Mail Call!

The Central Dili Post Office was opened on 29 April, officially inaugurating the start of the East Timor Postal Service. The Postal Service, established with assistance by the Portuguese Post (CTT), provides mail service initially between Dili and Baucau, and internationally via Darwin, Australia. UNTAET will provide transportation for both domestic and international mail. Domestic stamps cost 10¢ while international stamps are priced at 50¢.

TAIS TIMOR

UNTAET, Indonesia sign agreement on border issues

The United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) and the Government of Indonesia have signed an agreement intended to help foster closer cooperation on border issues and to enable both sides to manage possible incidents along the boundary.

UNTAET Peacekeeping Force (UN-PKF) Commander Lt. Gen. Jaime de los Santos and the Indonesian commander for the region, Maj. Gen. Kiki Syahnakri, signed on 11 April in Dili the Memorandum of Understanding for Tactical Coordination in the Border Area between Nusatenggara Timur (West Timor) and East Timor between the TNI and the UNTAET Military Component.

The agreement reaffirms the "mutual respect and confidence" between TNI and UN Peacekeeping, Gen. de los Santos said at a news conference following the signing. The MOU "will result in a far stronger understanding of each other's position and a much improved ability to work together in the border areas," he added.

For his part, Gen. Syahnakri said that he hoped that the signing of the MOU would "improve the cooperation between TNI and UNTAET Peacekeeping and speeds up the repatriation of the Timorese."

The MOU defines a boundary between East and West Timor for military tactical coordination purposes only and does not establish an internationally recognized border.

According to the MOU, UN Military Observers (UNMOs) will be stationed at the 12 Junction Points, conduct tasks as Liaison Officers and coordinate between TNI (the Indonesian military) and the UN-PKF when the two sides want to speak to each other.

The MOU also reaffirms the previous memorandum signed on 12 January by TNI, UNTAET and the Australian-led international force, INTERFET, and includes additional matters on a new junction point in Maliana District, mutual cooperation in reporting and investigating boundary incidents and a prohibition against troops carrying weapons when crossing the border.

Town hall meeting on employment

The issue of East Timorese unemployment, and what UNTAET and the CNRT are doing about it, took center stage at a three-hour "Town Hall Meeting" held in the Old Gymnasiuim Building in Dili on 26 April.

CNRT leaders Xanana Gusmão and Jose Ramos Horta, and Nagalingam Parameswaran, UNTAET’s Chief of Staff, as well as youth group leader Mariano Sabino Lopes discussed employment issues with an audience of more than 1,000 people. Many of the participants had been in the protest over unemployment on 15 April in front of the Governor’s Office, UNTAET Headquarters.

Both UNTAET and CNRT attempted to clarify for the audience the process of rebuilding the damaged country and plans for employing people. In opening the discussion, Mr. Parameswaran stressed that UNTAET was not the main source in East Timor for finding jobs. The Chief of Staff also said that "we cannot rebuild the country in a week," although he confirmed that a major UNTAET reconstruction effort throughout the country was in the works.

In his statement, Mr. Gusmão reminded the audience that UNTAET was in East Timor "to help us prepare the country for independence." The problem of unemployment was not only to be found here, he added, but in every country in the world and that it would have to be addressed even after independence. Using the example of UNTAET’s Timorese drivers, Mr. Gusmão asked, "What will happen to them after UNTAET has left? It is a Timorese problem that the nation will ultimately have to solve itself."

Mr. Gusmão’s principle message was that Timorese needed to change their mentality regarding employment. "The public sector simply cannot be the only source of employment," he said, "It puts too much of a burden on the state." The private sector, he stressed, would be the main job creator in the new East Timor, not the public sector and the civil service.

For his part, Mr. Lopes, Chairman of the Students Community and Vice Secretary-General of Renetil, stressed the need to develop the country’s agricultural resources and to move into agricultural exports such as in bananas and fisheries. He also stressed the role of the youth in the nation’s next stage of development.

In relation to the task of generating employment in the country, both Mr. Gusmão and Mr. Parameswaran asked the Timorese to be calm and to help create a secured and safe environment throughout the country. There needed to be a "peaceful national environment" to attract foreign investment, which was essential to the process of creating jobs

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and rebuilding the Timorese economy. Mr. Parammeswaran said. Meanwhile, the president admonished Timorese to be like a small, thrifty shopkeeper. "We must create a new mentality of personal saving and contributing to the overall economy," he said.

Mr. Parammeswaran briefed the audience on UNTAET’s various labor intensive projects, including Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) that put Timorese to work throughout the country, and also on details of the major reconstruction effort soon to get underway. He said that "all the agreements that had been signed to date were done in consultation with the Timorese," the highest representation being the National Consultative Council (NCC).

In response to a question about training, all the speakers stressed, in light of the lack of skilled Timorese, the need to quickly establish training programmes to improve the economy. They also highlighted the importance of the media in keeping Timorese aware of what was occurring. The UNTAET Chief of Staff also asked the help of both the print and electronic media to broadcast what was discussed at the Town Hall Meeting. The CNRT President added that the press could not be seen as in opposition to the government. "On 30 August, we achieved the right to have differences in society and the right of being different from each other."

When asked about the apparent slowness of the reconstruction effort, Mr. Gusmão told the audience: "We must go through all the procedures of accountability and of transparency so we do not repeat the mistakes of the past."

In response to Bishop Belo's question regarding efforts to rebuild the nation's infrastructure, Mr. Cady responded that UNTAET would soon undertake a major, US$29 million programme to repair the roads, the ports and the transportation system. Mr. Cady also mentioned that Dili Port would be enlarged and that the nation's key roads, which run north to south and are the most heavily damaged, would be repaired.

"UNTAEFT and the CNRT," Father Matinho Gusmão of the Baucau Youth Commission said, "seemed active but didn't seem to be solving any problems, or maybe they were doing something but people were not informed about it."

Mr. Cady added that it "lets us know what people are thinking. In this regard, church leaders here today have been the voice of the people and asked the questions they want asked about UNTAET."

ULTAET, Timorese discuss labour issues

The first tripartite consultation on labour issues and the future labour law was concluded on 26 April in Dili. Organized by UNTAET, the workshop gathered representatives of East Timorese labour organizations, experts from the International Labour Organization (ILO), UNTAET and participants from human rights organizations, student groups and the Church. Regrettably, no representatives of employers attended the workshop.

The event was organized with the aim of securing participation and input from East Timorese in drafting the future labour law. A working group comprised of representatives of seven different organizations was formed to prepare the final report on the workshop. This report will then be distributed to all relevant stakeholders and should provide substantive input to the labour legislation which is to be drafted by UNTAET Legal Affairs Department and presented to the National Consultative Council (NCC) for approval. The regulation is expected to be passed by the end of June.

Meanwhile, the ILO will prepare a set of guidelines that will be discussed by the Working Group and passed for signature to the Transitional Administrator within a month.

So far, the UN PKF has found no other explosive devices at these sites, but Capt. Riddle is firm when he says that "it is very difficult to say that an area is completely cleared because one never knows exactly what is still lying around."

"That is why it is important for people to be educated about the dangers of unexploded ordnance and what to do when coming across it," Capt. Riddle says. For instance, unexploded ordnance can still be found in several places around the world. In Europe, shells and bombs from the First and Second World Wars are still being discovered.

To help increase people’s awareness and cautionfulness about the issue, UNTAET has launched a public information campaign with radio messages and a poster (see accompanying poster image).

For their part, UNTAET’s Civilian Police (CivPol) and the UN-PKF are working to improve communication on unexploded ordnance between the police and the military. They have established Standard Operating Procedures that require the police and the military to use the same language with regard to any information and action on unexploded ordnance.

"We want to avoid any misunderstandings," says Mike Peckover, Civilian Police Military Liaison Officer. "The police might come across unexploded ordnance during normal policing duties and be at a loss as to what questions to ask and what to do in such situations."

The new East Timorese police cadets will also be trained to recognize different ordnance. In addition, a central Control Centre on unexploded ordnance is being established in Dili where information is collected and recorded to build up an archive.

"All this in the hope that a life will be saved," says Officer Peekover. "Now that the security situation in East Timor is more stable, we want to get rid of the other dangers to society that still exist and work with the people to help avoid having any more people, especially children, getting hurt."
District News Round-up

East Timor is expected to produce nearly 95,000 metric tonnes of maize in the coming year, according to a recent United Nations report on crop and food assessment. The report, the result of a joint mission by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Food Programme (WFP) from 30 March to 7 April, also estimated that 30,540 metric tonnes of milled rice would be available, as well as 5,900 metric tonnes of food aid stocks.

The hard-hit western regions of Bobonaro, Covalima and Oecussi are expected to have lower than usual production levels because farmers returned late in the season to the planting fields.

The troops distributed thousands of bars of soap, shoes and slippers, farm equipment, school kits, clothes and household goods. The unit has also run a 30-person health clinic to inoculate and treat Lautem residents and a mobile dental clinic. Some batteries also volunteered to teach the local residents a trim. The UN Peacekeepers from the Republic of Korea have been an integral part of restoring normalcy to the district, providing humanitarian aid and safety against unexploded ordnance.

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Meanwhile, three more QIPs, totalling US$18,474, have been approved in an effort to address the unemployment problem. The USAID-funded Transitional Employment Programme is also due to start shortly, following consultations with the local CNRT leadership regarding priorities.

For the latest news and information about East Timor, tune in to Radio UNTAET.

News Briefs

China office in East Timor: China is planning to establish a representative office in East Timor. The Chinese ambassador to Jakarta, Chen Shiqiu, arrived in Dili on 28 April accompanied by government officials from Beijing.

China’s intent to open an office in East Timor was discussed last month during separate meetings in Beijing between the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Sergio Vieira de Mello, and Chinese Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan and his deputy, Wang Guangya.

The trio also discussed China’s US$6 million donation to East Timor made during CNRT President Xanana Gusman’s trip in February.

To date, Australia, Indonesia, Japan, Portugal, the United Kingdom and the United States have representatives for East Timor.

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Questions about UNTAET

Dear readers, are you confused about UNTAET and what it's up to? Well, you're not alone. A few days ago, Ameu came to me looking for answers to a few of his own questions about UNTAET. He brought a few of his friends who had questions as well. Listen in!

Ameu: Bondia Senhor Tiu, How are you?
Tiu: I'm fine, Ameu. Good to see you again, and with your friends. What brings you all here?
Ameu: Well, Tiu, a bunch of us stayed up last night discussing the future of our country and UNTAET's role here. The discussion got a bit heated because some of my friends didn't believe what I was saying about UNTAET. We thought we would check it out with you, wise Uncle.

Tiu: I'll help you if I can, but you should try to get more information on UNTAET yourself, from district offices and the Church and the NCTP.

Anyway, I'll do my best now to answer any of your questions and maybe resolve a dispute or two.

Ameu: Can you help put to rest the confusion and let us know in clear and simple terms why the UN is here. Is it doing anything useful for our new nation?
Tiu: Good question. Now listen to me carefully. UNTAET is the transitional administration in our country, which means that it has the overall authority during this period before independence.

UNTAET came into existence on 25 October 1999, with the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution No. 1272; and it is headed by Sergio Vieira de Mello, who is the General of the United Nations.

The two facilities have a combined capacity of more than 360 inmates. The UN Peacekeeping Force (UN-PKF) is continuing to provide catering and medical care until details of a contract with an independent contractor are worked out.

More than 30 Timorese prison wardens have been recruited. The Government of New Zealand is sending 11 prison management experts to help run the prisons and train local personnel.

First tenders for reconstruction: UNTAET has initiated the first contract tenders for the architecture and engineering services for 23 future Government buildings in Dili.

The repairs will take an estimated eight months and cost about US$7.5 million.