

Indonesia's President to Visit TL and Santa Cruz on Friday

AFP, AP, Xinhua, Lusa

Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono will begin a visit of Timor-Leste on Friday, making it his first visit to the country since taking office. Whilst in Timor-Leste, President Yudhoyono is expected to sign a deal ending a land border disagreement between the two nations.

The President will also meet his Timorese counterpart, President Xanana Gusmão, and Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri before signing the border agreement, which is one of the remaining disputes between the two countries.

A bilateral agreement on sea borders is not currently on the cards due to the ongoing dispute between Dili and Jakarta over the ownership of the islet of Fatu Sinai, located five-kilometres off the Timorese enclave of Oecussi in West Timor. According to Lusa news agency, an Indonesian military commander was quoted as saying that troops have been stationed on the outcrop of Fatu Sinai in an attempt to reinforce Jakarta's territorial claim.

Meanwhile, President Yudhoyono plans to pay homage at Santa Cruz cemetery in Timor-Leste, where Indonesian troops massacred hundreds of people in 1991. According to reports in The Jakarta Post, Yudhoyono will be the first Indonesian president to visit Santa Cruz Cemetery. On 12 November 1991, Indonesian soldiers opened fire on some 3000 unarmed protestors commemorating the death of an activist. Troops then bayoneted survivors and hauled off the dead bodies in trucks. More than 250 people were killed and about 270 went missing.

Foreign Minister Hassan Wirayuda was quoted as saying the President's visit to Santa Cruz was aimed at strengthening ties between the two countries and putting an end to the long-standing anger over human rights abuses by Indonesian troops in Timor-Leste.

"This visit is a gesture that we have agreed to leave behind the past and start a new relationship," he said. "Santa Cruz is a special place for the East Timorese. Since there is no war memorial there for local heroes, the cemetery also serves that purpose," added Wirayuda.