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More Diggers sent after survives assassination attempt

- Stephen Fitzpatrick and Paul Toohey
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AUSTRALIAN troops are arriving in East Timor after a double assassination attempt that left the nation's president in a coma.

"The C-130 aircraft are arriving by the hour. The troops will bolster forces already there," said a spokesman for Defence Minister Joel Fitzgibbon.

An Australian warship has also arrived off the Dili coast to support the first of 200 fast reaction troops sent to reinforce international security forces as doctors said President Jose Ramos Horta would remain on life support until next week.

In the capital Dili, East Timor's interim president Vicente Guterres declared a state of emergency and appealed for calm, after apparently coordinated attacks against the President and Prime Minister Xanana Gusmao threw the young nation into a fresh crisis.

Meanwhile, East Timor President Jose Ramos Horta remains in an induced coma and "is not out of the woods" but should make a full recovery after he was shot in a failed assassination attempt, doctors say.

Dr Ramos Horta was flown to Darwin last night after receiving bullet wounds in the abdomen and arm during a post-dawn gunfight between his security detail and rebels led by former military policeman Alfredo Reinado. Reinado and at least one other man died in the attack.

The President, who was shot at least twice and sustained a bullet wound to his right lung, was last night in a



"very serious but stable" condition on life support in an induced coma after emergency surgery, and "not out of the woods yet", according to doctors.

Surgeons operated on Dr Ramos Horta for up to three hours overnight to remove bullet fragments and repair his wound, but with bullet fragments still in his body, he faces further surgery.

"His condition remains extremely serious but by the same token, stable," Royal Darwin Hospital general manager Len Notaras told ABC radio. "The next few days will be the telling point."

Dr Notaras said fragments removed from the president's body had been given to Australian Federal Police for forensic examination.

Dr Notaras said Dr Ramos Horta was lucky to be alive after the assassination attempt and had suffered "terrible injuries".

"He remains in the intensive care (ward) and will remain there until at least Thursday this week on a ventilator.

"His progress is going to plan, clinically, and we expect that the next three to five days will be critical in terms of ensuring that we keep a vigilance for infection."

"The most severe is a wound to his lower right chest, there were soft tissue wounds to the back and around the area of the ... shoulder blade," Dr Notaras said earlier today.

Dr Notaras said Dr Ramos Horta would remain in intensive care for another week.

While he is capable of breathing unaided, the president will remain in an induced coma to ensure he is more comfortable and doctors are able to continue working on him, he said.

"The next surgery should occur sometime tomorrow or Wednesday and then that will be followed I expect, by further surgery likely 24, 48 hours after that," he said.

"At this stage we are quietly confident ... (but) the condition should not be underestimated. It is a serious event."

Dr Notaras said the injuries were caused by a "high-velocity weapon" but it was too early to determine whether there were two or three gunshot wounds.

Mr Gusmao escaped a separate assault on his convoy shortly after the first attack as it took him from his home, in the hills at Balabar above the capital, Dili, to his office.

There were conflicting reports last night that Dr Ramos Horta's guards fired first when Reinado and his fellow rebels arrived at the President's villa, several kilometres to the east of the capital, with Dr Ramos Horta being caught in gunfire when he returned to the compound from his morning walk.

Dr Ramos Horta was taken to the Aspen medical centre in Dili, which is staffed by Australian doctors. It is believed they were able to remove two bullets from Dr Ramos Horta and stabilised him, but some bullet shrapnel remained in his body when he was sent to Darwin.

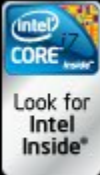
Meanwhile, more Australian troops will arrive in East Timor today after the tiny country was plunged into a new crisis by an apparent assassination attempt on Prime Minister Xanana Gusmao and President Jose Ramos Horta, who was last night fighting for his life in a Darwin hospital.

Kevin Rudd, who promised to visit East Timor this week, said Australia would send an additional 190 soldiers and federal police to bolster its force in the country at a "time of crisis in their democracy".

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