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# Julie Bishop makes diplomatic visit to East Timor

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## Australia's Deputy Opposition Leader and Foreign Affairs spokeswoman Julie Bishop is in East Timor.

Ms Bishop is scheduled to meet the Prime Minister Xanana Gusmao and Foreign Minister Jose Luis Guterres.

She'll also be visiting development projects funded by Australia's aid agency, AusAID.

**Presenter:** Richard Ewart

**Speaker:** Julie Bishop, Australia's Deputy Opposition Leader and Foreign Affairs spokeswoman

**BISHOP:** I am visiting Timor Leste, to maintain contact with the government representatives, whom I have met previously. I'm meeting with Prime Minister Gusmao, then with Foreign Minister Guterres, and I will be meeting with President TMR later this morning. The main purpose is to ensure the Timorese government that should the Coalition form government in Australia later this year, we will continue to focus our efforts on strengthening the bilateral relationship and with a view to broadening and deepening that relationship beyond the security focus and the aid donor-aid recipient status. I'm very keen to hear about Timor Leste's plans for economic development, not only in oil and gas, but also agriculture and tourism and other areas of possible expansion and what Australia can do to assist,

**EWART:** Now the two countries, have obviously haggled for sometime over the question of the gas and oil revenue that they effectively share. It's a question of how they share that. We now understand there's going to be arbitration over this issue and Australia has agreed to that. What's your view on that issue, where does the Coalition stand?

**BISHOP:** Well, I can't comment on any of the intelligence matters that have been raised in connection with this. As is longstanding practice, the Australian government hasn't commented on that either. But as it happens, I was the chair of our Joint Standing Committee on Treaties back in 2002-2003, at the time these treaties were negotiated. I was of the view then and I was satisfied that the treaty negotiations were conducted in good faith on both sides and that the Timorese had legal advice and competent negotiators and were satisfied with the terms of the treaty. In fact, Australia's always conducted itself in a professional manner in diplomatic negotiations as far as I can see. But now that the meeting is referred to arbitration, the arbitration process is underway. Australia is participating in the arbitration and the government has confirmed that.

**EWART:** In general, do you think that Australia though maybe needs to take another look at this particular issue, that the country has been accused under both parties, of course, of being rather hardline on this issue and the suggestion is that East Timor isn't really getting a fair share of the resources that exist between the two countries?

**BISHOP:** Well, that was not my understanding at the time, this was negotiated back in 2002-2003 and as the chair of the Australian Joint Standing Committee on Treaties, I was satisfied that the treaty negotiations were conducted in good faith and that the treaty should be ratified. But now that it's in arbitration, these matters can be investigated and I will await the outcome of that arbitration. The process is underway, I understand there are a number of procedures. Timor Leste nominates an arbitrator, Australia nominates an arbitrator and then the two arbitrators nominated a third arbitrator, so it's obviously very arms length and independent. We'll await the outcome.

**EWART:** Where does the Coalition stand on the question of the Greater Sunrise Gasfield processing Plant. Should East Timor be the plant for that in your view?

**BISHOP:** Well at the end of the day, it comes down to a commercial or economic decision of the operators.

I come from Western Australia and we've just had a situation where a proposed onshore plant, at James Price Point, is not going ahead, because the operators believe that a floating LNG platform is possible. So it's not only in Timor Leste that these issues arise. Western Australia has also found itself in that position. So I am meeting with some of the relevant companies here in Timor Leste, I meet with them in Australia and it will come down to an economic decision.

But, of course, Australia wants to see economic opportunity in Timor Leste, we want to ensure that they get their fair share of the oil and gas revenues and that those revenues are well managed and handled in a way that provides greater opportunity for the people of Timor Leste. So economic development in this country is obviously vital for its future.

**EWART:** Can I ask what your view is on whether or not East Timor should be admitted to the Commonwealth of Nations and if it were to be admitted, do you think there would be benefits for East Timor?

**BISHOP:** Well, I know East Timor is very keen to be admitted to ASEAN and Australia should support their application to be admitted as a member of ASEAN. There are some very important decisions taken by ASEAN and I think it would be good to see Timor Leste in that group.

As far as the Commonwealth's concerned, there have been a number of countries that were not originally part of the British Empire, that have been admitted to the Commonwealth and if Timor is keen to be a member, then I would hope that we would look favourably upon it. The common values that underpin the Commonwealth club, if you like, of democracy, rule of law, commitment to freedom are values that we hope the Timorese hold dear. So there's a very good case for Timor Leste to be admitted as a member of the Commonwealth and I always think that if a country wants to be a member of the Commonwealth, then the Commonwealth should look very kindly upon it. It's a very diverse group of countries and it deals with a whole range of issues across the diversity of the membership. So it sounds like a very, very positive issue that Timor has raised.

**EWART:** Now, of course, while you're in East Timor, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd is in Indonesia for talks with the President there, and inevitably, of course, the whole question of the asylum seeker issue is bound to come up. Now, Kevin Rudd has said that we shouldn't expect any new policy statements, I guess that remains to be seen. But in terms of your stand within the Coalition, are you moving at all on this question of turning the boats back were you to be elected?

**BISHOP:** Well, we would reinstate the policies that worked under the Howard government. Kevin Rudd, when he was Prime Minister first time around, changed those policies and we've seen a reinvigorated people smuggling trade. Over 45,000 people have now tried to come to Australia by boat. Hundreds-and-hundreds of people have died at sea. There has been a multi-million dollar blowout in our detention network costs. So my question to Kevin Rudd is what

is his solution? He claims that the Coalition's policies won't work. We say they will and they should be at least tried by this government, but Kevin Rudd's refusing to do that. So what is his solution? If he says that he's not going to make any progress with Indonesia. Well my question to him is what does he propose to do about it? We cannot continue to have people risking their lives, coming by boat, and in hundreds of cases actually drowning, dying at sea. This is just completely unacceptable. There is nothing humanitarian about the government's policies and I'd like to hear from Mr. Rudd as to what his solution to these issues is.

EWART: You use the word "humanitarian" and yet my understanding is that a senior adviser to Indonesia's Vice-President, is saying that the Coalition's policy of turning back the boats, in his opinion, would be inhuman and you have to get an agreement if you're elected with the Indonesians surely to make this work. And against that background, it would seem that's going to be a very tough task?

BISHOP: Well interestingly, retired Brigadier Gary Hogan, who has just completed his three year posting in Jakarta, has confirmed that our policies can work, that's what he said yesterday. These policies worked in the past.

Mr. Rudd says they won't work. So what is his solution?

EWART: Well, as I mentioned, he's telling us not to expect anything too major on policy, but we'll see what emerges from his talks with the President later. But beyond that, I mean what would you expect to come out of his visit to Jakarta. Because the suggestion is that perhaps Australia really needs to get to know Indonesia better and have a stronger relationship?

BISHOP: I agree with that. A Coalition government, should we be elected, would make our relationship with Indonesia a first order priority in terms of foreign affairs and trade. I believe we should have a much deeper relationship with Indonesia. We have promised a "no surprises" policy with Indonesia, so that circumstances like the government's stand on the live cattle trade, without notice to Indonesia, would not occur again. But there is a repair job that needs to be done to restore our reputation as a trusted and reliable trading partner and I believe that there is much more that we could do to develop economic and trade links with Indonesia.

It's one of our closest neighbours, it's a growing population, with a growing economy. There is much more that we can do in economic terms between our two countries.

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