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Xanana stands firm on Aus arbitration demand

By: Evaristo S. Martins

DILI: Prime-Minister Xanana Gusmão remains committed to taking the Australian government through an arbitration process over validity of Certain Maritime Arrangements in the Timor Sea (CMATS), despite the urgings from some colleagues that it would damage bi-lateral relationships.

In the face of growing speculation about a breakdown in CMATS talks, Xanana said his government would not step down its pressure on Australia to finalise a treaty that had expired 103 days ago.

On Sunday a resolute Prime Minister said he had gained support from several Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) leaders to resolve CMATS during his recent regional visit.

Speaking at a press conference at the International Airport in Dili, Mr Xanana side -stepped questions about arbitration calls damaging relationships, saying the government's position was about public interest and doing what was best for the right of Timorese people – "not Australian people."

"ASEAN members country also support us because the Greater Sunrise must come to Timor-Leste because it is our right," he said.

Timor-Leste notified Australia on April 23 that it had initiated arbitration under the 2002 Timor Sea Treaty of a dispute related to the 2006 CMATS.

The arbitration relates to the validity of the CMATS treaty. Timor-Leste has argued that CMATS is invalid because it alleges Australia did not conduct the CMATS negotiations in 2004 in good faith by engaging in espionage

Meanwhile First Assistant Secretary, South-East Asia Division of Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Allaster Cox confirmed on May 21 that his government had received an arbitration notice from the Timorese but a reply had not been returned.

"At this stage, we are still considering our response," Cox said during a meeting of the Foreign Affairs Subcommittee into Australia's relationship with Timor-Leste in Canberra.

TL eyes first oil joint venture customer

The Philippines could soon be Timor-Leste's first oil customer out of its joint petroleum development Area it shares with Australia, according to Prime Minister Xanana Gusmao.

"It will happen.....what we need is to sell our oil," Gusmao said at a press conference in Pasay City, Philippines on Sunday, noting such an arrangement would be beneficial for both countries.

It is understood the oil would come from offshore oil and gas fields in the Timor Sea worth some \$11.7 billion.

A news release from the Presidential Communications and Operations Office said Timor-Leste's oil company had a 24-percent stake in its first joint venture with Italian and Japanese partners to explore an area 240 km from Dili and 500 km from Darwin, Australia.

"It is East Timor's first direct participation in developing resources in the Joint Petroleum Development Area it shares with Australia," the statement said.

According to a Palace statement, Prime-Minister Xanana said his country would consider supplying the Philippines with oil once such fuel sources have been tapped.

Xanana was on a four-day official visit to the Philippines.

Source: DVM, GMA News