factions in East Timor in an amicable atmosphere, failed to produce a framework for reconciliation.

The Catholic church sponsored a second reconciliation meeting, Dare II, between the two opposing factions in Jakarta. It too failed to yield a fruitful outcome that could have served as the ground for a peaceful settlement of the conflict. Meanwhile, efforts to undermine and to cancel the ballot continued unabated. The threat against UNAMET officials was obvious. The head of the Aitarak militia, Eurico Guterres, made several threats to David Wimhurst, the UNAMET spokesperson in East Timor, saying 'he does not want to see Mr Wimhurst in East Timor' in the future.²²

As a result of militia and Indonesian army activities, thousands of people left their homes and took refuge in churches and places considered to be 'safe'. According to John Martinkus of *AAP*, by 30 July 1999, more than 50 000 people were classified as internally displaced people (IDP) throughout the territory. The number went higher in the lead up to the ballot day.

As a result, the UN postponed the ballot from 8-22 August 1999, and later postponed it again until 30 August 1999. Registration began on 12 August and ended a week later amidst continuing violence by the militia. The UN, according to the Portuguese *Diario das Noticias* (20/08/99), had asked the Indonesian government to apprehend the militia and bring the members of the military, who were actively

²² Television interview with Eurico Guterres during the Dare II meeting in Jakarta.

supporting them, to justice. Pressure to quell militia violence was also put forward by the governments of the US, Britain, the Republic of Ireland, Brazil, Portugal and some South-east Asian countries (*Diario das Noticias*, August 1999).

Increasing pressure also forced General Wiranto to recall several of his commanders in East Timor just days before the referendum. These were Colonel Tono Suratman who was the commander of the TNI in the territory, Letkol Siagam, the commander of Korem in Maliana and General Zacky Anwar Makarim the liaison officer for Indonesia's team of observers in the referendum (*The Canberra Times*, August 1999).

In the weeks leading up to the ballot, a group of Indonesian ministers including Ali Alatas (Foreign Affairs Minister), General Wiranto (Commander of the Armed Forces) and Faisal Tanjung (the Minister for Politics and Security Affairs) twice visited East Timor. Their aim was to observe the situation as well as persuade the militia to stop their campaign of terror.

However, the military and General Wiranto in particular, seemed to be ambiguous in responding to events in East Timor, particularly in the period leading to the referendum. As a member of Habibie's cabinet, Wiranto did not intend to undermine both Habibie's determination to hold the ballot based on the accord signed between Indonesia, the United Nations and Portugal on 5 May 1999. Yet he continued to remain silent over militia atrocities in East Timor. He seemed unable to resist the push from some members of the military who did not want to see East Timor gain independence. In many cases the army was involved in militia attacks on a defenceless population.

It was understood that military involvement in militia atrocities could undermine its image and halt efforts to rebuild its credibility before the international community. Therefore, whenever international pressure was mounted, TNI would intervene as if it continued to maintain a neutral role between the militia and the resistance body.

Throughout these developments, the armed pro-Indonesian militia continued their campaign of violence. Thus, for example, Yayasan *HAK*, a local human rights body, confirmed that on 19 August, the militia attacked a crowd of pro-independence supporters outside a church compound in the town of Suai leaving several injured (*AFP*, 19/08/99).

The pro-Indonesian side also started their autonomy campaign even before the official campaign period was launched. Banners encouraging voters to vote for autonomy were displayed around the territory; awareness campaigns promoting the autonomy package took

place in different parts of the territory and distribution of pamphlets carrying autonomy messages were common. As a response to the pro-Indonesian campaign, the CNRT chose to undertake a muted campaign. According to the Indonesian news daily, *Kompas*, during the month of June and July more than 1000 East Timorese university students dispersed to remote villages to make the population aware of the option for independence.

During the months of May and June, several students from the University of East Timor, who were doing their practical work in Suai, were beaten unconscious and two of them were abducted and later found dead. On 19 August, in a gesture to appease mounting criticism of the Indonesian military, the leader of the Aitarak militia made a symbolic hand-over of weapons saying that it was to ease the tension and pave the way towards a peaceful referendum (*Reuters*, 19/08/99).

On 15 August 1999, the CNRT raised its flag for the very first time in Dili, marking the first day of its political campaign in East Timor and the official opening of its first office in Dili. It took only two days for the new office to witness several shots fired by the militia, who renewed their campaign of violence.

On 20 August 1999, more than 10 000 people attended a ceremony commemorating 24 years of Falintil in Waimori, a location designed by UNAMET as one of the four cantonment areas for the Falintil. Similar ceremonies took place in the other three Falintil cantonment areas in Los Palos, Ermera and Bobonaro (*AFP*, 20/08/99).

Although militia violence appeared unstoppable, the church still tried to bring peace to the East Timorese. On 29 August, one day before the ballot, Bishop Carlos Ximenes Belo and the parish priest of Suai, Father Hilario Madeira,²³ successfully sponsored a peace settlement between the militia and the CNRT. In a mass attended by more than 800 people, the leaders of the two opposing parties, pro-

²³ Father Hilario Madeira was shot dead together with two other priests, Father Francisco Soares and Father Tarcisius Dewanto, and a large number of refugees who were seeking protection in the church of Suai on 7 September 1999. According to eyewitnesses, the shooting took place in front of the church and was conducted in a joint operation between the militia and the Indonesian army (interview with four UNAMET local staff working in Suai: namely, Eusebio da Costa, Artur Lopez, Alipio Baltazar and Simão Barreto in Darwin, 2-4 October 1999).

and anti-independence, embraced each other and vowed to commit themselves to peaceful means of settling their differences. The militia leader Vasco da Cruz²⁴ was among those who handed over their weapons to the bishop who, in turn, gave them to Indonesian police. Later, according to several first-hand accounts, Vasco da Cruz and several members of his Mahidi militia were disarmed by other militia members for agreeing to attend the church-sponsored peace.²⁵

Closing remarks

This chapter has described briefly the political developments in East Timor on the eve of the referendum on 30 August when the East Timorese voted overwhelmingly for independence. The period between September and October 1999 saw several major political developments in the territory.

The first was the Indonesian army and militia rampage throughout the territory, during what ought to be known as 'Black September', resulting in large-scale destruction and killing in the territory. Thus, after the ballot was announced on 4 September 1999, the militia, backed by the Indonesian army, started their rampage throughout the territory, burning houses and forcing the evacuation of people from their homes. More than 250 000 people fled to West Timor and hundreds, if not thousands, of independence supporters were subsequently abducted and killed by the same militia.²⁶ The Indonesian military helped transport the refugees into West Timor and other, yet to be known parts of Indonesia. Amnesty International accused the military of orchestrating the mass exodus of people and forcing them to leave East Timor at gunpoint. The International Crisis Group for East Timor refers to the militia rampage as a 'scorched earth policy' planned carefully by both the militia and the Indonesian army.

The second development was the introduction of an Australian-led multinational peace-keeping force and the withdrawal of the

²⁴ Mr Vasco da Cruz was the leader of the Mahidi militia branch who oversaw the sub-district of Zumalai in the district of Covalima.

²⁵ Interview with four UNAMET local staff working in Suai before and after the referendum (Darwin, 2-4 October 1999).

²⁶ International Crisis Group, East Timor Briefing, Darwin, 6 October 1999.



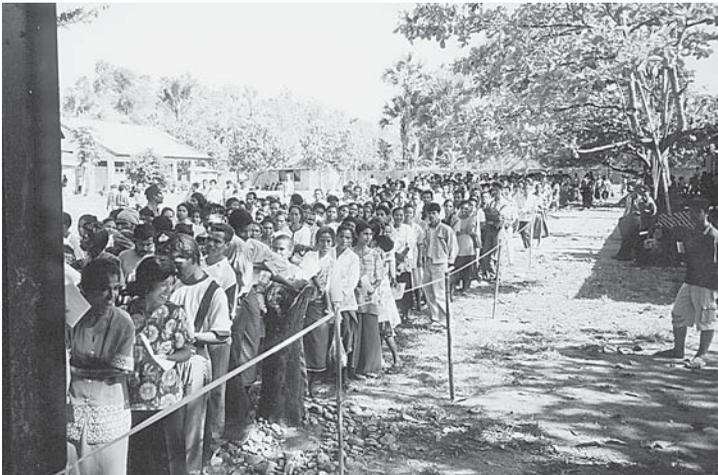
UN polling station at Camanasa, in Covalima, 30 August 1999



UN polling station in Covalima, 30 August 1999



CNRT rally in Dili, 27 August 1999



East Timorese waiting to vote outside the UN polling stations at Camanasa, 30 August 1999

Indonesian army (TNI) from East Timor. This was followed by the return of the United Nations Mission for East Timor (UNAMET) and other international humanitarian groups as well as non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Subsequently, the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET), headed by Sergio Vieira de Mello, was established to administer East Timor in its transition to independence.

On 19 October 1999, the Indonesian Parliament (MPR) endorsed the ballot result, opening the way for East Timor to become a new nation. A new chapter in East Timor's political history had begun.

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