

East Timor Rioters Fight With Machetes, Challenging Government

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Viva Timor-Leste!

Aug. 24 (Bloomberg) -- Hundreds of people armed with machetes clashed in East Timor, destroying a market and burning down homes in rioting that poses a further challenge to the Southeast Asian nation's new government.



Ramos-Horta, traitor!

Violence broke out yesterday in several parts of the country, including the capital, Dili, according to the United Nations, which has a 1,700-strong police force in East Timor.

In the town of Metinaro, about 20 kilometers (12 miles) east of Dili, as many 300 people fought in the street with machetes, steel darts and bows. Three people were arrested as rioters set 10 houses and a motorcycle on fire and destroyed the market, the UN said. Two people were killed during a confrontation in the eastern region of Ermera and peacekeepers fired tear gas to control crowds in Dili.

It was the latest violence to hit the nation, which borders part of Indonesia on an island north of Australia, since inconclusive elections two months ago. Fretilin, East Timor's largest party, was excluded from government for the first time since independence from Indonesia five years ago, sparking protests against the new coalition headed by former President Xanana Gusmao.

Australian-led peacekeepers and UN police were deployed to the nation of 1 million people in May 2006, after fighting between groups from the western and eastern regions killed 37 people and drove 150,000 from their homes.

Gas Reserves

The country has a jobless rate of 50 percent and about 42 percent of the population lives below the poverty line. While holding the rights to an estimated 8 trillion cubic feet of gas and 300 million barrels of light oil, East Timor is one of the region's poorest countries.

Fretilin supporters rioted after Gusmao, who assembled a three-party coalition with a parliamentary majority, was appointed Aug. 6 as prime minister. Fretilin, which won the most votes in the June 30 election, said the move by President Jose Ramos Horta was unconstitutional.

Three UN vehicles were ambushed Aug. 11 as they drove between Bacau, East Timor's second-largest city, and Viqueque, where more than 140 houses were destroyed in earlier rioting.

Gusmao, a former guerrilla leader who fought against Indonesian occupation, pledged to unite the nation when he was sworn in.

The former Portuguese colony was occupied by Indonesia for 24 years. The nation voted for independence in a 1999 referendum, triggering a campaign of violence, backed by the Indonesian military, which left hundreds of civilians dead. The country became independent in 2002.

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Duped Australian pawn, Major Reinado

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