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Malaysia-Timor Leste's Relations, 2002-2015

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Abstract

As a new state in the international system, Timor Leste requires partners and development models to enable the country to flourish. In this regard, Malaysia with its extensive experience dealing with international issues is seen as the most appropriate model in realizing this desire. Despite the fact that Timor Leste has no strategic economic value to Malaysia, as Timor Leste is seen as a poor and newly independent state, the writer argues that Malaysia has enormous responsibilities in assisting these new independent neighbours. Hence, the main focus of this paper is to evaluate how Malaysia who has a similar experience as a former colonised state and experienced nation-building process can assist the process of forming a newly independent nation thus contributing to the peace and stability in the country as well as and at the regional level. It discusses Malaysia's commitment to the development of the Timor-Leste, and at the same time it seeks to identify current cooperation and other strategic areas of interest for both countries.

Keywords: Model, Malaysia, Timor-Leste

INTRODUCTION

Timor Leste gained independence on May 20, 2002, following the United Nations-sponsored referendum and interim administration, three decades after Portuguese took control of the territory in the middle of the 18th century and also an end of 24 years Indonesian rules in the country between 1975 and 2002. As a newly independent nation, Timor-Leste needs support and models to the country development. In this regard, Malaysia is seen as a country with great experience in pursuing this Timor Leste agenda. This situation coincides with the status of Malaysia where it has extensive experience in establishing a vibrant economy and political stability in the country which is suit to be a model of a newly independent nation. Therefore, this paper will discuss Malaysia's commitment to the development of the Timor-Leste. It seeks to identify current cooperation and other strategic areas of interest for both countries. Discussions will begin by providing a brief background of Timor-Leste followed by the history of relations between the two countries. This is followed by discussions on Malaysia-Timor-Leste's economic relations, and assistance in nation-building.

BACKGROUND OF TIMOR-LESTE

According to anthropological studies, Timor-Leste's population formation can be seen from three major waves. Firstly, humans who first reached this island consisted of Vedo-Australoide between 40,000 and 20,000 BC. The second wave occurred around 3,000 BC comprising Melanesia (as in Papua New Guinea and the Pacific Island

and third, Malay-Proto from southern China and northern Vietnam (McWilliam & Traube 2011). Meanwhile, the first arrival of the Portuguese around 1515 was at a settlement known as Oecusse, which was also an area renowned for its sandalwood. The Portuguese would later colonize the area for the next four centuries. As sandalwood production decreased, the Portuguese began to introduce coffee, cotton and sugar cane as a replacement.

The Portuguese colonization lasted until 1974 when the Carnation Revolution in Portugal led to the collapse of the dictatorship of Salazar-Caetano as well as the end of colonization of colonies, including East Timor (then Timor-Leste). On 28 November 1975, unilateral independence was declared by Fretilin, the most dominant party in East Timor, but nine days later December 27, 1975, Indonesia invaded East Timor and declared the region as Indonesia's 27th province (Ricklefs 2001, 364). The reason behind Jakarta's occupation on this island was due to the fact that they do not want to be neighbors with a communist-independent nation (Ricklefs 2001, 364). Indonesia proceeded to spend USD600 million from 1982-1992 to build infrastructure and administrative facilities (Carey 1997). In fact, Indonesian authorities often criticised Western powers asserting stressing, "We have done a lot for East Timor in twenty years rather than four and a half centuries under the Portuguese administration" (Carey 1997).

Indonesia's General, Murdani even challenged East Timorese youth, *'Don't dream about having [an independent] state of East Timor. There is no such thing! There have been bigger rebellions. There have been greater differences of opinion with the government than the small number calling themselves Fretilin, or whoever their sympathisers are here. We will crush them all!'* (Carey 1997). East Timor's independence fighters managed to present an effective military resistance over the next three years to the occupation of Indonesia's military in 1975. However, as the fourth largest military force in the world, overcoming East Timor fighters was inevitable. Nevertheless, the change of tactics to a nonviolent approach eventually led to its independence. As Braithwaite argued, Timorese youths willingly dared to face Indonesian military bullets in protest against the legitimacy of the forced regime (Braithwaite 2012). The international network support combined with the actual struggle had become more effective after the non-violent approach adopted by Gusmão. The incident of 200 protesters shot by troops in the Santa Cruz graves in 1991 was the culmination of international engagement which recorded and shamed Suharto's handling of the protests in East Timor (Braithwaite 2013 286).

Most of East Timor had been destroyed by pro-Indonesia Militia Group by the time of the 1999 referendum. The UN estimated that nearly 70 percent of the infrastructure had been destroyed and 250,000 of its people moved to West Timor as most of the supporters of independence faced the death penalty (Smith 2005, 28). Habibie's decision to allow the referendum to be held for East Timorese backfired as 78 percent of the people chose to separate from Jakarta. Violence erupted as the pro-Indonesian militants killed 1,500 people (The Washington Post 2006). The military supported the actions of the militia group as it helped strengthen the control of the TNI. With Indonesia's permission, Australian-led peacekeeping forces were mobilized into East Timor to restore rule and order. Finally, in late 1999, the East Timor administration was taken over by the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET), and on May 20, 2002, East Timor gained independence.

However, conflict on the island was far from over. A second civil war broke out again in Timor-Leste less than five years after its independence. As Sahin explains, the May 2006 clash was due to the gap between the two main actors of Timor-Leste politics, the leader of independence or elite in power against the young, educated Indonesians. Indonesian's educated young opposed the government's decision to make Portuguese as one of the two official Timor-Leste languages (Kingbury 2013, 9). The Portuguese language is very unfamiliar to these post-independence youths, and they do not see the reasoning for it being an official language of the state (Sahin 2014, 9). However, Gusmão, the country's leader, insisted that Portugal deserved acknowledgement as a former colony. Portugal's colonisation over Timor Leste had prevented it from falling into the hands of the Dutch, and by extension, to Indonesia. The decision to pay homage to its former colonizer was also to allow the elite class is ruling the current government, access to EU funds for national development through Portugal (Sahin 2011, 349).

As the first sovereign state of the 21st century, Timor-Leste gained independence on May 20, 2002, after over four centuries of colonization by the Portuguese and 25 years of Indonesian rule. Timor-Leste's pre and the post-independence journey has been one marked by unrest and political uncertainty. In 1999, anti-independence militants, who were reportedly heavily supported by the Indonesian military, began attacking civilians as 78 percent of the population supported for an independence referendum. Protests again erupted in the state in 2006 following the refusal by the Catholic Church to accept the swearing in of an Islamic Prime Minister, Mari Alkatiri (Johnston 2011). Alkatiri's attempt to abolish religious education at the schools prompted the Catholic Church to hold a two-week demonstration. The role of the Catholic community in this small country is very important because of the dominance of the Catholic population in the country. By 1999, the Catholics represented almost 90 percent of the population compared to 70 percent in 1975 (Johnston 2011). It was exacerbated when Alkatiri sacked 600 of the country's 1,400 strong armies for mutiny when they protested about the alleged discrimination against soldiers from the west of the country. Rebel troops and thousands of protesters thereafter took to the streets to demand his resignation, which finally leads to his announcement on 26 June 2006. These two conflicts which occurred during the early years of independence were a true test for this new entity. The impact was the total collapse of institutions, especially those related to law & order.

At the age of 13, the country still relies on and receives foreign assistance and is the highest recipient in terms of per capita income from countries such as Australia, Portugal, and Japan for the purpose of paying the debt of the country (Horta 2014). This is despite the fact that Timor-Leste is known as a major oil and gas producer in the region. In this regard, it is clear that capital-intensive oil and gas production does not alleviate the unemployment problem despite oil revenue contributing 90 per cent to national income (Rasiah & Miao 2015, 40). While the agriculture sector, the second most important sector, has generated employment opportunities for Timor-Leste, 50 percent of the population is illiterate, and a third of the population lives in poverty with infra-structures still the worst in the region (Horta 2014). This situation is exacerbated by the on-going political upheaval, with bribery an endemic problem. Compared to its close neighbours, Timor Leste also possesses an undersized and weak security force. These burdens of pose a serious problem for a new country and if not adequately resolved will leave a long-term impact on Timor Leste's future.

LITERATURE

There are no academic writing on Malaysia's bilateral relations with-Timor-Leste so far. This is normal since Timor-Leste is a relatively young nation, whilst Malaysia, one of the founding members of ASEAN, is a fast developing nation in the region. Not surprisingly, works on Malaysia's foreign policy or bilateral relations with other countries are numerous. Among them are by Abdul Razak (2015); Saravanamuttu (1983); Wan Shawaluddin (2012); Wan Shawaluddin & Peters (2005); (Saravanamuttu (2010); Azhari (2009) Md Nasharuddin (2009); Ganesan (2010) ; Funston (2010) ; Kuik (2015); Nathan (2010) ; Castro (2010); Weiss (2010); Liow (2005); Jeshrun (2007); Kadir (2015); Azlizan (2010); Khadijah(2015); Khadijah & Loh (2017), Khadijah & Shakila, (2012); Rusdi (2014); Asmady (2013) Hamidin (2003); Asmadi (2015) and Ahmad Faiz (2005). However, not many literatures has been written on the topic of Timor-Leste's foreign policy, foreign relations or on bilateral. Nevertheless, there are works by Smith (2005); Strating (2017); Ortuoste (2011); Sahin (2007, Sahin (2012), Sahin (2014) and Horta (2009). Given its geographic location in Southeast Asia, it comes as no surprise that most of its literature is focused on Timor Leste's possibility of being an ASEAN member in the near future.

THE HISTORY OF MALAYSIA-TIMOR-LESTE DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS

It is known throughout the region that Kuala Lumpur has been silently providing support to the Moro struggle (in the southern Philippines), Malay (in Patani, Yala & Narathiwat) and the Free Aceh Movement (in Aceh). This occurred despite ASEAN's clear position that no member country should intervene in another country's domestic affairs. What then about East Timor? Fretilin, as a Marxist-Leninist ideological organization, had sought Kuala Lumpur to supporting its' people's struggle to free East Timor. However, Fretilin's struggle after the conquest of East Timor by Jakarta in 1975 occurred just as Malaysia was faced with the communist threat

from the Communist Party of Malaya. While it was no secret that Malaysia was aware of the presence of GAM members in Penang, Kuala Lumpur never declared any kind of open support for them. It is therefore not surprising that Kuala Lumpur did not give support to the struggle of East Timor's independence movement from 1975-1998.

Malaysia is among the first countries to have opened the Liaison Office in Dili in April 2000 (Mahathir 2002). The existence of the Liaison Office is an effort to encourage and facilitate co-operation and closer relations with Timor-Leste (Mahathir 2002). On May 20, 2002, the Liaison Office was upgraded to the Malaysian Embassy in accordance with East Timor's independence (Mahathir 2002). Located on Jalan Kelapa Beach, Dili, the first Malaysian ambassador to Timor-Leste was Abdullah Faiz Zain (Abdullah 2006). In the same year, the Timor Leste opened its embassy in Kuala Lumpur with the appointment of Djafar Alcatiri as its first Ambassador in Malaysia (Mahathir 2002).

While the initial stages of Malaysia-Timor Leste were reserved due to the communist threat faced within the country, Malaysia did not entirely cut ties with them. Relations strengthened after Timor Leste's independence when Malaysia offered its assistance in resolving the long-standing conflict in Timor-Leste. In fact, Prime Minister Mahathir was the first head of state to visit Timor Leste after its independence. Mahathir's official visit to Dili on 23 October 2003 also included some of Malaysia's senior ministers at that time, such as Najib Razak (Defense Minister), Syed Hamid Albar (Foreign Minister), Rafidah Aziz (International Trade Minister) S. Samy Velu (Transport Minister), Lim Keng Yeik (Principal Basic Commodity Minister), Koh Tsu Koon (Chief Minister of Penang) and some 50 Malaysian business leaders (Abdullah 2006, 186). During the visit, Mahathir donated 32 brand new "Handalan" brand army trucks and other military equipment to strengthen Timor-Leste's defence (Abdullah 2006, 186). A year later, Timor-Leste's President Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão reciprocated the visit when he and his delegation visited Kuala Lumpur.

MALAYSIA AND INTERNATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY

The Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste officially became the 191st member of the United Nations (UN) on September 27, 2002 (Dolven, Margensson & Vaughn 2012, 1). Having achieved independence, Timor-Leste has held diplomatic relations with numerous countries worldwide including Portugal, Australia, Britain, China, Japan, South Korea, United States, Thailand, Philippines, Brazil, and Malaysia (Abdullah 2006, 185). They were among the first to send their diplomatic corps to Dili. Malaysia is also among the countries that maintain good relations with Timor Leste. In fact, Malaysia has continuously offered assistance where it can, to this new developing country. In this regard, Malaysia is a model for Timor-Leste in the development of its country as it sees Malaysia as one of the fastest growing Southeast Asian economies in terms of economic development.

Saravanamuttu contends that there are four dominant themes in Malaysia's foreign policy; first, regionalism that emerged in the late 1960s; second, neutralism and non-alignment in the 1970s onwards; third, globalization and its impact on Malaysia's foreign policy in the 1980s, and fourth, Islam as a driver for foreign policy from the 1990s onwards (Saravanamuttu 2010, 329). Clearly, despite these change in themes follows Malaysia's transformed role in the Southeast Asian region from one of the recipient country to that of a donor country particularly to developing countries. Therefore, when discussing issues related to Malaysia's relations with other developing countries, such as Malaysia and Timor-Leste, one of the key issues is to relate to Malaysia's commitment and responsibility in encouraging growth in these countries, emulating the path in which Malaysia had gone through to attain its current achievements. Clearly, Malaysia's international commitment and responsibility is not a new issue in international politics. During the early years of its independence, Malaysia had also been a major recipient of foreign aid from abroad, and therefore, it feels a great responsibility in assisting current countries in the international system who are going through a similar phase as Malaysia had in the past.

There had been four main sources of foreign assistance extend to Malaysia since its independence. The first is through bilateral relations, specifically through its membership in the Colombo Plan for Co-operative Economic

Development in South, and Southeast Asia. The Colombo Plan was a scheme designed by the UK to provide financial and technical assistance to the Commonwealth countries in 1950. Through the Colombo Plan, economic and technical cooperation was provided by developed countries such as Australia, Canada, India, Japan, New Zealand, and Great Britain. Second, the Technical Economic Co-operation Economic Agreements together with non-Colombo-Plan countries are also part of bilateral technical assistance. This includes countries such as Belgium, France, Germany, Indonesia, Kuwait, Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Saudi Arabia, Soviet, and UAE.

The third source of technical assistance is sourced from international agencies and foundations including the Asia Foundation, the Ford Foundation, and the International Development Research Center. Malaysia has also received assistance from various organizations including the International Executive Service Corps, the Canadian Executive Service Corps, the US Peace Corps, the Japanese Overseas Cooperation Volunteers; the German Volunteers Service, the Canadian University Services Overseas, the Volunteers Services Overseas, The Australian Volunteers Agencies, the Volunteer Service Abroad (NZ) and the Volunteers Service Overseas (the UK), (Malaysia 1976, 248). JICA's ODA assistance to Malaysia, for example, is one of the most notable assistance in the country. Since the First Malaysia Plan (1966-1970) until the Ninth Malaysia Plan (2006-2010), Malaysia has received more than 39 JICA assistance projects, the first one amounting to a mere USD 3.53 million in 1967 to USD 201.92 million in 2006 (Ikbal 2010, 47-52 and Md Nasahrudin 2009, 59-63).

The fourth source of this technical assistance is the engagement of professional staff under Inter-Governmental Agreements. Malaysia has been and continues to be involved in accepting training for critical professions such as doctors, engineers, teachers, and others under this program. UNDP and several agencies within the UN are among the early contributors to Malaysia amounting to around RM13.3 million a year. A large number of this technical assistance are then channelled into agencies such as the Ministry of Education through the education development projects, curriculum development, and Education TV. This has resulted in aids for institutions of higher learning such as Mara Institute of Technology (ITM) (now UiTM) and Ungku Omar Polytechnic. In the agricultural sector, agencies such as MARDI, Agriculture Department, Federal Land Development Authority (FELDA), the National Livestock Development Authority (MAJUTERNAK), the Fisheries Development Authority of Malaysia (MAJUIKAN) and the Department of Statistics also benefitted from this assistance. Among the projects is the Forest Industries Development project, the Terengganu Logging Training Center, the Cocoa Cultivation and processing project.

Recognizing the great contribution of foreign countries to the development of this country, Malaysia is now paying it forward by working in assisting other countries in need. Malaysia strives to promote advancement technical expertise, especially among these developing countries. One of the initiatives undertaken by Malaysia was the formation of the Malaysian Technical Cooperation Program (MTCP) initiated during the first meeting of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) for the Asia Pacific region in Sydney on 13-16 February 1978. In a joint communique issued on 16 February, these Heads of Government acknowledged the need to help smaller states to realize their potential for development (Ahmad 2005, 55). In response to this, Malaysia then launched the MTCP on 7 September 1980 during the CHOGM meeting in New Delhi to show Malaysia's commitment to the south-south cooperation especially those involving Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries (TCDC) (Hamidin 2003). In the second CHOGM meeting held in Suva, Fiji in October 1982, Dr. Mahathir stated that Malaysia offered this technical assistance program to developing countries which he sees as less fortunate;

... the opportunity and the need exist for the more developed members to assist those who are less developed. As most of the countries in the region are developing countries, there exists a challenge for cooperation among the developing countries themselves to assist each other on a regional basis... I would not deny the fact that most developing member countries, including Malaysia, have derived certain benefits from their continued membership of the Commonwealth. ... Although Malaysia herself is dependent on technical assistance to accelerate her pace of economic development, in a spirit of co-operation Malaysia has

launched a technical assistance programme to assist developing countries which are less fortunate than she is.... In the context of the Malaysian Technical Assistance Programme (MTAP)... I wish to state that we will continue to render technical assistance to a number of developing countries....

(Mahathir 1982)

In line with the spirit of South-South Cooperation, Malaysia through MTCP wanted to share its experience of development and expertise with other countries as well. The MTCP is based on the belief that national development depends on the quality of human resources in one country. The program is part of the Malaysian government's commitment towards promoting technical assistance among developing countries, strengthening regional and sub-regional cooperation, as well as fostering a sense of self-reliance among developing countries.

In this regard, MTCP's main objective is to share Malaysia's development experience with other countries, strengthened Malaysia's ties with other developing countries, promote south-south cooperation, as well as promote technical cooperation among the southern nations. In order to achieve this, Malaysia implemented several programs through MTCP such as short-term courses, long-term courses (scholarships), study visits and attachments, expert assistance, socio-economic development projects, equipment and technical assistance (KLN, 2017). Obviously, the MTCP emphasizes human resource development through the provision of training in various fields that are important to the such as public administration, good governance, health services, education, sustainable development, agriculture, poverty eradication, promoting investment, ICT, and banking.

Under the MTCP, the Institute Diplomacy & Foreign Relation (IDFR) was set up under the Prime Minister's Department in 1991 and later became one of the key components of the Malaysian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2004. It provides basic and intermediate training to fresh and mid-career foreign officials as well as diplomats from developing countries (Saravanamuttu 2010, 32). Through collaboration with several agencies and local universities, it provides training through courses, seminars, workshops, conferences, public lectures and consultancy services to Malaysians as well as participants from ASEAN, Commonwealth countries, and Colombo Plan countries. Special training and consultations have also been extended to new independent states and politically unstable countries like Afghanistan, Iraq and Timor Leste. IDFR has thus far provided courses to about 136 countries worldwide as its commitment to achieving this goal.

In the opening remark of the MTCP course conducted by INTAN in 1996, Malaysian Foreign Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi stated that between 1985-1996, a total of 2,394 foreign participants were involved in courses offered by 15 training centres in the country. At the same time, 499 participants from 90 countries attended long-term academic programs at 5 universities and the Institute of Medical Research in the country. During this period, the government had allocated USD40 million compared to USD26.8 million during the five-year planning period (Ahmad 2005, 57). INTAN alone had successfully trained 1,500 participants from 75 countries during this period. In this regard, more than 100 specialized short-term courses were offered by 79 MTCP training institutes, of which the majority were conducted at the centre of excellence for training. Since its launch, more than 25,000 participants from 140 countries have benefited from the various programs offered by the MTCP (KLN 2017).

Malaysian assistance in the United Nations Security Team

Malaysia's involvement in peace mission in conflict areas is not new. Since 1960, Malaysia has been involved in 35 UN peacekeeping missions with total involvement of 29,000 military and police personnel (The Star 30 September 2015). Among the countries in which Malaysian peacekeepers have been involved are Bosnia Herzegovina, Kosovo, Sudan, Chad, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Liberia, Siera Leone, Burundi, Congo, Angola, Mozambique, Somalia, Kuwait, Iran / Iraq, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Nepal, Cambodia, the Philippines, and Timor-Leste. In Timor-Leste, Malaysia was involved in INTERFET (September 1999-February 2000),

UNTAET (June 1999-May 2002), UNMISSET (May 2002-May 2005) and UNMIT (2005-2012). INTERFET, the International Force for Timor-Leste, is the International Security Operations Force mandated to restore peace and security following the turmoil in Timor-Leste due to anarchy by the pro-Indonesian militia. INTERFET is headed by Australia with the largest number of personnel, 5,000 people out of a total of 11,000 members. Because of tense relations between Malaysia and Timor Leste at the time, and because INTERFET was headed by Australia, Malaysia had only sent 30 translators for the cause (Henke t.t). INTERFET was then taken over by UNTAET (United Nations Transition Administration for East Timor) with a mandate passed on October 25, 2002, Resolution 1272. For Chopra (2002):

UNTAET became in every respect the formal government of the country. Both legislative and executive powers were vested in a single individual, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Transitional Administrator, Sergio Vieira de Mello. He had the sole authority to issue 'regulations' as national legislation in the absence of an elected legislative assembly.

(Chopra 2002)

After UNTAET took over, Malaysia increased its assistance to Timor Leste, hoping to develop peace in the country through the United Nations (UN). Malaysia assisted in the peace process through the six-month United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste (UNMIT) mission with a desire to continue to renew the mission if necessary (Australian Peacekeeper & Peacemaker Veterans' Association Inc., 2009). In that resolution, the UN Security Council called on international security forces from Australia, Malaysia, New Zealand, and Portugal, to fully cooperate and provide assistance to UNMIT in implementing the mandate (Australian Peacekeeper & Peacemaker Veterans' Association Inc. 2009, 4).

The problem is that Timor-Leste's instability had drawn the interference of international organizations wanting to help control the deteriorating situation in the country. As stated at the beginning, the United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste (UNMIT) is a UN mission undertaken to help control internal conflicts in Timor-Leste. The international assistance in controlling internal conflicts in Timor-Leste is crucial as its young and weak government institutions have not been able to manage the country as internal problems arise. Malaysia had been one of the major contributors of military and police personnel in the UN peacekeeping mission in Timor-Leste. The Royal Malaysian Police (PDRM) was one of the agencies serving under the UNMIT mandate from 2006 until the security mission ended on November 13, 2012. To mark the history of the peacekeeping mission, PDRM donated 29 multi-purpose vehicles valued at RM3.5 million to the Timor-Leste at a ceremony held at the Malaysian Embassy in Dili on 7 November 2012 (Wisma Putra 2015; Babo-Soares 2011, 23).

The assistance given by Malaysia along with other countries through the UN mission succeeded in bringing Timor-Leste's instability under control. At the same time, the presence showed a positive impact to help the Timorese government in developing its country security forces. In a statement by Hussein Haniff, Malaysia's Permanent Representative at the UN in the Security Council Debate regarding the situation in Timor-Leste held in New York on February 22, 2012:

Malaysia is very much encouraged by the progress achieved in Timor-Leste. We wish to congratulate the leaders and people of Timor-Leste, which with the assistance of UNMIT and other international partners, have been successful in maintaining peace and stability in the country. The encouraging security situation is a testimony to the capability of the judicial and security institutions of Timor-Leste, especially the national police of Timor-Leste (PNTL) in carrying out its policing responsibilities. In this regard, we call for the continuous efforts in strengthening the security and judicial institutions; and the implementation of the Joint Transition Plan and the recently announced Strategic Development Plan.

(Hussein 2012)

Based on the statement by the Malaysian Ambassador, Hussein Haniff pointed out that the aid provided by Malaysia through UNMIT has established a relationship between the two countries. The assistance provided by

Malaysia through UNMIT and from other countries has led to peace and stability within the country. This statement exemplifies Malaysia's support and recommendations to international bodies to continue efforts to strengthen security and judicial institutions in Timor-Leste. Malaysia's support highlights how its involvement in UNMIT has had a positive impact on Malaysia and Timor-Leste's relations. The assistance given during the mission has led to closer ties in relations between the two countries. Although the Timor-Leste state is still a very young country in the international system Malaysia, having faced the similar situation during its early years of independence, is aware that support is necessary to ensure the development of security forces and stability in the region.

As a new country, Timor-Leste is certainly experiencing many internal problems after independence from Indonesia in 2002. As with any new state that had fought for its independence, Timor Leste was wrought the common problems such as problems for the state's finances; development of a strong and self-supporting economy; providing adequate education on all levels to train a new generation for economic and social challenges of the future; protection of the state's natural resources; and maintaining a sizeable and able defense force. The high levels poverty, coupled with a weak defense and uncertain government institution leaves Timor Leste exposed and very vulnerable.

New countries such as Timor-Leste often need help and guidance from other countries with a similar history in order to assist in their road to stability. Malaysia has been one of the first few countries in the region that has provided development assistance to Timor-Leste. The former Prime Minister of Malaysia, Mahathir said on August 12, 2002, in an official dinner between the two countries where the Prime Minister of Timor Leste, Mari Bin Amude Alkatiri attended the ceremony;

As a part of Southeast Asia, your country will play an important role in ensuring the continued development, peace and stability of this region. As developing countries, we in this region must foster close cooperation to collectively ensure that our interest is taken into account. We hope to see your country play an active role in this region a role of maintaining peace; of creating economic partnerships between countries; and of increasing our cross-national and cross-cultural understanding. This engagement in the region is possible and necessary. As a newly independent country, Timor-Leste will have to face many challenges in the years ahead, yet be assured that Malaysia's commitment to developing close and mutually beneficial relations with your country will continue. We will maintain our cooperation with you in your development efforts within our capacities and abilities, under the Malaysian Technical Cooperation Programme (MTCP). We will continue to provide training for Timor-Leste Defence Force personnel to help them increase their capabilities in maintaining peace and stability in your country. We are supportive of the continued and important presence of UNMISSET (United Nations Mission of Support for Timor-Leste) to ensure the smooth implementation of the process of nation-building in your country. Also, as you are aware, Malaysia participated in various capacities under UNTAET (the United Nations Transitional Administration in Timor-Leste).

(Mahathir 2002)

This speech gives a clear indication of Malaysia's desire to strengthen ties with Timor-Leste. As stated by Mahathir, a program run by Malaysia to assist in the development of Timor-Leste is the Malaysian Technical Cooperation Program (MTCP) and the Malaysia Defense Cooperation Program (MDCP). Both programs represent Malaysia's effort in assisting Timor-Leste to develop the country and to train officials from Timor Leste in terms of national affairs and administration in order to produce a systematic and structured institution. From 2000 to 2013, the Malaysian Technical Cooperation Program has trained 399 officers in areas such as public administration, conflict management and diplomacy, police and security, airport management, microfinance, road management, and construction, prison administration and administration, agriculture and

community nurses (Wisma Putra 2015). Malaysia with third-party funding through the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) also provided technical expertise in agriculture, procurement, microeconomics and statistics (Hussein 2012).

The support undertaken through the MTCP and MDCP has long since been implemented starting at the beginning of the independence of Timor Leste in 2001. The MDCP has provided military and security training assistance to Timor Leste, as Hussein Haniff's statement;

Since 2002, a total of 43 officers from the Timor-Leste Armed Forces have attended the MDCP programmes. Courses that have been offered included Ship Diver's 3 courses; Language training; Law of Armed Conflicts; Joint Warfare and UN Military Observers. In 2003, Malaysia contributed USD2.56 million as part of its efforts to assist Timor-Leste in developing its defense forces. Malaysia has also extended bilateral assistance in capacity-building programmes and training for the PNTL personnel at the Malaysia Police training centres since 2001. Malaysia has also conducted training programmes for participants from Timor-Leste with the joint financial assistance from Australia.

(Hussein 2012)

Another example of Malaysia's support towards Timor-Leste's 'nation building' is Putrajaya's support for Dili to join the Associations of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in the near future. In a statement by the Malaysian Representative, Hussein Haniff during the Security Council Debate on February 22, 2012, in New York;

Malaysia fully supports Timor-Leste's application to become a full member of ASEAN. In the recent ASEAN Coordinating Council meeting held on the 17 Nov 2011 in Bali, Malaysia reiterated its position that Timor-Leste's application should be favourably considered, in line with Article 6.2 of the ASEAN Charter and the fact that Timor-Leste meets the geographical criteria stipulated in the said article. We look forward to welcoming Timor-Leste as a full member of ASEAN soon.

(Hussein 2012)

The support given by Malaysia to the participation of Timor-Leste is meaningful given that Dili has the option of joining ASEAN or Melanesia, the South Pacific Forum (Sahin 2014). The Melanesia forum, which was founded in 1971, was renamed to the Pacific Islands Forum in 1999 with a total of 15 member countries including Australia and New Zealand (Shibuya 2004). The South Pacific Melanesian country supports the independence struggle that Fretilin fighter launched from Indonesia's colonization. This sense of indebtedness led Timor-Leste leaders to consider joining the Pacific Islands Forum. But because ASEAN does not accept its members to be members of other regional organizations, ASEAN has become the choice of Timor-Leste leaders (Sahin 2014, 11 and Smith 2005, 18). Timor's decision-makers explain the importance of being part of a larger and flexible stable group like ASEAN in the region, rather than be in a grouping in which Timor Leste has little sense of camaraderie with (Sahin 2014, 11). In fact, Ramos Horta in 2011, while still in his capacity as President of the Republic of Timor-Leste, insists on support for ASEAN, citing that geographically Timor Leste is located in the Southeast Asian region and with the support of Malaysia, Indonesia, Cambodia, Myanmar, Brunei, Thailand, and the Philippines, it is ready to become a member of ASEAN (Horta 2011).

Cooperation at the education level was also made by the Ministry of Education with the involvement of academic staff from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, University of Malaya, Universiti Utara Malaysia, National Defense University of Malaysia and Universiti Malaysia Sabah in providing syllabuses and curriculum for the establishment of the Timor-Leste Institute of Diplomatic Studies in 2013. On April 2, 2014, Universiti Malaysia Sabah awarded the Honorary Doctor of Philosophy Degree to Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão, Prime Minister and Minister of Defense, Republic of Timor-Leste to commemorate the 17th Convocation (Commemorative 2014; Borneo Post 3 April 2014). This award was given as recognition for his contributions to lead the struggle for independence and to free Timor-Leste from the grip of Indonesia and to engage in the development of Timor-

Leste. In fact, Universiti Malaysia Sabah extended offers to students from Timor-Leste to enrol in the course of Oil and Gas operation.

MALAYSIA-TIMOR-LESTE ECONOMIC LINKAGES

The economy is one of the most important elements for the development of any country, especially for a newly independent one. A weak economy leads not only to reduced budgets for government administration but also reflects poor economic management by the government. Malaysia's readiness to assist can be seen in Mahathir's statement in 2002,

From our own experience with independence in 1957, we recognise the importance of fully developing our economy and ensuring that the country's wealth is equitably distributed. We have since then embarked on various development programmes through our New Economic Policy, and presently our National Development Policy. We have aimed at transforming our economy from a commodity-based agricultural economy to a resilient, modern and diversified economy. With the right policies and the right support, I believe that your country can develop and prosper. I believe you can tap the energy of your new struggle for development.

(Mahathir 2002)

At the beginning of the relations between the two countries, during which Timor-Leste gained independence, economic relations between the two countries were not very encouraging. As acknowledged by Mahathir in his address on 12 August 2002:

We recognise that current economic relations between our countries are unimpressive, yet there exists the potential for trade and investment between our countries. We must endeavour to develop these potentials. I have been made to understand that there are already 90 Malaysian businessmen in Timor-Leste involved in various economic activities such as consulting and accounting; hotel and restaurants; and commerce and general trading. I am confident that this level of relations can be further expanded. On our part, Malaysia will continue to encourage its private sector to go to Timor-Leste and see for themselves the opportunities available for the mutual benefit of our two countries, among others in areas such as petroleum and gas exploration, infrastructure development, banking, and insurance and agriculture. It is also my hope that Timor Leste would facilitate and assist Malaysian entrepreneurs in their endeavours.

(Mahathir 2002)

Meanwhile, in a Business Dialogue between Malaysia and Timor-Leste on 23 October 2003, in a climate where 90 businesses had been operating in various sectors of its economy, Malaysia ranked second in terms of investment into Timor-Leste.:

While the Malaysian Government does its part in collaborating with Timor-Leste, our private sector has also been encouraged to invest here. As a matter of fact, in 2002, Malaysia ranked as the second largest investor in this country. There are to date, more than 90 Malaysian companies investing in your country, in areas such as hotel and restaurants; consultancy and accountancy services; information technology; legal aid services; transportation and mechanical services; shipping services; energy; commerce and general trading activities.

(Mahathir 2003)

In 2002, Malaysia's total trade to Timor-Leste amounted to USD 0.39 million with Malaysia's exports worth USD 0.31 million and imports from Timor-Leste amounted to USD 80,000 (Mahathir 2003). In the same Dialogue, also mentioned that the potential to enhance bilateral trade relations between the two countries would be an eventuality as statistics have shown how good bilateral relations and complementary economic situations brought increased development to both Malaysia and Timor Leste (Mahathir 2003).

To date, bilateral relations between the two countries are still small. In 2013 the amount was USD42 million, and 2014 increased to USD94 million. Malaysia's exports to Timor-Leste in 2014 are USD93 million. Among the items exported to Timor-Leste are petroleum, processed foods, agricultural products, eggs, meat, and live animals and transport equipment (Wisma Putra, 2015). Among the most important Malaysian trade sectors in Timor-Leste is the oil and gas trade sector. Petronas is an oil and gas company that has been in Timor-Leste since 2004 (*Malaysian Digest*, 07 June 2016). Compared to neighboring countries, Indonesia also has a small trade relationship of Timor-Leste of USD221.52 million (2011) rising to USD258.8 million (2012) (Parlina 2013). In short, as a small country with 1,231,116 million inhabitants (CIA 2014), Timor-Leste is not a big market. Not surprisingly, the volume of trade is not encouraging.

CONCLUSION

Bilateral relations between Malaysia and Timor-Leste are new but meaningful to both countries. As a new country, Timor-Leste needs help from others especially those in the region, in this case, Malaysia. Faced with two civil wars in five years, of course, it requires Timor-Leste to enforce law and order in order to restore peace. Nevertheless, corruption, a chronic disease faced by the country almost caused it to collapse, thus requiring its high leadership consciousness and commitment to address the issue. This means that Dili desperately needs help to strengthen its security forces, especially the police and the army so that disorder can be avoided. Under the UN umbrella, Malaysia has contributed to the security forces comprising police and military from 1999 until 2012. During this time Timor-Leste had also sent their policemen and troops for training in Malaysia. In terms of nation-building, Timor-Leste is also in need of assistance in training human resources and has been involved in human capital training and development in several institutions and universities in Malaysia. Malaysia has also been a strong supporter of Timor-Leste membership as the 11th member of ASEAN.

Timor Leste's refusal to join the Pacific Islands Forum shows the seriousness and the maturity of Timor-Leste leaders in benefiting from its closest regional association. ASEAN's reputation as the most successful Third World organisation may have also played a part in Timor Leste's decision. Timor-Leste will benefit more by joining ASEAN in the region on the threshold of the establishment of the ASEAN Economic Community by 2015. Timor-Leste is given a visionary progressive leader to guide and design the nation building. Leaders such as Gusmão, Ramos Horta and co-leaders are dependent on people's expectations to pull out Timor-Leste from the shackles of poverty faced now. Malaysia in this regard is seen to have no problem in helping and contributing to this new country. With the prosperity neighbor's approach, of course, this country's leader will be able to lend a hand in helping the oil-rich country become a successful country and is no longer a failed state status as before.

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