

# The visit to East Timor

C. TIMES  
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## LETTERS to the Ed

Sir,— Your editorial on the Whitlam-Hastings East Timor visit (March 13) gives me the impression that *The Canberra Times* believes it has exposed yet another fiendish trick that the Indonesian Government has played on innocent Australians abroad. Where will it all end, one might ask. But for the perceptiveness of *The Canberra Times*, the Indonesians might have got away with it unnoticed.

Your editorial suggested that "Mr Hastings was not served well by the Indonesian Government in being closely associated during his visit with Mr Whitlam", and wondered why senior Indonesian advisers "would want Mr Hastings and Mr Whitlam to visit East Timor and not, apparently, other foreign observers". You suggested that "The question is unfair to both Mr Hastings and Mr Whitlam, but it is one to which

Indonesian policy has now subjected them."

How ingenuous of *The Canberra Times* to take this line! I suppose you are serious, although it seems extraordinary. Doesn't it occur to you that perhaps Whitlam and Hastings can look after themselves? Neither of them are exactly babes in the wood.

In fact, the circumstances surrounding the Whitlam-Hastings visit are quite straightforward. As Mr Hastings explained, he and Mr Whitlam were invited to visit East Timor under the auspices of the Centre for Strategic and International Studies in Jakarta. The relationship between CSIS and the Indonesian Government is well known, and doubtless both Mr Whitlam and Mr Hastings were well aware of the fact that their visit would be semi-official.

The question of Mr Hastings being "served well" by the Indonesian Government does not arise. It is not the job of any government anywhere in the world to "serve" the interests of foreign journalists. It is the job of governments to serve the interests of their own nation, and it is the job of journalists to remember that governments behave in that way.

Mr Hastings would have been very naive to expect that his Indonesian hosts were setting out to put his interests above their own, and it is hardly likely that he entertained this notion for a second.

Furthermore, Indonesian policy has not "subjected" Mr Whitlam or Mr Hastings to anything. Once the offer of access to East Timor was made, Mr Whitlam and Mr Hastings were quite free to decline it if they had wanted to.

If *The Canberra Times* wants to pose questions which are "unfair to Mr Whitlam and Mr Hastings", then the questions should be addressed directly to these gentlemen, because both are quite capable of explaining themselves. They certainly do not need the protection of *The Canberra Times* from the "subjection" of the Indonesian Government.

Finally, the "unfair" question which your editorial poses (if it is so "unfair" why do you ask it?) is a silly one in any case. It is surely perfectly clear why senior Indo-

nesian advisers wanted Hastings and Whitlam to visit East Timor: they thought that on balance, the result was likely to be in Indonesia's interests.

Does it surprise anyone that Indonesian advisers have Indonesia's interests in mind? Is there anything wrong with this? Don't we expect that senior Australian advisers should have Australia's interests in mind? Why shouldn't Indonesian advisers behave in the same way?

Your editorial is a good example of the peculiar view that *The Canberra Times* has of Australian-Indonesian relations. Somehow or other, Australians are generally the innocent party. Somehow or other, it is usually the fault of the nasty Indonesians.

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Hawker.