

## OPINION: Upheaval in Timor-Leste a threat to Greater Sunrise scheme

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Stepping down: Xanana Gusmao resigned his petroleum responsibilities in Timor-Leste REUTERS/SCANPIX

**OPINION:** The removal of Timor-Leste's three top petroleum officials and the resignation of Xanana Gusmao from his petroleum responsibilities is a setback that could imperil the country's petroleum future.

Alfredo Pires was replaced as petroleum minister, while Francisco Monteiro was fired as chief executive of national oil company Timor GAP and Gualdino da Silva was dropped as president of the National Petroleum & Mineral Authority.

All three were instrumental in the development of Timor-Leste's oil and gas sector.

Political upheaval lies at the heart of this uproar. There has been ongoing bickering and the coalition government, led by the dominant Fretilin party, wants its own people in positions of influence.

Upstream is told that Monteiro and Da Silva did not have ties to any party, but their long associations with Gusmao made them targets.

Gusmao is a member of the CNRT political party, which pulled out of the coalition government.

As soon as Gusmao learned that Pires and Monteiro were being replaced, he resigned as Timor-Leste's special representative for petroleum and its chief negotiator for the Greater Sunrise development.

The country needs Sunrise to be developed, and it needs companies to take up new acreage in the current licensing round.

But these decisions — and there is a rumour that more management changes are under way at Timor GAP — could destroy the hard work done so far.

With all four individuals who brokered the Sunrise deal with Australia now gone, these are worrying times for Timor-Leste.