

East Timor

monthly memo
news

R. Pinheiro Chagas, 77 - 2º E 1000 Lisboa Portugal
☎ (01) 57 47 18 / 54 13 08 Telex 64 062 CIDAC P

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MONTHLY MEMO Nº 9 1991

(Information received during October 1991)

1. EAST TIMOR

a. Troops storm Motael church :

At dawn on October 28, within days of the cancellation of the PPD visit to East Timor (see Urgent Communiqué (1) 91), Indonesian soldiers stormed Motael church in Dili, where about 20 young people were taking refuge, in the early hours of the morning. Sebastião Gomes Rangel, 18 years old, was killed when the troops opened fire with automatic weapons. Afonso Henriques, 29 years, was also killed. Approximately three dozen East Timorese youths were taken away and were reported to have been tortured at the police headquarters. (Público 30 October 1991)

The young people had been taking refuge in the church, as they had at various recent times of tension, because of fears for their safety. Among their number was Aleixo Ximenes, who was said to have organized about 10,000 people to demonstrate in Baucau during the PPD visit, and who was on the run after having been wounded a few days before. (Diário de Notícias 29 October 1991)

This was the first time that the armed forces had taken such an action against Timorese taking refuge on Church property. Bishop Belo arrived on the scene shortly after and speaking to the crowd that had gathered said that "they are treating our church like the enemy". (Público 30 October 1991)

Next day, thousands of people came on the streets as the body of Sebastião Gomes, who is said to have been identified with the resistance, was carried around the town before being buried at Santa Cruz Cemetery. Bishop Belo attended the funeral in defiance of the Indonesian authorities. (Público 31 October 1991)

The incident was acknowledged by Jakarta and covered in TV news reports there. The armed forces daily, Angkatan Bersenjata, said that the shooting started after a brawl in which young men had pelted passers-by with stones. It claimed that a later search of the church, carried out by police, found knives and FRETILIN flags and banners there. (The Australian 30 October 1991)

Amnesty International in Australia called on the Australian Government to

intervene urgently. It also refuted Indonesian reports that there had been FRETILIN flags and small arms in the church. (Diário de Notícias 30 October 1991)

A statement on 2 November, Bishop Belo stated that "anti-Indonesia pamphlets, Fretilin and Portuguese flags were found, as well as some objects (knives, sticks and iron bars) in the house of the domestic staff and outside of the parish offices, but not inside the Church as has been tendentiously broadcast." He said that for a period of weeks prior to the 28 October, during the pre-dawn hours when only military and Intel agents appeared on the streets, men on motorcycles had been circling the church and watching it because of the youths who were taking refuge there.

"In the early hours of 28 October, a group of individuals on motor-cycles began to circle the perimeter of the Presbytery and the Church of Motael, shouting abuse. This time, from mere words they moved to action, throwing stones against the front of the Church and at the side known as "Taman Mini", and entering the grounds of the Church. Physical contact was inevitable (2 a.m.). Meanwhile, a number of individuals with pistols drawn began to advance, coming from the beach and entering the front door of the Church, where the young man, Sebastião, was killed, riddled with bullets he was found dead some 18 metres from the door of the wall of the Church, on the verge of the other side of the road." (Reg. East Timor, E-Mail topic 321, 1991)

Further confrontations and house-to-house searches took place in Lospalos, Viqueque, Baucau, Fatumaca and Manatuto according to resistance sources in Darwin and a number of Timorese were detained on suspicion of having been involved in preparations for the PPD visit. These include Bernardo and Teolinda Sarmiento (Baucau) and Manuel de Cordélia Piedade (Manatuto) (Público 31 October 1991; Diário de Notícias 29 October 1991).

b. "Panic and terror" - Australian visitors:

Two Australian film-makers, who were in Dili on the day of the Motael Church shooting, later described the conditions of "panic and terror" they had witnessed. From their hotel they heard the sounds of the church bells ringing incessantly in the early hours of the morning of 28 October and looking out they saw hundreds of people, including women and children, unarmed and silent, defying the curfew and running panic-stricken towards the church.

A while later they heard shots from inside the church and the bells stopped. A large number of non-Timorese in civilian dress appeared and ordered the people to disperse which they did, still in silence.

In their travels in Timor, where they were shooting a documentary film, the Australians said they had encountered everywhere a sense of "fear and panic" among the Timorese. (Diário de Notícias 31 October 1991)

c. Military ordered "Purge of FRETILIN":

The Indonesian military initiated a crackdown on dissidents in August in preparation for the Portuguese parliamentary visit to East Timor, according to an Indonesian military document in Bahasa which has been obtained by

both the Portuguese and Australian press.

The document, leaked by a military source in East Timor to the East Timor News Agency, says the army allegedly initiated a clean-up campaign to deter the Fretilin guerilla movement before the visit. It had been sent by the commander of the Special Operation Executive in East Timor, named as Pangkolakops, to the director of the Strategic Intelligence Headquarters and it describes in military code, operations to stop and destroy the FRETILIN guerillas and analyze the preparations for the visit.

The document says the special branch of strategic intelligence of the Indonesian army was also to investigate the escape last May of the four Timorese soccer players who were participating in the Arafura Games in Darwin.

It also says the special forces were to uncover and deter the "underground networks involved with the preparations for the visit or with the FRETILIN guerilla movement."

The source in Dili claimed the military had created a number of teams with specific instructions to infiltrate the pro-independence groups.

The Indonesian ambassador in Australia, Mr Sabam Siagian, denied these reports. "These reports are a lie. We are used to this type of news about the situation in East Timor but these reports are fabricated and not true," he said.

But a spokesman for the Catholic Bishop of East Timor, Bishop Belo, confirmed the reports and told The Australian the East Timorese were "living a time of terror."

The official Antara news agency reported in Jakarta on October 30 that Indonesian police had released 22 of 40 people detained after the incident.

East Timor Military Commander Brigadier General R.S. Warrouw said yesterday that all responsible for the brawl he alleged caused the deaths would be brought to justice.

The Portuguese ambassador to Australia, Dr Jose Luis Gomes, said on 30 October he would call on the Australian Government formally to condemn Jakarta over the shootings. (The Australian 31 October 1991)

d. Bishop's fears of bloodbath:

On 23 October, Lord Avebury, of Parliamentarians for East Timor, asked parliamentarians throughout the world to urge the UN Secretary-General to station an international observer force in East Timor for three months from mid-November.

This was in response to an appeal from Bishop Belo, made in a letter written in September to a fellow bishop in Portugal, for "an international force to control the situation after the deputies leave" and to a radio interview on Portuguese radio, in which Bishop Belo voiced his fears of "a bloodbath" if the visit took place. (ETN/431)

A letter from Dili to the UN Secretary-General and other international

figures, dated 10 October and signed by former political leaders of APODETI, KOTA and the Workers Party in East Timor, had also expressed fears of reprisals and appealed for an international peace-keeping force. (ETN/323)

e. Guerrilla surrender report denied:

A claim by Gen. Warrow that 150 FALINTIL guerrillas had given themselves up to the Indonesian authorities has been categorically denied by an authoritative resistance source in Dili. (Público 31 October 1991)

f. Abílio Araújo "Proposal for a Solution":

Abílio Araújo, head of the FRETILIN External Delegation, presented the Portuguese President, on 12 October, with a document containing a plan entitled "East Timor - Proposal for a solution".

The plan envisions four phases leading to a "free and democratic" consultation of the Timorese people. Portugal would appoint a High Commissioner for East Timor in the interim and Portuguese troops would replace the Indonesian armed forces, who would retire from the territory, and the FALINTIL forces who would lay down their arms. (Público 18 October 1991; ETN/432))

g. UDT Rift:

Paulo Pires, the Lisbon-based UDT leader, was dismissed from his post on 1 October according to João Carrascalão, Secretary-General of the organisation, speaking from Perth. (Jornal de Notícias 29 October 1991)

h. Documents received:

- 1) Press release by Parliamentarians for East Timor, 23 Oct. 1p (English); ETN/321
- 2) "East Timor - Proposal for a solution", Abílio Araújo, Lisbon 10 Oct. 1991, 9p (Portuguese); ETN/322
- 3) letter from representatives of APODETI, KOTA and the Timorese Workers Party, Dili 10 Oct., 1p (Portuguese); ETN/323
- 4) Statement by Bishop Belo concerning the Motael Church incident, Dili 2 November, 1 p (Portuguese); ETN/324

2. ADMINISTERING POWER: PORTUGAL

a. PPD visit cancellation:

Vitor Crespo, Speaker of the Portuguese Parliament, told "Publico" that along with the issue of the veto on journalist Jill Jolliffe, (see Urgent Memo 1,91) two other factors had weighed in favour of the cancellation of the PPD visit to East Timor. One was the fears expressed by Bishop Belo in telephone interviews, especially that of 21 October on TSF radio when the Apostolic Administrator of Dili said "in my opinion, it would be better that they do not come, better that they do not come".

The second factor was the fear that Xanana Gusmão intended to surrender himself to the Portuguese delegation during the visit and request that he leave the territory with them. (Público 30 October 1991). It is unclear where this information originated but one suggestion is that it had been

transmitted by the two Portuguese deputies who had been part of the earlier Advance Team who went to East Timor to arrange the logistics of the PPD visit. (Expresso 2 Nov. 1991)

"Público", however reports that Xanana himself was unaware of these rumours and had prepared an entirely different plan of action for the visit according to a letter written by the resistance leader on 10 October, and for security reasons published only in part by the paper. This made no mention of giving himself up, but rather talks of planning his "participation in the demonstrations of the people" and his intention to continue the struggle. (Público 30 October 1991)

Meanwhile in Jakarta Ali Alatas accused Portugal of having broken a gentlemen's agreement, made with the knowledge of the UN Vice-Secretary-General Raffeuddin Ahmed although not published in the Terms of Agreement, that either side could veto the foreign journalists nominated. (Diário de Notícias 29 October 1991)

3. INTERNATIONAL

a. Bishops appeal to de Cuellar:

In response to the descriptions by Bishop Belo of the current situation and his fears for his people, the UN Secretary-General received an appeal signed by 49 bishops from all parts of the world, denouncing the wave of repression in East Timor and calling for the Timorese to be protected against the repression which Bishop Belo had reported. (Público 31 October 1991)

Editor and translator: Billy Williams
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