

East Timor calls on Australian troops to leave
Malaysianmirror.com
Disember 24, 2010

SYDNEY - Prime Minister Xanana Gusmao wants Australian troops to leave East Timor, news reports said Friday.

Gusmao reportedly told police and military leaders in Dili, the capital of the half-island that once belonged to Indonesia, that security was well in hand and foreign troops were not needed.

Australia has 400 soldiers serving in the world's newest nation alongside 75 New Zealanders in the Australian-led International Stabilization Force.

Government spokesman Agio Pereira told Melbourne's The Age newspaper that a "total shift in the way our people perceive security threats" had taken place in the two years since East Timor looked set to fall into anarchy.

"Nowadays when the president and prime minister go to the districts beyond the capital, the demands of the population are about water, roads and bridges and not at all about policing and the Army," he said.

Australia led the intervention force that quelled a civil war in 1999 and supervised the withdrawal of Indonesian troops.

East Timor, a nation of 1 million people, was a Portuguese colony until Indonesia invaded in 1975. It became independent in 2002, but civil unrest four years later prompted the return of Australian and New Zealand troops. - dpa

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