

# Timor-Leste President's Visit Special

## Celebrating strong ties ahead of visit

**CELIO MONIZ DA SILVA**  
CHARGE D'AFFAIRES A.I. OF TIMOR-LESTE



As his excellency the president of Timor-Leste prepares for an official visit to Japan, the Embassy of Timor-Leste reflects on the remarkable 23-year partnership between our nations — a relationship built on mutual trust, development cooperation and a shared strategic vision for the Asia-Pacific region.

As interim charge d'affaires, it is both my honor and profound duty to express, on behalf of our nation and people, our deepest gratitude to the government and people of Japan for the extraordinary partnership in our journey from post-conflict recovery to sustainable development.

Since Timor-Leste restored independence on May 20, 2002, Japan has stood as one of our most vital partners, providing over \$300 million in overseas development assistance. Japan has been pivotal in our nation-building journey. Japan's early support through



**Prime Minister Xanana Gusmao**  
EMBASSY OF TIMOR-LESTE

United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor peacekeeping missions (1999 to 2002), swift diplomatic recognition and the 2003 Basic Agreement on Economic Cooperation laid the foundation for transformative projects such as the Presidente Nicolau Lobato International Airport and the Dili-Ainaro-Maliana highway network. Through the Japan International Cooperation Agency, Japan has also empowered our human capital via the Project for Human Resource Development Scholarship pro-

gram, training over 200 Timorese civil servants and professionals.

Today, our bilateral cooperation spans energy security for oil and gas exploration, accession to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (with Japan advocating for our membership since 2022), and maritime development, notably the new solar power plant in Betano and planned fisheries infrastructure.

Japan's private-sector engagement demonstrates confidence in our future. The Timor Gap-Japan liquefied natural gas working group, established in 2023, may unlock our Greater Sunrise fields, potentially doubling our gross domestic product. The recent inauguration of the Japan-funded Guido Valadares National Hospital Maternal-Child Unit exemplifies our health sector collaboration, while the officers of the Timor-Leste National Police, trained by Japan's Self-Defense Forces, underscore our security partnership.

Through JICA's scholarship program, 217 Timorese professionals have earned advanced degrees in Japan since 2018, 42% of them women. These alumni now lead key ministries, transforming governance. Scholarships through Japan's Edu-

cation Ministry have also empowered 86 Timorese youth. As we look ahead, President Jose Ramos-Horta's visit will focus on unlocking Timor-Leste's untapped potential through three key sectors: blue economy partnerships (by developing fisheries and port infrastructure); energy transition (by expanding solar and hydrogen investments), ASEAN-Japan connectivity (positioning Timor-Leste as a regional hub) and expanding people-to-people exchanges, building on our 15,000-strong Timorese diaspora in Japan.

For me, Japan's "heart-to-heart" diplomacy mirrors our values. This visit will reaffirm our commitment to peace, prosperity and innovation in the Indo-Pacific.

To Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba, Foreign Affairs Minister Takeshi Iwaya, His Majesty Emperor Naruhito, Defense Minister Gen Nakatani, JICA President Akihiko Tanaka and every Japanese citizen who has volunteered, trained or prayed for Timor-Leste, we say *arigatō gozaimasu* (thank you) from the bottom of our hearts. Your *omoiyari* (compassion) has shaped our destiny.

*This content was compiled in collaboration with the embassy. The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect those of the newspaper.*



**President Jose Ramos-Horta**  
EMBASSY OF TIMOR-LESTE

## Developing the nation as trusted partners

**IWAO KITAHARA**  
SECRETARY-GENERAL,  
JAPAN-TIMOR-LESTE ASSOCIATION,  
HONORARY CONSUL GENERAL



As we mark the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II, I would like to extend my heartfelt welcome to Nobel Peace Prize laureate and President of Timor-Leste H.E. Jose Ramos-Horta,

who is visiting Japan to meet with our national leaders and to host Timor-Leste's National Day at Expo 2025 on Aug. 28.

It is worth recalling that in 2010, during his previous presidency, Ramos-Horta visited the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park as a sitting head of state. There, he paid his respects at the Hiroshima Victims Memorial Cenotaph and the Children's Peace Monument, and attentively toured the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum. At the museum's Memorial Hall, he delivered a powerful speech at a peace forum attended by atomic bomb survivors and the younger generation, passionately appealing for peace. I vividly remember him giving thoughtful responses to various questions raised from the floor.

Timor-Leste, born from a hard-fought struggle to restore its independence, is now in its 23rd year as Asia's youngest

nation — full of vitality, full of smiles, peaceful and a true "land of the rising sun."

Ramos-Horta and Prime Minister H.E. Xanana Gusmao have shown outstanding leadership in close coordination, dedicating themselves to nation-building and human resource development with the aim of ensuring a better life for their people.

Internationally, they are actively pursuing a foreign policy of "No Enemies, No Allies," while working tirelessly toward achieving full membership in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in October.

Japan has consistently supported and endorsed Timor-Leste's nation-building, human resource development and smooth accession to ASEAN.

In response to Timor-Leste's request, Japan began accepting technical intern trainees from the country in September 2023 for the first time. Currently, about 50 such trainees are working hard in places such as Kochi and Hiroshima prefectures. For Japan — facing an increasingly severe labor shortage due to a declining birthrate — their contribution is invaluable, and we look forward to expanding acceptance in the future.

Japanese companies are also strongly encouraged to invest, establish operations and create employment opportunities in Timor-Leste. Furthermore, regarding the Institute of Japan Studies at the National University of Timor-Leste — agreed upon

between then-Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and Gusmao in December 2023 — I strongly request that construction begin without delay.

Timor-Leste is a pro-Japanese country that shares our fundamental values of democracy and human rights. Its degree of political democratization surpasses that of the current 10 ASEAN member states. In the 2025 Gender Gap Index, Timor-Leste ranked 86th out of 148 countries, ahead of Japan's 118th place. In terms of political empowerment in particular, Japan ranked 125th, while Timor-Leste ranked 76th — an indication of the active role women play in the country. On the other hand, overall quality of life and economic prosperity in Timor-Leste remain challenging.

In this context, it is essential for Timor-Leste and Japan to further join hands as trusted partners, strengthening our broad and multilayered friendship in the years to come. Both as the secretary-general of the Japan-Timor-Leste Association and as the honorary consul general, I will continue to make every effort to contribute to this partnership.

Finally, I cannot help but express my regret that in the 23 years since Timor-Leste restored its independence, no Japanese prime minister has yet visited the country. Given the difficult international climate, I strongly hope that such a visit will take place at the earliest possible opportunity.

## Nation seeking economic diversity

**SUKEHIRO HASEGAWA**  
FORMER SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE  
OF THE UNITED NATIONS SECRETARY-  
GENERAL FOR TIMOR-LESTE



As President Jose Ramos-Horta prepares to visit Japan this month, his arrival marks not just a diplomatic engagement, but a celebration of one of the most remarkable success stories in modern peace-building. Having served as U.N. special representative to Timor-Leste from 2004 to 2006 and later as adviser to the president, I have witnessed firsthand this young nation's extraordinary transformation and Japan's invaluable role in its democratic evolution.

When Timor-Leste declared independence in 2002, Japan's contribution was both substantial and sustained. The Self-Defense Forces personnel built crucial infrastructure — roads and bridges connecting remote communities — while sharing technical expertise on maintaining construction vehicles and equipment. The Japan International Cooperation Agency played a pivotal role in human resources development and institutional capacity-building, training Timorese officials in governance and administration essential for running a modern democratic state.

Today, Timor-Leste stands as a shining example of successful democratic transition. Most remarkably, Timorese leaders demonstrated extraordinary moral courage in reconciliation with Indonesia, whose army occupied East Timor from 1975 to 1999, resulting in nearly a fifth of the population's deaths. Rather than

pursuing retributive justice, leaders like Ramos-Horta, supported by the most powerful and respected leader in Timor-Leste, former President and current Prime Minister Xanana Gusmao, championed restorative justice, prioritizing healing and future-oriented cooperation over punishment.

Timor-Leste's commitment to international law has been equally impressive. When faced with maritime disputes with Australia over Timor Gap oil and gas resources, Gusmao led the fight at the U.N. tribunal, standing firm on principles rather than accepting unilateral solutions.

Japan's support proved instrumental in Timor-Leste's regional integration, notably supporting its successful Association of Southeast Asian Nations bid. This will bear fruit in October, when Timor-Leste is scheduled to formally become ASEAN's 11th member.

Japan can learn much from Timorese leadership in safeguarding multilateral cooperation and the rule of law. As Japan navigates complex relationships with China and South Korea following historical conflicts, Timor-Leste's reconciliation approach offers invaluable insights.

The Timorese example challenges us to rise above emotion and sentiment, embracing the magnanimity that true leadership requires. If Timor-Leste could forgive Indonesia despite decades of occupation and immense suffering, surely Japan, China and South Korea can find wisdom to move beyond historical grievances toward regional cooperation. The potential for trilateral partnership among these nations — guided by multilateral principles through U.N. frameworks — could become a transformative force for international peace.

Ramos-Horta's visit represents both opportunity and reflection.

As Timor-Leste seeks economic diversification beyond oil and gas dependence, aspiring to emulate Singapore's self-reliance model, Japan should recognize the Timorese people's democratic achievements and support productive infrastructure investment. This economic transformation requires new leadership and fresh approaches for building a diversified, knowledge-based economy. Japan's experience in technological innovation positions it as an ideal partner for this critical transition.

As someone maintaining lasting friendship with Ramos-Horta since our nation-building collaboration, I believe his visit offers a crucial moment for Japanese leaders to embrace a broader vision. Timorese leaders' magnanimity provides a road map for Japan's approach to China and South Korea. By rising above emotion and sentiment, Japanese leadership could forge a trilateral partnership leveraging multilateral cooperation through the U.N.

This moment calls for Japanese leaders to be more confident and courageous in pursuing the peace vision envisaged in the Japanese Constitution and the U.N. Charter. Japan's unique position as the only nation to have experienced nuclear war gives it unparalleled moral authority in promoting nuclear disarmament.

Timor-Leste's transformation story, supported by Japan's steadfast friendship, reminds us that with vision, moral courage and international solidarity, even the most challenging historical divisions can be bridged. As Ramos-Horta advocates for honoring international law and saving multilateralism, his message calls for a new era where Japan, China and South Korea work together through multilateral frameworks to become architects of peace rather than prisoners of the past.

## Partnership built on trust, shared values

**MITSURU YAMANAKA**  
PRESIDENT, ASTOMOS ENERGY  
CORPORATION



On the occasion of the official visit to Japan by His Excellency President Jose Ramos-Horta of Timor-Leste, I am honored to share a message of friendship and cooperation from Astomos

Energy Corp.

As I reflect on our long-standing relationship with Timor-Leste, I am reminded that true partnership is not built solely on trade or resource procurement — it is built on trust, shared values and a commitment to mutual growth.

Since 2008, Astomos Energy has sourced liquefied petroleum gas from the Bayu-Undan gas field, located in the joint development area between Australia and Timor-Leste. This stable supply relationship has not only supported our business operations, but also laid the foundation for a deeper bond between our company and the people of Timor-Leste.

In 2015, we took a step beyond commerce and launched a scholarship program for students at the National University of Timor-Leste. As of 2024, we have awarded scholarships to 200 students. Apart from the period during the COVID-19 pandemic when travel was restricted, we have invited one to two students each year to Japan for immersive training programs. In 2025, we plan to award scholarships to 20 more stu-

dents, and the ceremony to celebrate their achievements will be held in Timor-Leste in September.

Our scholarship program is not only a gesture of goodwill — it is a strategic investment in human capital. We believe that education is the cornerstone of national development, and by supporting Timor-Leste's brightest minds, we are helping to build a foundation for inclusive growth and regional stability. The students we support are selected not only for their academic excellence but also for their potential to lead and inspire. Their time in Japan is designed to be transformative, exposing them to new ideas, technologies and cultural perspectives that broaden their horizons and strengthen their resolve.

We are continually inspired by the resilience and optimism of Timor-Leste's youth. Despite facing economic and infrastructural challenges, they demonstrate a remarkable commitment to learning and self-improvement. Their aspirations reflect a deep desire to contribute meaningfully to their country's future, and we are honored to play a role in nurturing that potential.

Timor-Leste is a young country, having gained independence just over two decades ago. With a vibrant and youthful population and a sincere commitment to nation-building, Timor-Leste is actively transitioning toward a diversified and sustainable future. These efforts offer compelling opportunities for Japanese companies seeking meaningful and long-term engagement.

Astomos Energy's corporate motto — "*Jozu ni Mirai e*" ("Skillfully into the

Future") — guides every aspect of our operations. It reflects our dedication to delivering comprehensive energy solutions that empower both households and society at large. We strive to be a trusted partner to our customers by providing reliable, LPG-centered services that enhance daily life. At the same time, we are deeply committed to environmental stewardship, ensuring that our practices align with the principles of sustainability.

Our engagement with Timor-Leste exemplifies this philosophy in action. It is a relationship built not on short-term interests, but on long-term vision and mutual respect. We see energy as a conduit for connection and a means toward shared progress. In this spirit, we remain committed to deepening our partnership, exploring new avenues for cooperation and standing alongside Timor-Leste as it navigates the path toward a prosperous and resilient future.

As the global energy landscape evolves, we recognize the importance of adaptability and innovation. Timor-Leste is at a pivotal moment, transitioning toward a more diversified and sustainable economic model. We believe that by working together, sharing knowledge and investing in people, we can help shape a future that is not only energy secure, but also equitable and inclusive.

To the people of Timor-Leste, and to all those who have supported this partnership, I extend my heartfelt gratitude. May our friendship continue to flourish and may our cooperation inspire the next generation to build a brighter, more connected world.



**Timor-Leste has many tropical beaches.** GETTY IMAGES



**A motorbike passes in front of the Statue of Francisco Xavier do Amaral, the first president of Timor-Leste, in Dili.** GETTY IMAGES

## Our Heartiest Welcome

to H.E. Jose Ramos-Horta, President of  
the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste,  
on His Official Visit to Japan



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