

Timor famine report false, says Whitlam

JAKARTA, 5 March. — The former Australian Prime Minister Mr Whitlam today accused the Apostolic Administrator in East Timor of circulating a false report that the province was on the verge of a big famine.

Mr Whitlam, who returned to Jakarta last night after a two-day tour of the former Portuguese colony, said he saw no signs of famine or imminent famine. He added that he regarded reports emanating from Catholic sources on the island about alleged killings of civilians by the Indonesian authorities as either false or grossly exaggerated.

Referring particularly to a letter from Monsignor Martinho da Costa Lopes, Apostolic Administrator of Dili, East Timor's capital, Mr Whitlam told a Press conference: "I cannot understand why he perpetrated this wicked act and sent this cruel letter."

The letter, which the Australian Catholic Relief Agency published in January, said a large-scale military operation last year against guerillas of the Fretilin Independence Movement had caused many civilian deaths. It also disrupted agriculture to the extent that \$A270,000 was needed by next June for emergency food and medical aid.

Mr Whitlam said he spent two hours with Monsignor da Costa and the administrator had told him he now believed that a 1000-tonne food buffer stock which the International Red Cross planned to set up in East Timor would be sufficient to cope with any local food shortages caused by drought.

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