



Mr Whitlam discusses food and medical problems with officials at Nartabora, one of the new resettlement villages on East Timor's south coast.

From PETER HASTINGS of the Sydney Morning Herald

Indon officials warm to the Whitlam style

JAKARTA, 7 March. — Mr Gough Whitlam unhesitatingly introduced himself as "Bekas Perdana Menteri Australia" (former Australian Prime Minister) wherever he went during his trip through East Timor.

In part the success of his visit was due to the fact that the Indonesians were particularly helpful wherever he went, not just for purposes of State, but because they like his style.

President Suharto cut short an urgent visit to Solo to return to Jakarta to talk to him before he left for Australia.

Indonesians like him because he likes them, rather too uncritically perhaps. But it is a small reservation in relation to the fact that he is always alone among senior politicians on the Right and Left in Australia in taking an active interest in South-East Asia and the Pacific.

He avoided the trap of remaining fixated on the events of 1975 and concentrated on what the Red Cross and other agencies were doing in Timor and on Indonesian plans for the future.

He made a point, for example, of visiting every classroom in each school, asking the same questions of teachers and pupils — how many spoke Portuguese, how many Tetum and now many Indonesian?

He asked where the villagers were, if they had been hungry and what they wanted to do.

In Maliana, he noticed on a blackboard algebraic equations

being worked on by class three students of 16 years and above, students who have suffered the catastrophic events of 1975 and after.

How long had algebra been taught, he asked, finally eliciting the answer that in Portuguese times algebra had been taught only in Dili to a fortunate few.

Wherever he went in small centres, he took careful note of bush hospitals, their patients and whether they had adequate supplies of drugs.

Whatever he did not understand in questioning Timorese, Indonesians or Red Cross workers, he would make clear by patiently going over the ground again.

Sweating profusely in unventilated rooms in torrid heat, he took copious notes with the same impressive speed with which he demolished whatever food was placed in front of him.

He was particularly patient with the Apostolic Administrator, Monsignor Martinho da Costa Lopes, commonly referred to as the bishop, going over his accusations of Indonesian atrocities and allegations of hunger and deprivation. Where was the famine? Where had atrocities occurred? How many had been killed? Where did the bishop get his information?

end of the tour was that allegations of famine were unfounded, that the relative absence of armed forces and the relaxed attitudes of those in bush centres, including doctors, nurses and teachers, indicated that Fretilin was finished as a military force.

The Indonesians in fact answered every question he put to them very fully and, with a single exception, permitted him to see all that he asked to see.

The exception was six political prisoners in Dili's jail. He did not press his point but noted it in his diary.

On the lighter side, his wit left some Indonesians puzzled.

There are a few English words like confrontation, transmigration and integration which can be rendered *konfrontasi*, *transmigrasi* and *integrasi*. They are very few.

He astounded Indonesian Ministers with a whole new lexicon of possibilities — *televisi*, *telekomunikasi*, *disposisi* and, rock bottom, *incapacitasi*.

But for one exchange he gets full marks.

Walking down a bush track in oppressive heat, I remarked that I could think of better things to do.

"I will confess, comrade," he rejoined drily, "that I used to be better on water."

PAGE 11: Priest's tale of woe could cost Timor aid.