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Making a buck in times of bad luck

East Timor's misery is good business for some Australians, reports Sian Powell in Dili

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THE rise and rise of overseas carpetbaggers in East Timor has irritated many in the UN and the independence movement, and prompted Australian entrepreneurs to defend themselves in the name of capitalism.

Foreign-run businesses have sprung up in Dili offering beer for \$3 a can, hot meat pies, fridges and fans, car hire, cigarettes and accommodation, all doing well — and tax-free.

Independence leader Xanana Gusmao said the advent of such opportunists in East Timor made him "very, very sad".

"It's an insult to the misery, to the suffering of our people," he said, referring to Westerners selling and hiring cars and other luxuries.

"Our people need soap, they need food. They have primary needs."

There are fears the enterprising business people, many from Darwin, have extended their interests beyond cars, fridges and fans. "I have already heard about prostitution," Mr Gusmao said. "Sometimes we felt the Indonesian

generals had no human feeling. Some businessmen, without realising it, also exploit the situation.

"It's very sad, more sad because I cannot do anything about it. If I have a little power I can tell them to go, but I have nothing, no power."

Northern Territory liaison officer Mike Gallagher said he had dealt with 22 territory companies that had set up in East Timor since early October, from building companies, contractors and car dealers to hoteliers.

"There are opportunists, if you want to put it that way," he said. "I've had to deal with several complaints. The main one is trying to define the ownership of land."

Land title in East Timor is complicated by the Indonesian invasion, with some East Timorese still claiming land that was forcibly taken by the Indonesians two decades ago.

Although businesses operating in East Timor are not subject to any form of licensing or regulatory structure, other than registering with the UN administration, Mr Gallagher said the Northern Territory Government did make some stipulations.

"They are satisfied with the conditions we set down — to seek a local partner and start employing people as soon as practicably possible."

The deputy chief of the UN administration, David Harland, said many of the new businesses had not registered with the UN. "They run the risk of being closed down," he said. "The quicker they know that, the better."

The UN administration would soon introduce taxes, Mr Harland said probably a sales tax and a value added tax, and imports would be monitored. The high cash-turnover hospitality sector would probably be targeted first.

Many within the UN suspect some of the more aggressive businessmen in East Timor of dealing in vice, particularly prostitution. Such dealings could result in expulsion from the territory.

But John McAuliffe, who is involved in running the Dili Lodge, said he knew of no carpetbaggers in East Timor. "If more people stopped badmouthing, and started their own businesses and employed people, this country would get back on its feet a lot quicker," he said.

The Dili Lodge includes air-conditioned container accommodation now sleeping more than 100, with a capacity for 300 planned, a shop, with another planned, and a small car hire facility. The business employs 150 locals, Mr McAuliffe said, which was of service to the community.

The Dili Times, a 12-page newsletter run by a former News Ltd employee with the expatriate community in mind, promotes East Timor as an entrepreneur's dream.

"The East Timorese are desperate for work," one article begins. "Hundreds of men and women are ready, willing and able to start work immediately. The going rate is about \$A5 a day, \$A25 a five-day week."

"There are no awards or trade unions in East Timor, but it is worth remembering that good management practices apply in every country. Ensure you keep plenty of water available. It is very hot throughout the day, and if your people are doing manual work ensure the water is handy. They also need to eat so give them a break in the middle of the day."

Editor and publisher Julian Swinstead said he did not think Dili was attracting opportunists. The prices of cans of softdrink and beer were not outrageous compared with Darwin nightclub prices, and there was perhaps a 10 per cent premium on Darwin car-hire charges.

Mr Swinstead estimates between 300 and 500 Australians are operating in private enterprise in East Timor, and his newsletter caters to them.

"They're bringing services back that otherwise just wouldn't be available to the East Timorese," he said. "They can make telephone calls, hire cars and buy cars."

UN orders Aussies to close Dili hotel

9
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Aust.

MICHAEL WARE
□ Dili

OPERATORS of a \$2 million Australian-owned hotel in East Timor's capital Dili have been given seven days by the UN to shut down because their occupation of the hotel property has been declared illegal.

The hotel, known as the Dili Lodge, is operated by a group of Northern Territory business figures including former chief minister Shane Stone (now federal president of the Liberal Party) and Darwin multi-millionaire Wayne Thomas.

The enterprise ran foul of the UN because it is situated on the site of what was an Indonesian army barracks before the military's withdrawal.

The use of such a site — which the Darwin identities leased from a controversial East Timorese political and business family — requires the full authorisation of the UN Transitional Administration in East Timor.

This permission has not been given.

A UNTAET spokesman said the commercial use of public land in the fragile East Timorese economy should not be allowed to degenerate into a "first come, first serve land-grab".

It is believed seven days may not be enough time for the hotel to remove its dozens of airconditioned demountable buildings and have its equipment clear quarantine for a return to Darwin.

The UNTAET spokesman said the management had been repeatedly warned and

now had to take care of their interests.

The eviction, though said by the UN to be unrelated, follows criticism by prominent East Timorese of Australian "carpetbagging", or profiteering, as well as UN suspicions over prostitution occurring at the Dili Lodge.

The Dili Lodge management have denied any involvement in prostitution. The hotel has become one of the most popular destinations for overseas workers and military staff because of its airconditioning and canteen-like restaurant.

UN Civilian Police Superintendent Graeme Cairns, on assignment from the New Zealand police service, con-

The eviction follows suspicions over prostitution at the Dili Lodge

firmed information had been received that management of the Dili Lodge had allowed prostitution to take place on the premises.

But Superintendent Cairns said that while patrols had been assigned to "actively police" the hotel every night as a result of the information, no direct evidence had been found.

However the concerns appear to have also reached leading East Timorese independence figure and Nobel laureate Jose Ramos Horta.

On Tuesday, Mr Ramos Horta condemned the "scandalous" exploitation of East Timor's plight by unnamed Australians seeking high profits and referred to "murky and unpleasant business going on".

‘ Hundreds of men and women are ready to start work. The going rate is about \$A5 a day ’

The Dili Times



FIRST THE ARMY, THEN THE CHEQUE BOOKS !

The East Timorese people have fought for 25 years, with arms in hand, for their independence.

Today the Australian Army is leading the 'peace keeping', humanitarian' force in East Timor.

One of the first jobs of the Australian army was to attempt to disarm the East Timorese. We do not know whether they have been able to do this.

We need to examine the words of the Leader of the Opposition. He predicts that Australian troops will be in East Timor for 'many years to come', and, this is a 'long-term commitment by the Australian people.' He throws in the 'human principle' and it is a 'privilege .. to help in creating a nation'. The Opposition is backing the Howard government all the way.

Is Australia taking a leading role in East Timor because the USA dare not expose its strategic hold in the area?

On Dec. 11/99, Chief of the Defence force Admiral Chris Barrie said, "When we move overseas into other areas, traditionally our doctrine has been focused on how we would plug into coalition operations with our United States partners. This represents quite a departure. Australia is now leading the coalition in east Timor and I think for future situations that look a bit like East Timor, where that Australian sense of fairness has been so grievously offended, then I think the Australian community and Australia might be expected to lead similar forces in the future."

"Oh look, he said, I think that the role of the United States as the world policeman does need to be helped in every way that it can...and I think Australia doing its bit in our part of the world's also important"

The newspaper The Australian called this 'dopey bunyip triumphalism' and very harmful.

The Australian imperial army will serve Australian imperial interests. Humanitarian causes is so much rubbish trotted out to hide from the people the real interests of the ruling class. The capitalists are in East Timor already.

It is the proletarian duty of the Australian working people to continue to support the East Timorese struggle for independence.

We must support the East Timorese to lay claim to the rich oil and gas reserves in the Timor Sea. These oil wells are exploited by the big American oil cartels and Australian companies.

All this 'bunyip imperialism' will cost lots of money and this will be stripped from the hides of the people, their schools, hospitals, social services., cuts in wages etc.

SUPPORT THE INDEPENDENCE OF EAST TIMOR.

HANDS OFF EAST TIMOR.

Beazley backs Private sector

SIAN POWELL

IN the militia-ravaged East Timorese enclave of Oecussi yesterday, Opposition Leader Kim Beazley praised the work of the Australian men and women serving in the territory and speculated that Australian defence forces would be present for some years to come.

"This is a long-term commitment by the Australian people, I do believe," he said. "I would think that in the life of many Australian soldiers they're going to see this place once or twice in their careers. We've been involved in many conflicts, in many operations, since WWII. I can't think of one more solidly supported by the Australian people."

Echoing Prime Minister John Howard, who visited East Timor on Sunday, Mr Beazley assured the troops the Australian people were still thinking of them, and of the plight of the East

Timorese, even though news from the territory might no longer be on the front pages of the newspapers.

Speaking to troops earlier in Dili, the one-time military historian said it was rare for such a large military force to be used to support a universal human principle, and it was a privilege for the men and women of the forces to help in creating a nation.

"From my point of view, as the Opposition Leader, I've said to the Prime Minister we'll support whatever it takes."

Accompanied by Opposition foreign affairs spokesman Laurie Brereton and Northern Territory MP Warren Snowdon, Mr Beazley saw refugees being transferred to HMAS Jervis Bay in Dili and met Nobel laureate Bishop Carlos Belo and independence leader Xanana Gusmao.

Mr Beazley said East Timorese refugees in Australia should remain as long as necessary.