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May 10, 1975

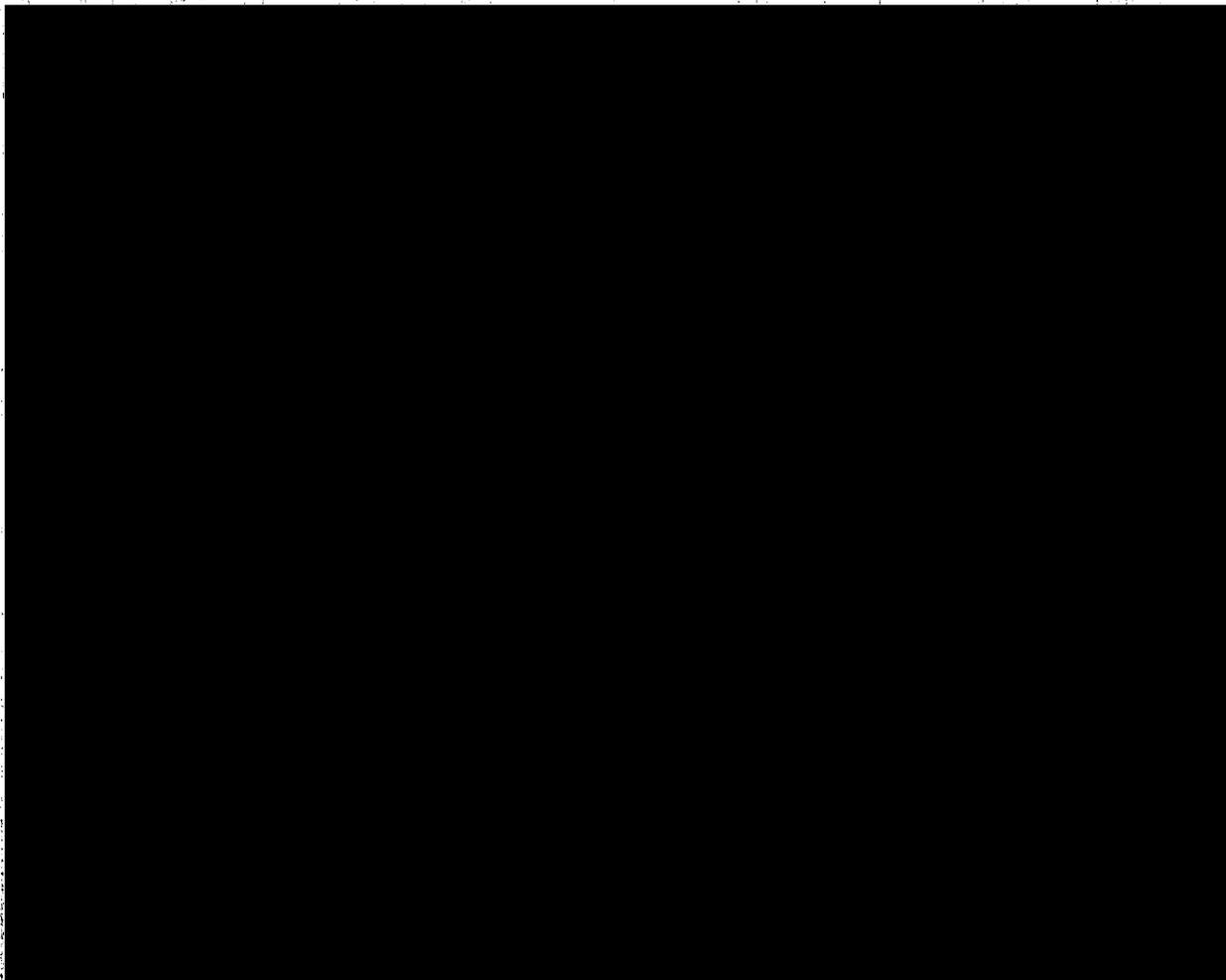
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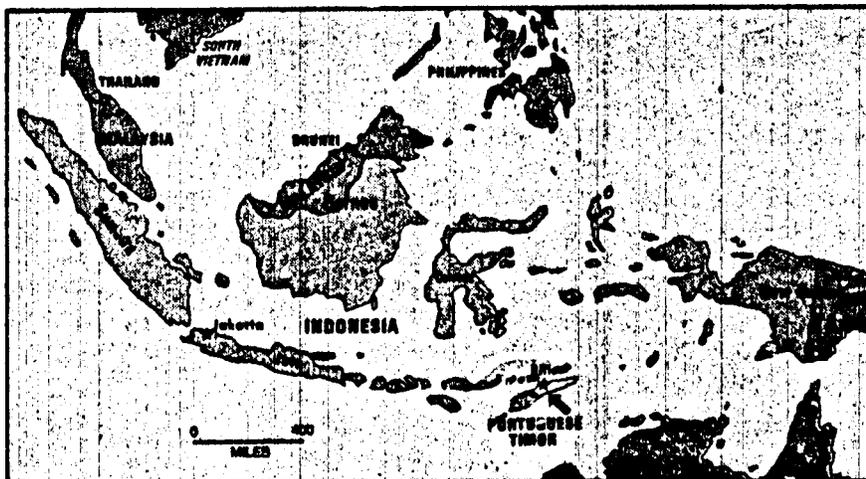
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PORTUGUESE TIMOR

Lisbon has announced that it is beginning negotiations this week with representatives of political organizations in Portuguese Timor toward establishing a transitional government for the colony. The discussions, apparently taking place in Macao, will be followed by talks next week with representatives of the Indonesian government.

According to an official statement on May 2, separate meetings will be held with Timor's pro-Indonesia party and its pro-independence coalition to discuss:

- recognition by Lisbon that the Timorese people have a right to independence;
- establishment in October 1975 of a transitional government;
- formation in October 1975 of an ad hoc consultative assembly to distribute government portfolios and write an electoral law;
- holding of elections in October 1975 for a constituent assembly empowered to draft a proclamation on independence and a constitution.



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Jakarta has not commented publicly on this scenario, despite the fact that Indonesian officials earlier were adamant in their opposition to any Portuguese resolution of Timor's status leading to ultimate independence for the colony. The apparent change of heart in Jakarta may be the result of recent talks the Indonesians have held with both Portuguese and Timorese leaders. The Indonesians evidently have decided that everyone now tacitly agrees Timor will definitely join Indonesia, although it is by no means certain that the other parties interpreted the recent talks the same way.

Commenting on the Macao talks, General Ali Murtopo, who handles the Timorese issue for President Suharto, said that sometime in the next two years the proposed Timor government will organize a plebiscite on Timor's status. The vote is intended to result in merger with Indonesia. Murtopo appears confident that during the interim before the vote, Indonesian propaganda [REDACTED] in Timor will assure a favorable outcome.

Since March, Jakarta has been fairly upbeat about the prospects for absorbing Timor peacefully. Indonesia believes it has assurances from Lisbon that the Portuguese will give Jakarta carte blanche to influence the course of events in Timor. Indonesian optimism has been reinforced by recent meetings in Jakarta between Murtopo's advisers and Timorese pro-independence leaders, who gave Murtopo the impression that they could be brought to terms.

It is possible the pro-independence Timorese have decided that joining Indonesia is inevitable, but it is equally likely that in their talks with Murtopo they engaged in stalling to buy time and prevent a military invasion of the colony. If the Timorese were in fact misleading Murtopo, a solution to the Timor problem has only been postponed. If it becomes apparent that there is in fact no "understanding" on Timor, Suharto will be hard pressed to withstand the militants in his government who have been calling for immediate invasion. [REDACTED]

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