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Viewing cable 09DIL134, U.S. 7TH FLEET COMMANDER AND THE USS LASSEN VISIT

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09DIL134	2009-02-04 15:15	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Emb

VZCZCXRO2882
PP RUEHCHI RUEHCN RUEHHM
DE RUEHDT #0034/01 0351515
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P R 041515Z FEB 09
FM AMEMBASSY DILI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4219
INFO RHMFISS/COGARD CEU HONOLULU HI
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 DILI 000034

SIPDIS

FOR DOD/OSD FOR DASD CLAD; STATE FOR EAP/MTS DAS MARCIEL; PACOM
FOR ADMIRAL KEATING; PACFLT FOR ADMIRAL WILLARD; MARFORPAC FOR

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2/4/2019

TAGS: PREL ECON MARR EAID TT

SUBJECT: U.S. 7TH FLEET COMMANDER AND THE USS LASSEN VISIT
TIMOR-LESTE

DILI 00000034 001.2 OF 003

CLASSIFIED BY: Major Ron Sargent, US Defense Representative, US
Embassy, Dili, East Timor, Department of Defense.
REASON: 1.4 (a), (b), (d)

(SBU) 1. Summary. Embassy Dili recently had two distinguished visitors: U.S. 7th Fleet Commander, Vice Admiral John Bird, and the USS Lassen. Both were well-received by the leadership and population of Timor-Leste, as were their exchanges involving the Australian-led International Stabilization Force. VADM Bird visited the Timorese military's modest naval base and discussed the future of U.S. cooperation and assistance with both the CHOD and Secretary of State for Defense. The Lassen visit was a notable success because of the outreach she facilitated and the professionalism of her crew. Embassy Dili is eager to host future U.S. warships visits as is the Government of Timor-Leste, and requests that all visiting ships in the future be adequately resourced prior to arrival to conduct community relations (COMREL) projects that fit within their scope. Such projects will remain important to our theater security cooperation objectives into the unforeseeable future. End summary.

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(SBU) 2. The U.S. 7th Fleet Commander, Vice Admiral John Bird, visited Dili on January 23-24. His visit included calls on Foreign Minister Zacarias da Costa; Secretary of State for Defense Julio Tomas Pinto; F-FDTL Commander Brigadier General Taur Matan Ruak; the head of the Timorese Navy, Commander Donaciano Gomes; and the new ISF Commander Brigadier Bill Sowry. The visit also included a dinner attended by UNMIT SRSG Atul Khare and several representatives of the local diplomatic corps.

(C) 3. During all calls with local officials, there was strong, unanimous affirmation regarding the desire to have the United States play a prominent role in assisting with security sector development and modernization within the context of an exceedingly challenging environment populated by a large number of donor nations. Of significance, Ruak repeated the request he made of PACOM Commander Admiral Timothy Keating at the November 11-13, 2008, Chiefs of Defense Conference in Bali for more professional military education slots in U.S. military institutions; a U.S. legal advisor for his headquarters; and assistance in developing a training center on Timor-Leste that F-FDTL and international military forces could utilize. Pinto repeated his earlier request for a memorandum of understanding between the GOTL and the USG regarding training support to F-FDTL. He also reiterated his plea for U.S. assistance in strengthening donor coordination especially in the area of maritime security.

(C) 4. During the visit with Commander Gomes at his base in Hera, VADM Bird learned that Lisbon intends to send three additional naval advisors to Hera to complement the existing two, to assist in the development and expansion of Timor's maritime force that currently has only 70 members. Gomes also told VADM Bird, as he did Commander of the U.S. Pacific Fleet Admiral Robert Willard during his July 14-16, 2008 visit, that he desires to significantly expand the Hera facilities in the near future to accommodate the anticipated receipt of two Chinese Shanghai-class vessels as early as 2010. However, Gomes noted that he did not yet have national leadership buy-in for such a plan, and that he did not know which donor would support such an effort.

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(SBU) 5. The visit of the USS Lassen on January 26-29 was well-received and successfully conducted. Major events included: one COMREL that resulted in the painting of a large, four-room two-story school building and repair of an adjacent water pump; two Project Handclasp events which involved the Dili Diocese and a local orphanage; a visit to the National Hospital; ship tours; office calls by Captain Anthony Simmons on the Secretary of State for Defense and the F-FDTL Commander; participation in Australia Day activities sponsored by the Australian Embassy; liberty for Lassen's sailors; and mil-to-mil engagement with both the ISF and F-FDTL. Additionally, a VIP reception was conducted onboard which included President Jose Ramos-Horta and Foreign Minister Zacarias da Costa; a delegation from the Australian Parliament; and many diplomats and local officials. Several of these events were favorably covered by the local media.

(SBU) 6. The visit was dependent upon security provided by a combination of the UN Police, the National Police of Timor-Leste, and the ISF, all of which was ably and professionally coordinated by the Naval Criminal Investigative Service. There was also close and effective coordination between the Lassen's shore patrol and the ISF's military police. Logistical support was provided principally by the husbanding agent, Glenn Defense Marine, and Embassy Dili.

(SBU) 7. Liberty for sailors included access to most restaurants along the Dili beachfront, extending from the US Embassy in the west, to the Cristo Rei beach in the east. Scuba diving tours were also organized and conducted for a total of about 10 sailors. The husbanding agent arranged for bus transport of sailors along the beachfront. Additionally, the Embassy was able to provide a refreshment concession to the approximately 100 sailors who visited the compound's swimming pool. Sailors were given a back-on-ship curfew of 2200 hrs daily. There were no serious incidents involving sailors on liberty.

(SBU) 8. Embassy Dili conducted extensive coordinations with the GOTL, F-FDTL, ISF, and the UN Police as soon as the Lassen's visit was confirmed. As Timor-Leste is a country which includes a non-US led joint task force, an active UN peacekeeping operation, and both national police and defense forces all occupying the same operational space, the challenges for U.S. military deployments continue to be unique, albeit reasonably manageable. However, particularly due to the willingness of all agencies to both support and participate in Lassen-related activities, the visit's execution occurred with no complications. This spirit of cooperation will go a long way in facilitating future ship visits, something that Embassy Dili continues to strongly encourage and the Timorese Government eagerly welcomes.

(C) 9. For future U.S. naval ship visits, Post recommends that advance parties (ADVON) come early enough to coordinate upcoming shore operations in light of the ship's respective operational tempo. We feel this is a modest requirement which will ensure that future visits, vitally important to our theater security

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cooperation engagement, are successful. While the Lassen visit was very positively received, Post cannot overemphasize the importance of adequate advance preparation due to the complications associated with operating in a security-challenged environment such as Timor-Leste's. A properly resourced ADVON could easily achieve all of the aforementioned COMREL and coordination aims if arriving as late as 72-96 hours prior to a ship's arrival.

(C) 10. Additionally, COMRELS which involve minor repairs and painting of Timor's dilapidated educational and health facilities must be adequately resourced. These modest activities have enormously positive impact for our public diplomacy programs in Timor-Leste. Their bang for the buck is profoundly large and to fail to properly resource these projects or events inhibits mission success. As a rule of thumb, we recommend that visiting ships be prepared to locally purchase up to \$3000 of supplies in order to ensure project completion. It should be noted that the need to local-purchase supplies can be mitigated if an ADVON is in-place early enough to inform the ship of what it could procure from appropriate stores prior to arrival. However, this can be potentially problematic due to the non-standard nature of materials in Timor-Leste in comparison with what is normally procured by the USG.

(SBU) 11. Post wishes to once again express its genuine appreciation to the U.S. Pacific Command, the U.S. Pacific Fleet, and the U.S. 7th Fleet for visits to Timor by U.S. Navy ships such as that recently completed by the USS Lassen. Embassy Dili is especially grateful for the generous commitment of Captain Anthony Simmons' personal time and the resources of his command to several programs in Timor-Leste, and the remarkably positive energy and goodwill expressed by his crew. The USS Lassen will long be remembered by all the Timorese fortunate enough to engage with her crew. Embassy Dili is

committed to fully welcome and support future visits to
Timor-Leste by U.S. Navy warships.
KLEMM