

“L’etat c’est moi” (the country is me)

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“The victory of comrade Lu Olo and I did not just shake up Timor-Leste, but has affected other places too,” said Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri in his speech at the closing of the Fretilin Congress on May 19. Four days later, fighting erupted in Fatuahi, the eastern edge of the city of Dili, between rebel forces led by Major Alfredo Reinado and the Falintil-FDTL. This was followed by dissension in the ranks of the PNTL (National Police of Timor-Leste) which triggered further social unrest and ultimately the returned presence of international troops, led by Australia, in Timor-Leste.

On Friday, June 6, 2006 from his stronghold at the former Portuguese colonial villa, *Pousada de Maubisse*, in the cool mountainous region in central Timor-Leste, Major Alfredo Reinado, together with members of his force, handed over eighteen M-16 automaticrifles, four pistols, four improvised firearms and thousands of rounds of ammunition to Australian troops.

For the last two months, from his scenic hideout ‘round gardens of blooming flowers, Reinado had issued demands for “justice”, encouraged the overthrow of PM Mari Alkatiri, met with political figures and been interviewed by foreign and Timorese journalists who then described him as a man whose popularity rivals that of President Xanana Gusmão and Foreign Minister Ramos Horta. Australian and Indonesian media wrote favourable reports and cranked up the popularity of this leader of the military revolt. Journalist David O’Shea from SBS Australia described him as a smart, savvy military figure, a future leader who had trained in Australia.

After handing over the weapons, Major Reinado, a mid-level officer who left his post after an April 28 incident in Tasi Tolu, dismissed claims that he is being steered. To this day, “I have remained a soldier, obedient and loyal to the commander-in-chief, President Xanana Gusmão”, said Reinado to journalists during the handover of weapons. This position was reiterated by Major Tara and Major Marcos Tilman who also left their posts to join the opposition in the Ermera district.

If Major Alfredo Reinado and the members of his group who left their posts are soldiers obedient and loyal to President Xanana Gusmão, the Australian, Indonesian and Timor-Leste media have ganged up on Alkatiri and depicted him as an arrogant “Mozambique Marxist” who has dragged Timor-Leste to become a failed state.

As the arrogant “Mozambique Marxist” leader governing the “failed” Timor-Leste, in the 49 months of his government, Alkatiri has scored achievements that displeased many. Canberra has been frustrated by Alkatiri’s tough negotiating stance on oil and gas in the Timor Sea. Opposition parties, 20%-strong in the parliament, were irritated and have constantly undermined Alkatiri’s government for his reluctance to share power. Even Alkatiri’s comrades in Fretilin from the pro-market *mudança* (reform) group - who were unequivocally defeated in the last congress led by José Luis Guterres - were also upset because Alkatiri wanted to restrict the private sector.

“Your claims [for oil rights] go almost to Alice Springs. You can demand that forever for all I care ... We are very tough. We will not care if you give information to the media. Let me give you a tutorial in politics-not a chance.” That was how Canberra regime bullied Alkatiri through its Foreign Minister Alexander Downer. However, due to the firm stand of the Dili negotiating team led by PM Mari Alkatiri, in two difficult rounds of negotiations, Timor-Leste received 50:50 rights to the rich oil

and gas field of Greater Sunrise (Canberra's originally proposed 18:82). Dili also wrestled 90:10 from the original 80:20 proposed by Canberra for the Bayu Undan, Elang Kakaktua and surrounding fields. An interesting political lesson indeed. Small, impoverished Timor-Leste faced off with Australia, who had promoted itself as the United States' Deputy Sheriff in the Asia-Pacific region, and came out ahead.

In line with Australian and American policy, the World Bank has been overseeing funds from donor countries for Timor-Leste reconstruction projects. Projects that began during this transition period have been very beneficial to the private sector. Several government efforts to improve public services, such as plans to establish a public transportation company, electrical utility and national oil enterprises, were thwarted by the World Bank which prefers these sectors run by private companies.

Even while refusing to submit to economic growth policies, Alkatiri's impoverished government managed to provide free education to the people of Timor-Leste from primary to secondary levels complemented by nutrition improvement programs by providing free meals to students at school. Through bilateral cooperation with the Cuban government, Alkatiri brought in hundreds of Cuban doctors to remote parts in Timor-Leste to provide free health services. The government also sent hundreds of Timorese students to Cuba to study medicine and founded a medical school at the Timor-Leste National University.

The latest issue which angered the private sector to the breaking point of tolerance is the creation of the Petroleum Fund. This fund was created to manage the wealth from oil and gas in order to prevent the "oil curse" - war and acute poverty which often creates a petro-dollar crisis. Proceeds received is managed transparently using a Norwegian system where 90% of the funds are obligated to go into the Federal Reserve Bank in the United States of America for long-term needs, and 10% of the funds will be used for government projects and invested in the public sector. The private sector opposed this system. They want oil wealth to be distributed and used for developing the private sector. Does Timor-Leste President Xanana also oppose these policies?

Over the last several weeks the political situation has become increasingly tense. President Xanana publicly attacked Alkatiri in a one-and-a-half-hour speech broadcast on RTTL on Thursday, June 22, 2006. In this state address, the president asked Fretilin militants to reconsider Fretilin's leadership, who, in his opinion, was chosen by an undemocratic congress last month. President Xanana also expressed his disappointment and his loss of faith in Alkatiri who had been unable to end the current crisis.

The previous evening, the president expressed this disappointment in a letter he wrote to Alkatiri asking him to step down after watching ABC Australia's "Four Corners" television program. In this investigative programme, Alkatiri was accused of involvement with former Internal Affairs Minister Rogério Lobato (who is currently under house arrest and undergoing hearings in Dili courts) in creating a Fretilin Secret Security Force. Alkatiri, forcefully denied these accusations by the leader of this Secret Security Team, Railos. Alkatiri also asked the United Nations to immediately undertake an investigation of the accusations against him.

A coup d'état to unseat him from power is now apparent, just as Alkatiri thought. The president has appeared before demonstrators. "Alkatiri is a terrorist and communist," yelled protestors led by opposition representatives Major Tara, Major Marcos and Railos, who now are mobilizing the overthrow of Alkatiri and the dissolution of the parliament. As the highest commander, the person responsible for the country's security and the "guardian of the constitution", President Xanana has openly said to the Timor-Leste people, particularly to the Fretilin militants, "choose me or Alkatiri."

If today, tomorrow or the day after tomorrow PM Alkatiri is successfully forced to step down through

undemocratic means, then the Portuguese government's warning of a possible conspiracy involving Australia and internal Timor-Leste elements may prove true. Then this new country will be condemned to become a banana republic in the Asia-Pacific region and have a leader who can, whenever he feels like it, threaten, "L'état c'est moi" - the country is me. And whoever doesn't submit may step aside ...

...kita semua harus menerima kenyataan, tapi menerima kenyataan saja adalah pekerjaan manusia yang tak mampu lagi berkembang. Karena manusia juga bisa membikin kenyataan-kenyataan baru. Kalau tak ada orang mau membikin kenyataan-kenyataan baru, maka "kemajuan" sebagai kata dan makna sepatutnya dihapuskan dari kamus umat manusia...

(Pramoedya Ananta Toer, Rumah Kaca, hal 436)

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