

The East Timor contest

SIR. As an East Timorese (or Eurasian, or a mestizo as Gough Whitlam and Peter Hastings would prefer to say) I feel compelled to write in response to one of the worst pieces of journalism I have ever read. I refer to Peter Hastings's pro-Indonesia series on East Timor.

In an obvious attempt to discredit a courageous and honest East Timorese priest, Mr Hastings and his travel companion, the former Australian Prime Minister-turned Indonesia's propagandist, Mr Gough Whitlam, went out of their way to deny Father Martinho da Costa Lopes' charges of famine and Indonesian brutalities in East Timor.

Mr Whitlam decided to shut his eyes to the death of more than 200,000 East Timorese since Indonesia invaded the territory. He never uttered a word of condemnation of the campaign of terror, rape, torture and massacre perpetrated by the Indonesians against the East Timorese.

Mr Whitlam has a messy record on East Timor since his days as Prime Minister. He is on the record in dismissing East Timorese rights to self-determination and in support of the territory's incorporation in Indonesia.

Acting alone and against the advice of the Defence Department and of his own colleagues, ignoring his Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Whitlam decided East Timor's fate with President Suharto back in 1974.

In 1974 and 1975, the Portuguese Government, myself and many other East Timorese leaders urged Whitlam's Government to reopen the Australian

Consulate in East Timor so that Australia could monitor events there and assist in the decolonisation of the territory.

An Australian diplomatic presence in Dili would have been a deterrent to Indonesia's campaign of intimidation, provocation and interference.

The response from Whitlam's Government was always negative and the explanation was that reopening the Consulate in Dili would irritate Jakarta.

Now, Mr Whitlam, in his numerous utterances on East Timor, tries to blame the tragedy of East Timor on the East Timorese.

The Indonesian generals who invaded the island and massacred one third of the population receive only high praises from the former Prime Minister.

After a four-day visit to East Timor, Peter Hastings and Mr Whitlam claim to know more than a devout Catholic priest, a courageous man who dared risking his own life to speak out for his countrymen.

Father Lopes does not have "nostalgia" for the Portuguese rule as Mr Whitlam so insultingly suggested.

He was outspoken against injustices during the colonial rule and earned the admiration of the East Timorese; then the Catholic newspaper he edited, *A Seara*, was closed down by the Portuguese because of the frequent criticism of injustices by the newspaper.

We the East Timorese (mestizos included) do not recognise in Mr Whitlam any moral authority to speak for or about our country.

He has blood on his hands and he now tries to evade his guilt and responsibility by presenting East Timor as an Indonesian-made paradise.

It is often said that history will judge men's actions. We do not want to wait for history to judge Mr Whitlam's policies of criminal connivance in East Timor's take-over by Indonesia.

The coming Senate inquiry on East Timor should devote part of its energies in investigation of Mr Whitlam's role. We do not think the entire Whitlam cabinet was co-responsible in East Timor's policies. Not even Don Willesee had much voice in the formulation and decision on any major foreign policy issue.

To associate the entire ALP with Whitlam would be also unfair. Whitlam alone (and some pro-Indonesia pushers in the Foreign Affairs Department, such as Dick Woolcott) should answer before the Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence.

Will Mr Whitlam have the courage to appear before the committee?

JOSE RAMOS-HORTA,
Fretilin's Representative to the
United Nations,
April 16 New York.

Peter Hastings writes: Mr Whitlam and I went out of our way to deny Bishop Martinho da Costa Lopes' "charges of famine" in East Timor because we found them unproven not only on the evidence of our own eyes but on the detailed evidence of the International Committee of the Red Cross, and US Catholic Relief Services, which have been working in the province since April 1979. Both organisations categorically state "there is no famine."

We also found it hard to establish incidents of atrocities although they have undoubtedly been perpetrated by all sides. The most recent charges of atrocities in Timor, which occurred

earlier last year, were laid in fact not against the Indonesian Army but against a Timorese battalion which is now breaking stones on a road building project in Kalimantan (Borneo) for its pains.

Mr Horta produces once again a magic figure of 200,000 deaths in Timor. The work entirely, he says, of the Indonesian Army.

What is the evidence for this? While it most difficult to arrive at satisfactory figures, on all the evidence available to me I believe, like Peter Rodgers after his visit to East Timor in 1979 and David Jenkins after his visit in 1980, that perhaps 100,000 Timorese have died from all causes — the civil war, Indonesia's armed intervention, but mainly from famine and famine related diseases.

Mr Ramos-Horta says that the Apostolic Administrator is not nostalgic for Portuguese rule. This was not our impression nor in fact that of some of his priests or Timorese lay people.

Moreover, nostalgia is not incompatible with the administrator's undoubted ability to speak out for what he believes or with his penchant for exaggeration, a characteristic shared with Mr Horta who only last October told the fourth committee of the UN that 300,000 Indonesian troops, more than Indonesia's entire Army, had invaded East Timor.

In any case nostalgia is not a crime either on the part of the Bishop or on that of Mr Horta, who has more than once approached Indonesian authorities to sound out the possibility of a return to East Timor, a fact vouched for not only by the Indonesians themselves and close, former, Timorese friends of Jose Ramos-Horta but by his own family in Dili.