

East Timor Premier quits

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JAKARTA: East Timor Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri announced his resignation on Monday, saying his decision was to prevent President Xanana Gusmao from stepping down. "I declare I am ready to quit my position as Prime Minister, so as to avoid the resignation of President Xanana Gusmao," he was quoted by the Detikcom news website as saying. Saying the national interests are the most important thing, Mr. Alkatiri added, "I am determined not

to deepen the crisis." East Timor was plunged into violence in May after the Prime Minister fired nearly 600 of the country's 1,400 army men for mutiny when they protested alleged discrimination against them. Since then, the sacked troops and thousands of protesters have demanded resignation of Mr. Alkatiri. The mass and the sacked soldiers said Mr. Alkatiri should be responsible for the violence that had seen youth gangs fighting, looting in capital Dili. — Xinhua

Timor's PM clings to power, Nobel laureate resigns

ROD MCGUIRK

DILI, JUNE 25

TIMOR Leste's ruling party refused to fire the prime minister today, defying the demands of popular President Xanana Gusmao and triggering the resignation of the Nobel prize-winning Foreign Minister Jose Ramos-Horta.

The developments threatened to completely unravel the government as it struggled to regain control following the worst outbreak of violence since the country voted for independence seven years ago.

Many East Timorese say PM Mari Alkatiri's decision to fire 600 disgruntled soldiers in March was to blame for street battles and gang warfare that left at least 30 people dead and sent nearly 150,000 people fleeing from their homes. Alkatiri also faces allegations of forming a hit squad to silence his political opponents, a charge he denies.

Gusmao, revered for leading Timor Leste's resistance to Indonesian occupation, last



East Timor's President Xanana Gusmao (centre) with PM Mari Alkatiri (left) and Foreign Minister Jose Ramos-Horta in East Timor in this June 18, 2006 file photo. AP

week demanded that Alkatiri resign, energising demonstrators who have poured into the streets by the thousands. But the ruling Fretilin party said after holding emergency talks on Sunday that the prime minister had accepted the unanimous appeal of its committee to remain in his post.

Ramos-Horta, who won a Nobel peace prize in 1996 for his nonviolent resistance to In-

donesian rule over his tiny homeland, responded by saying he would himself step down "until a new government is established".

Though Alkatiri said he knew nothing about the alleged political hit squads, a close ally, the country's former interior minister, is facing criminal charges for allegedly arming civilian militias on his request. —AP

25 JUN 2005

INFORMATION

25 JUN 2005

Celebrations begin as E Timor PM resigns

SIMON Montlake
Dili, June 26

THE EAST Timorese Prime Minister, Mari Alkatiri, announced his resignation on Monday and said he shouldered the blame for the violent unrest that has swept the tiny country in recent months.

Protesters danced on the waterfront in the battle-scarred capital Dili, joined by others who poured into the streets to celebrate as news spread.

His departure ended days of heightened political tensions after East Timor's popular president, Xanana Gusmao, vowed to quit unless Alkatiri stepped down, a strategy that appeared to have succeeded.

On Sunday, the foreign minister, Jose Ramos-Horta, who won the Nobel peace prize for his non-violent opposition to Indonesian occupa-



Demonstrators in Dili, their faces painted in white to represent the ghosts of people killed during the recent unrest, celebrate after Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri resigned on Monday.

tion, resigned in protest at Alkatiri's refusal. In a statement, Alkatiri said he was resigning for the sake of the nation and to comply with President Gusmao's request, and added that he assumed his "own share of responsibility for the crisis affecting our country". He did not name his successor. The prime minis-

ter has been accused of arming secret militia for political purposes, and his former security chief was arrested and charged last week with importing illegal weapons. Both men have denied the charges. Much of the chaos that erupted in Dili has been traced back to an army mutiny this year

The Guardian

Fierce gunbattles in East Timor

International peacekeepers arrive in Dili amid fears of civil war

DILI (EAST TIMOR): International peacekeepers arrived in East Timor's capital to restore order as gunbattles between rebel troops and government forces threatened to plunge the world's youngest country into civil war.

At least three persons were killed and more than a dozen wounded in fierce fighting across Dili, sending terrified residents and foreigners fleeing for safety, some rushing to the airport.

"I feel horrible, like a rat deserting a sinking ship," said Australian Margaret Hall, who arrived in the country several months ago with an organisation that is helping provide maternal and child health care. "But I'm confident we'll be back."

Serious threat

The unrest in East Timor is the most serious threat to the desperately poor country since it broke from Indonesian rule in 1999 in massive violence that ended only with the arrival of an Australian-led international peacekeeping mission.

The United Nations administered the tiny nation for the next three years, during which time the army was formed — critics say too hastily, contributing to the present crisis.

The latest dispute started in March when 600 soldiers — nearly 40 per cent of East Timor's entire armed forces — were fired after going on strike to protest alleged discrimination in



FLEEING TO SAFETY: East Timorese refugees head for a U.N. camp in Dili on Thursday. — PHOTO: AP

the military. Some hard-liners fled the capital, hunkering down in surrounding hills and threatening guerilla warfare if they were not reinstated.

Gunbattles erupted on Thursday for a third day in several parts of Dili — including near President Xanana Gusmao's of-

fice and the U.N. compound where around 1,500 residents had sought refuge.

Homes and business were torched, with plumes of smoke rising over virtually deserted streets.

Two former soldiers and an army captain were killed, bring-

ing the death toll in this week's bloodshed to five, said the military and Lt. Gastao Salsinha, a spokesman for the ex-soldiers. Fourteen ex-soldiers and a South Korean bystander were wounded.

Some of the fiercest fighting took place when unidentified

gunmen attacked police headquarters, suggesting that elements of the police had now taken sides in the conflict, said a U.N. staffer.

The chaos prompted the fledgling nation's government to ask for international troops.

— AP

26 MAR 2006

THE HINDU

East Timor PM sniffs coup plot as violence mounts

Associated Press

DILI, May 27. — East Timor's capital descended into chaos today as rival gangs attacked each other with machetes and spears and set houses aflame, defying international peacekeepers patrolling in armed vehicles and combat helicopters. The Prime Minister said a coup attempt was under way.

"What is in motion is an attempt to stage a coup d'etat," Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri told a news conference, as fires raged across the city and thousands of residents fled or hid, terrified, in their homes.

Minutes before he spoke, Australian troops disarmed up to 40 machete-wielding gang members just half a block away, highlighting the lawlessness on Dili's streets. The Australian troops, who answered an emergency help call from the fledgling country's government two days ago, patrolled the city all day in armoured personnel carriers and tanks, and *Black-Hawk* helicopters thundered overhead.

Mobs rampaged regardless, and sporadic gunfire was heard in various parts of the city. There were seven injuries, mostly during street clashes, and despite threats of force, foreign soldiers aren't believed to have fired their guns. In one early morning

raid, dozens of houses and cars were set ablaze. Women and children fled screaming to seek shelter at a nearby church. Shortly later, Australian soldiers rounded up two to three dozen civilians armed with machetes, spears and other handheld weapons, questioning them and searching vehicles. Thousands of other terrified residents loaded provisions onto trucks and cars and drove to embassies, the airport or makeshift shelters. "The Timorese are fighting, so we are afraid. At night they fire guns, or maybe worse, so I had to run to the United Nations," said Anim, a mother of four, as she prepared for a night in an overcrowded refugee camp at the UN headquarters.

Earlier this week, a mob torched the house of a government minister, killing five children and an adult whose charred bodies were found yesterday. "There is no solution," priest Jose Antonio said at a church where hundreds of people have sought shelter. Hatred between the warring factions runs long and deep, he said, "and this is an opportunity for revenge."

The violence was triggered by the March firing of 600 disgruntled soldiers, nearly half the 1,400-member army and is the most serious crisis East Timor has faced since it broke from Indonesian rule in 1999.

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THE STATESMAN