

13/10/1999

Australia says its role in E. Timor mandated by the UN

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Australia's role in East Timor is mandated by the United Nations and the country has no ulterior motives, its High Commissioner Robert Cotton said today.

"Australia is operating under firm and strict mandate of the UN. Australia's role in East Timor comes from that authority, it does not come from any separate Australian act or interest," he said.

Cotton said he called a Press conference to explain to Malaysians the true motives and reasons for Australia's role in leading the UN multinational force in East Timor.

"The point I want to get across to the Malaysian audience is that Australia has no ulterior motives and is mandated by the UN. We were requested by UN secretary-general (Kofi Annan) to act quickly.

"Lives were being lost daily. We were in a position to respond but did not until there was a UN resolution and Indonesia itself gave its agreement," he said.

He added that the Australian Government had regular meetings with the Asean heads of mission to update them on the situation in East Timor including what was happening on the ground, discussions in the UN and other political issues.

He said his Government held regular updates on the situation for other countries as well.

Cotton said Australia welcomed the participation of other countries in the multinational force and to date 20 countries had indicated they were interested to participate, including Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore and the Philippines.

"We would welcome Malaysians in the force, not only for their military expertise but also for their `Bahasa' advantage," he said.

He added that despite growing criticisms from Malaysia of Australia's role in East Timor, relations between the two countries were strong enough to manage through.

When asked on a report quoting Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad as saying that East Timor would become Australia's Vietnam, Cotton said the operation in Vietnam was not mandated by the UN while East Timor had UN authority.

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