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**Stop Press**

The Asia Society AustralAsia Centre is very pleased to announce that it recently received a grant from the Visions of Australia programme. This grant will enable the Centre to develop an exhibition of modern Indonesian art to be toured in 2002. This exhibition will be the first initiated by the AustralAsia Centre.

The exhibition will draw works from major private and public art collections in Australia and Indonesia and will provide a unique opportunity for the Australian public to consider twentieth century Indonesian art within a social and political context.

This development grant serves to acknowledge the Centre's important and ongoing role in building bridges between Australia and Indonesia, as well as the Centre's successes with cultural programming.

**Save the Date:**

Thursday 15 February 2001

**CEO Asia Update Luncheon**

with guest speaker Mr John Wadsworth Jr, Chairman, Morgan Stanley Asia Limited & Morgan Stanley India

**Asia Society AustralAsia Centre  
Annual Dinner, 2000**

**T**HE Centre's 2000 Annual Dinner was held on Monday, 20th November at the Regent Hotel in Sydney, and was the Centre's third Annual Dinner. A capacity audience of over 600 attended the event, which featured Senior Minister of the Republic of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew as guest speaker. The Senior Minister addressed the topic of East Asia and the Pacific in the Twenty-first Century.

At the Dinner, the AustralAsia Centre also had the pleasure of launching the second part of Senior Minister Lee's memoirs, *From Third World to First – The Singapore Story: 1965-2000*, with a speech given by the Founding Director, Richard Woolcott AC.

The Centre was grateful to all those members and table sponsors for their support of this year's Annual Dinner. Special thanks go to the co-dinner chairmen – Charles Goode, Chairman, ANZ and Mak Swee Wah, Senior Vice President, Singapore Airlines Limited who were the two Dinner Benefactors.

One feature of this year's dinner was the use of the ginger flower on the invitation and as part of the floral arrangements on each table. The magnificent ginger flowers featured on the night were supplied by Alan Carle who operates "The Botanical Ark" in the Whyanbeel Valley in far north Queensland.

Botanist Alan Carle is renowned as the world's foremost protector of endangered rainforest plants and flowers, and a leading authority on "heliconias" or ginger plants. He has recently been commissioned by the Singapore Botanical Gardens to design, source and plant a one hectare display of ginger plants within the existing Singapore Botanical Gardens. The display garden will feature over 400 types of ginger plants native to the southeast regions of Asia and Australasia.

The floral arrangements at the dinner presented a selection of the ginger flowers that will be featured in the gardens.



Annual Dinner Guest Speaker, Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew with Founding Director of the AustralAsia Centre, Richard Woolcott AC (left) and the Chairman of the AustralAsia Centre, Hugh Morgan AO (right)



**AustralAsia Centre  
Newsletter**

## Founding Director's Message



**T**HE AustralAsia Centre has maintained a high level of activity since our Winter newsletter. Developments in the region, especially in Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines, only serve to underline the importance of the work of those institutions, including the Centre,

who seek to strengthen links between Australia and its Asian neighbours, especially with a federal election coming in 2001.

During recent weeks in my capacity as Founding Director of the Centre, I have addressed Australian National University audiences twice, once on Indonesia and once on the Philippines, the Committee for the Economic Development of Australia (CEDA) and the University of Queensland Convocation 2000 in Brisbane. I was also invited to address the Board of the ANZ Bank on the situation in South East Asia. On each occasion I have stressed the ongoing importance of strengthening our ties with the countries of the region in which we are situated and the need to dispel a perception in the region that Australia may be stepping back from its engagement with Asia. The Government has recently reasserted that East Asia remains Australia's area of first priority in respect of foreign and trade policy but it is necessary to convince countries in Asia that this is still the case.

I had an interesting and informative meeting with Singapore's Senior Minister, Lee Kuan Yew, at the Istana on 11th of September. We discussed the situation in East Asia at some length, his address to the Centre's Annual Dinner on 20th of November, and his concerns about the situation in Indonesia.

In October I visited New York and Honolulu briefly. In New York I met the President of the Asia Society, Nick Platt, and other senior officials. It was heartening to find that they were unanimous in the opinion that the Centre has made an excellent start and developed a wide range of informative programmes despite its limited resources in only just over three years. I also attended the meeting of Trustees in New York on 25th of October. I was able to have a brief discussion with the Secretary General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, about the difficulties of an independent East Timor is likely to face next year.

During a visit to Indonesia in October, Dr Mochtar Riady informed me that he would like to join the Centre's President's Circle, which he has done, and that LippoBank would become a Corporate Benefactor. The Deputy Chairman of the Lippo Group, James Riady has joined our Advisory Council.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those companies, institutions and individuals who have supported the Centre and its growing range of activities during the last three years. Without your generous support the important work which the Centre does cannot continue.

## Indonesia Update

Richard Woolcott AC

**I** HAVE visited Indonesia three times since our last newsletter for meetings of the Board of Commissioners of LippoBank, of which I am one of the two non-Indonesian members.

I would have hoped to report an improved situation since that described in our Winter newsletter. Regrettably, however, Indonesia is still drifting economically, politically and socially. The situation has not improved and the Government has so far failed to deal successfully with continuing economic, political, ethnic and religious problems.

Authority has been undermined and increasingly people and groups seem to be taking the law into their own hands. One gets the impression no one is really in charge. Following the down fall of Soeharto there has been a fragmentation of power in which neither the Presidency, the Army, the Parliament (DPR) nor the remnants of the old order have the strength to assert their will.

Although the economy is recovering slowly following the regional crisis and is expected to grow at over 4% for 2000 with low inflation, serious problems continue which will inhibit the return of much needed large scale investment over the next two to three years, unless corporate debt restructuring, the parlous state of the banking system and the need for a more consistent political direction are addressed promptly. Unfortunately there is little sign at the present that this is likely, mainly because of the lack of political will and capacity, although the recently appointed Coordinating Minister for Economic Affairs, Rzal Ramli, has strengthened this important area of government.

It is sad that President Wahid's virtues of intellect and a tolerant, non-sectarian, pluralist democratic approach to governing Indonesia have been largely offset by growing criticism in Indonesia of what is said to be his erratic, capricious and at times arrogant personality, a lack of management skills and a deficient understanding of economic issues compounded by his uncertain health.

Support for President Wahid in the Parliament (DPR) is probably now down to 30% of its membership. Vice President Megawati Sukarnoputri's Indonesian Democratic Party (PDI), the largest party in the DPR, is increasingly disenchanted with the President. The DPR is also more divided and more assertive than it was. It cannot, however, be assumed that it will always act responsibly. Megawati herself

tends to be strongly nationalist in her outlook and retains close links with the armed forces.

Australians involved with Indonesia need to acknowledge several major changes if they are to understand trends there. First, the Wahid Presidency has been weakened and the President has lost much of the credibility he initially enjoyed. Second, the Armed Forces are no longer the cohesive political force they used to be. Morale is low and the political role and influence they enjoyed is unlikely to be restored.

United States' interest in Indonesia is likely to decrease as, to the extent that the new administration focuses on foreign policy, the focus will be on North Asia (China, Japan and the two Koreas), Europe and India/Pakistan. This provides an opportunity over time for Australia to restore some of its standing and influence in Indonesia.

It is important that the bilateral relationship between Australia and Indonesia be progressively repaired by both governments. Given the reality of an independent East Timor in 2001, it is also important that a cooperative and cordial triangular relationship between Australia, Indonesia and East Timor be developed. This will involve successfully stabilising the border between East and West Timor and the renegotiation of the Timor Gap Treaty. While the morale and unity of the Indonesian military has declined seriously it remains the only real guarantor of the security of the state. My personal view is that Australia should resume defence cooperation with Indonesia without delay. Australia is in a position to improve the professionalism of the armed forces through training, including military ethics. This could also be helpful in reducing hostility towards Australia within the armed forces.

There is also a need for the media in both countries to be better informed about developments and attitudes in the other and for more balanced reporting. Business and academic cooperation, which is generally good, should also be enlarged. The exiting network of people to people contacts should be nurtured and expanded while efforts continue at the government level to repair the relationship.

The strength of Indonesia in the past has been its resilience and I believe it will gradually stabilise over the next few years despite the present concerns and uncertainty.

From the Chairman, Mr Hugh Morgan AO

## Indonesian Award to Richard Woolcott AC



Richard Woolcott AC receiving his award, the *Bintang Mahaputra Utama*, from the Indonesian Foreign Minister, Alwi Shihab.

**T**HE Founding Director of the Asia Society AustralAsia Centre, Mr Richard Woolcott AC, was honoured by the Indonesian Government in Jakarta on 18 August. He was invested with the *Bintang Mahaputra Utama* by the Foreign Minister, Alwi Shihab, in the presence of the former Foreign Minister Ali Alatas. The award was approved by President Wahid.

The honour is the highest award given to a foreigner. In his speech at an impressive ceremony at the Indonesian Foreign Ministry, Foreign Minister Alwi Shihab spoke of Mr Woolcott's long experience of Australian-Indonesian affairs as Ambassador to Indonesia (1975-1978), as Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (1988-1992), and most recently, as Chairman of the Australia Indonesia Institute from 1992-1998. In this latter context he paid tribute to Mr Woolcott's successful efforts to build up a very wide network of people and contacts.

Mr Shihab said that Mr Woolcott had played an important role in Australia in promoting, with Indonesia, regional co-operation through the establishment and the early development of APEC, the Cambodian peace process and the regional security dialogue.

Importantly, Minister Shihab, used the occasion to stress the "reservoir of good will", despite occasional problems, between the Australian and Indonesian peoples and to say that he looked forward to "increasing and strengthening" cooperation with Australia, especially through trade and economic developments. The Minister said it was his intention that the award send a positive message to both the Australian and Indonesian communities.

In his reply, Mr Woolcott said he accepted the honour not for himself, but in the hope that it would be seen in both the Australian and Indonesian communities as an indication that the mutually important relationship between the two neighbouring countries would now improve again. He added that both governments should put past difficulties behind them and look to the future, "Australia, Indonesia and an independent East Timor, when it comes into being, must work together to build a close, cordial and cooperative triangular relationship in the years ahead".

From the Executive Director



**C**HRISTMAS is upon us and the Asia Society AustralAsia Centre finishes the year 2000 on a high note, with three major events:

- The Centre was awarded by Visions Australia, a grant of \$69,000 for the development of a Modernist Indonesian art exhibition. Planned for 2002, the Asia Society AustralAsia Centre will look at the growth of Indonesian nationalism over the last 50 years through its art. It will be an opportunity to explore political, economic and societal developments occurring in Indonesia over the period.
- Asia Society Foreign Policy Update Luncheon was addressed by Admiral Dennis Cutler Blair, USN Commander in Chief, US Pacific Command, on regional security in Asia. Admiral Blair's address was widely reported in the Australian media.
- Asia Society Annual Dinner with guest speaker Senior Minister of the Republic of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew, was held in Sydney. Senior Minister Lee spoke on East Asia and the Pacific in the Twenty-first Century. The Senior Minister's address also attracted wide coverage in both the printed media and television.

Planning for 2001 is starting to take shape, with guest speakers from Australia, Japan and Hong Kong for the Centre's CEO Asia Update Luncheon Series, the Asia Foreign Policy Update Luncheon Series and Private CEO Briefings in the early part of the year.

The Centre will also be focusing on the latest developments in the North-South Korea dialogue as they unfold, to tie in with the Australian government's diplomatic recognition of North Korea.

The Asia Society AustralAsia Centre's cultural programming will continue to offer access to Asian and Asian Australian writers, artists and performing artists in a range of high quality events. The Centre will continue to present these in partnership with key institutions to ensure as wide an audience as possible is reached.

As the year closes, on behalf of all the staff at the AustralAsia Centre, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all our members for their generous support of the Centre's activities, and to wish you and your families the very warmest seasons greetings. We look forward to seeing you again in the New Year.

### East Timor: The Consequences

Last July, the New Zealand Institute of International Affairs presented a successful and well attended seminar focusing on East Timor. Presented in Wellington, New Zealand, the seminar was addressed by Xanana Gusmao, New Zealand Foreign Minister, the Hon. Phil Goff and the Centre's Founding Director as well as by representatives of Indonesia, China, Japan, the United States and Thailand. Papers from this seminar have been published under the title *East Timor: The Consequences*.

The publication can be obtained from the NZIIA, C/o Victoria University of Wellington, PO Box 600, Wellington, New Zealand.

## Breakfast with Mr David Tang OBE



**M**R David Tang OBE is a Hong Kong icon. In 1994 he opened the famed Shanghai Tang store in Hong Kong's historic Pedder Building. The company now has stores in Shanghai, Beijing and Madison Avenue, New York. Shanghai Tang draws upon 4,000 years of Chinese history, art and folklore to create a highly acclaimed range of contemporary fashions, fabrics and novelty items. In addition to his role with Shanghai Tang, Mr Tang is also the Founder of both Hong Kong's exclusive China Club, and the Pacific Cigar Company, which controls half the global trade in Cuban cigars.

In September Mr Tang addressed an Asia Society AustralAsia Centre Breakfast held at the Australia Club in Melbourne. Presented in association with David Jones, the Breakfast was very well attended with Mr Tang expressing both his surprise and delight that so many people would get up so early in the morning to hear him speak. In an entertaining and wide-ranging talk, Mr Tang outlined the historical context of East-West trade

and cultural relationships and his own commercial goals within this context. With Shanghai Tang, he explained, he seeks to establish the world's first internationally known Chinese brand name, a name that will become as universally recognised as the leading American brand names. While, at present, Shanghai Tang is geared towards the international market, he hopes ultimately to establish China as his biggest market.

Mr Tang outlined the ongoing need for commercial cooperation between East and West, and expressed his confidence in Hong Kong's – as well as China's – increasing economic strength. Asked about his plans for expansion into the Australian market, he explained that, while at present there are no plans in this direction, he would welcome the opportunity to work with Australia's retail leaders if the right opportunities presented themselves.



Richard Warburton, Chairman, David Jones Limited; David Tang OBE; and Prue Holstein, Executive Director, Asia Society AustralAsia Centre



Breakfast with David Tang OBE at the Australia Club

**A**DMIRAL Blair assumed duties as Commander in Chief, U.S. Pacific Command at Camp H.M. Smith, Hawaii, on February 20, 1999.

Addressing a large audience in Melbourne in November, Admiral Blair presented a paper entitled *Asia Pacific Security in the 21st Century*. In it, he surveyed the current security challenges of the Pacific region and outlined what he saw as the path towards better regional stability.

He said that the major challenges in region were to be faced from the unresolved tensions in Korea, across the Taiwan Strait and in Kashmir. Other challenges include communal violence driven by separatist movements and historic grievances in places such as Indonesia, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Fiji and the Solomon Islands. Finally, transnational concerns, such as terrorism, weapons proliferation, illegal drug trafficking and piracy, continue to present problems that require regional co-operation to address effectively.

He said that he believed that "the path to security in the region ultimately will be through the effects of the information age – loosening state control of data and opinions – through financial and economic interactions, and through diplomacy and co-operation in non-military areas." To develop habits of co-operation between nations does not, he argued, necessarily require formalised treaty alliances or common enemies. He cited ASEAN as an example of a successful alliance, and highlighted the fact that since its foundation no member state of ASEAN has been at war with another.

With regards to the United States' involvement in Asia, he said that the US has "important interests in all corners of Asia", but suggested that North East Asia was a particular area of US focus. Forging better regional security ties with China, Japan and the Republic of Korea were key US goals in this area.

## Annual Dinner Address by Senior Minister of Singapore Lee Kuan Yew



THE Founding Director of the AustralAsia Centre, Richard Woolcott, launched the second volume of Lee Kuan Yew's memoirs *From Third World to First* at the Asia Society AustralAsia Centre Annual Dinner in Sydney on 20th November 2000. He said that Lee Kuan Yew was "one of the pivotal figures in post colonial South East Asia who has been instrumental in creating an important nation from a small island."

Mr Woolcott said the second volume describes the great challenges which Singapore has faced between 1965 and 2000 and how a stable, prosperous, effective and uncorrupt government had been established.

### Senior Minister's Address:

Lee Kuan Yew's address on East Asia and the Pacific in the 21st Century was of great interest to an audience of just over 600 people. This substantial speech was full of valuable insights and is, therefore, not easy to summarise. But the main points were as follows;

- By 2040 China and Japan's combined GDP will exceed that of the United States. This will "shift the economic centre of gravity of the world from the Atlantic to the Pacific".
- China will be a formidable player in the region, which no

other combination of East Asia countries will be able to balance. It was necessary therefore for the United States to play the role of "balancer".

- Although the Korean peninsula is a "flash point", it now looks less likely to "blow up" but reunification and peace are not yet at hand.
- The most dangerous situation in the region involves the possible consequences of "any clash of arms across the Taiwan Straits". With the election of a new president in Taiwan, whose party stands for independence, the danger of rising tensions has increased.
- The ASEAN countries need to combine their markets and develop the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) to meet the challenge of China's attraction to foreign investment.
- Indonesia was the country worst affected by the 1997 financial crisis. It still faces serious economic, political, ethnic and religious problems which would take some years to heal. Until Indonesia's leaders were able to restore order investor confidence would remain weak.

### Turning to Australia:

- It is in Singapore's and Australia's long term interests to press ahead with trade liberalisation. As the focus of APEC had become diffused it would be useful to have a "sub-group within APEC of East Asian and Australasians".
- There is an over-focusing in the Australian media on the East Timor situation (by contrast Singapore concentrated on the situation in Indonesia).
- A bipartisan approach to Australia's relationships with Asian countries was very important. Australians needed to recognise Australia's place in the region, discard "cultural and emotional baggage" of the past, and "forge a bipartisan policy of getting Australia closer to Asia".

Guests at the Asia Society AustralAsia Centre Annual Dinner held at The Regent in Sydney on 20th November 2000



Lee Kuan Yew, Zeke Solomon, Allen Allen and Hemsley, Robert Olsen, Esso Australia Pty Ltd and Mobil Oil Australia Pty Ltd.



Michael Robinson, Arthur Robinson and Hedderwicks, Judy Robinson, Carole and Philip Flood AO



Co-Dinner Chairman, Charles Goode, ANZ with Lee Kuan Yew.



Co-Dinner Chairman, Mak Swee Wah, Singapore Airlines Limited

## Brightly a Southern Moon:

### Asia Society at the Melbourne Writers' Festival

THE Asia Society AustralAsia Centre was delighted with a capacity audience of over 200 at its Asian Australian writers panel, *Brightly a Southern Moon: Asian Lives, Australian Context*, held in conjunction with the Melbourne Writers' Festival in August, 2000.

Chaired by Alison Broinowski, former diplomat and author of *The Yellow Lady: Australian Impressions of Asia*, the panel featured Arlene J. Chai, Ang Chin Geok, Chandani Lokugé and Ouyang Yu. Discussants included Simone Lazaroo and Lillian Ng.

Alison Broinowski began the session by suggesting that we are at a unique time in the history of Asian Australian literature. It is a period of transition in which writers of Asian heritage living in Australia are becoming fully integrated into the mainstream of Australian writing. As this happens the authors' diasporic experiences and



Simone Lazaroo

Second generation Chinese, born in Manila and removed to Australia, Arlene Chai said that rather than finding a need to rediscover her Chinese 'ghosts', she had enjoyed the 'fluid' identity that her personal history afforded her; depending on where she is at any given time, she is happy to embrace a Chinese, Philippine or Australian identity. In the discussion, Simone Lazaroo added her own experiences of fluid identity by speaking about her own Eurasian background.



Chandani Lokugé and Arlene J. Chai

insights are becoming less central to their writing. For the moment, however, these writers still maintain a distinctly Asian flavour in their writings, offering Australian readers a fresh insight into Australian society and the experience of cross-cultural identity within it.

During the session, each author drew from their own personal experiences to speak on what it means to them to be an 'Asian Australian'. Ang Chin Geok discussed her experiences as a Singaporean Chinese. As someone already once removed from the 'homeland' of mainland China, she discussed the efforts of the Singaporean Chinese to preserve Chinese traditions and to cling to ghosts from an already distant past.

Chandani Lokugé considered the diasporic issues of balancing ties to the homeland with the need to adapt to a new culture, in the context of all those who have migrated to Australia from a wide range of ethnic origins. In the discussion, Lillian Ng reflected on the pragmatism demonstrated by so many Chinese who, in the quest for survival, have had to simply get on with the business of accepting their new homes and adapting, often unsentimentally, to the new environment.



Ang Chin Geok and Lillian Ng



Question time at "Brightly a Southern Moon" held in the Beckett Theatre, C.U.B. Malthouse

With his characteristic wit and anger Ouyang Yu challenged notions of identity purely based on appearance or cultural heritage. He questioned the notion of the 'Asian Australian', and whether with its many difficulties, the label, 'Asian Australian' has any validity. The relevance of the term 'Asian Australian' sparked a lively debate amongst members of the audience, many of whom contributed their own experiences of cross-cultural identity.



Ouyang Yu



The panel chaired by Alison Broinowski (centre)

## Staff Changes at the Centre



**Naomi Smith**  
Administration Assistant

The Asia Society AustralAsia Centre is delighted to welcome Naomi Smith as its new Administration Assistant. Naomi has graduated from the University of Melbourne with an Honours degree in Anthropology and is currently completing her Master's degree. Naomi has worked in a variety of capacities including tutoring at the University of Melbourne, assisting with the organisation of a cross-cultural film festival in London and has worked at the British Library of Political and Economic Science at the London School of Economics. Naomi has a keen interest in Asia with a focus on social and development issues and has recently returned from travels to the Philippines.



**Paul Turner**  
Programme Officer

The position of Administration Assistant was previously held by Paul Turner. Paul has now taken on the role of Programme Officer responsible for the Centre's cultural programming. Paul brings to this position not only the experience he gained while working for the Asia Society AustralAsia Centre in his previous role, but also a background in the performing arts, including studies with the Victorian College of the Arts and work for the Melbourne Symphony.

## Australia and the Indonesian Incorporation of Portuguese Timor, 1974 - 1976

Melbourne University Press 2000

**T**HIS IS an extraordinary collection of documents about one of the most important, and disputatious, episodes in Australian foreign policy. Over time they should lead to a complete re-evaluation of the dominant views and, I would argue, mythologies. They concern particularly Australian policy towards East Timor, from late in its 400 year period of colonial administration by Portugal, through the breakdown of that administration, the East Timorese civil war, and the subsequent invasion and annexation of that territory by Indonesia.

The subsequent history of East Timor has been cruel. The Indonesians made some considerable efforts to develop East Timor, certainly more than the Portuguese ever had, but their rule was violent, corrupt and arbitrary. As a result they never really achieved full civic legitimacy with the population of East Timor, which eventually voted, in a United Nations referendum, to seek an independent future.

However, all of that we know only with hindsight. The situation which presented itself to Australian policy makers in 1974 and 1975 was extraordinarily complex. Australian policy since Menzies had taken the view that Portuguese East Timor should eventually be decolonised and that the most logical and best outcome of that decolonisation would be for East Timor to become part of Indonesia, as all the former Dutch colonies, including the ethnically identical West Timor, had done. Australian policy makers also held the view that there should be an acceptable act of self-determination in East Timor.

What these documents make absolutely clear is that the then Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam, at no stage gave any approval to an

Indonesian invasion. In fact much of the documents involve ongoing Australian attempts to dissuade the Indonesians from this course, to persuade the Portuguese to live up to their responsibilities and to bring all the major parties together for talks and a negotiated settlement.

Eventually, after breakdown and civil war in East Timor, the embassy, under the leadership of the ambassador, Dick Woolcott, came to the conclusion that the Indonesians had determined on the course of invasion. The question then was what Australia, as the country which had done more than any other to dissuade Indonesia from invasion, should do further. Part of the great misrepresentation of the Timor industry in Australia has been to selectively misquote this phase of the debate as if it represented the whole of Australia's response to the Timor problem.

In fact the critics of Australian policy of that time have no realistic alternative to offer. It was of course inconceivable that Australia would take military action against Indonesia. Similarly, in the view of the professionals of the time, Canberra had taken stronger bilateral and international steps than any other nation. Indeed when Indonesia's invasion was subsequently voted on at the United Nations, Australia was the only country in this region to vote against Indonesia, and there were demonstrations against the Australian embassy in Jakarta. Any escalation which was in the realms of possibility for Australia to take would not have made any difference.

More broadly the documents disclose a highly professional group of Australian diplomats and officials, in the embassy in Jakarta and back in Canberra. The quality of the prose in the cables is very high. The sentences are clear,

logical, mostly in the active voice. Because it is such a large collection of documents, 883 pages, it is an unusual, perhaps unique, insight into diplomatic policy method. Tracing intellectually the development of Australian policy in these documents is fascinating. The overwhelming impression is of high class professionals, working to the limits of their ability, to know the facts, present the options to Canberra, argue honestly what they think is the right approach, but always to carry out the instructions of the Government.

Australia has no reason to be ashamed of anything it did in this period.

Quite the reverse, these documents show us what a very high class diplomatic service Australia had in that period and in that location. That's just as it should be. That the Indonesians ultimately made such a mess of East Timor is certainly not Australia's fault. Plenty of others had their share of responsibility as well, not least the violent East Timorese factions.

However, if there is a single villain revealed in these documents it is Portugal, whose irresponsibility was epic.

Having said all that, these documents are also a riveting read. There are a few dull patches, when various policy cul-de-sacs are explored and abandoned. But overall there is a compelling narrative thread as Australian policy makers dealt honourably with impossible choices in what was to become a genuinely tragic situation.

Reviewed by **Greg Sheridan**  
Foreign Editor, *The Australian*

Greg Sheridan has written a longer article on these papers which will appear in the *Australian Review of Books* published in *The Australian* newspaper on Wednesday 13 December.



## AustralAsia Centre

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