

Embassy glosses Timor visit

THE Indonesian Government was sensitive about a proposed Senate inquiry into East Timor, an official at the Indonesian Embassy in Canberra said yesterday.

The embassy's press and information counsellor, Mr Isslamet Poernomo, told reporters Jakarta did not welcome the inquiry because it regarded East Timor as a domestic issue.

Mr Poernomo invited six journalists to an informal lunch in an effort to play down the significance of the present visit to East Timor by the former Prime Minister, Mr Gough Whitlam.

He explained that Mr Whitlam's visit, described as secret, was a private affair, paid for by Mr Whitlam and not the Indonesian authorities.

The hastily-organised lunch — journalists were given only two hours' notice — was fur-

By WIO JOUSTRA

ther evidence of the sensitivity over the Timor issue between Australia and Indonesia.

It followed a news agency report from Jakarta, published in at least one major newspaper yesterday, which said Australian Embassy officials in Jakarta had been asked to keep the Whitlam trip secret.

Mr Poernomo said Mr Whitlam had asked to visit Jakarta and East Timor about a month ago, and the Indonesian Embassy in Canberra had supported his visa application.

Mr Whitlam had arrived in Jakarta last Friday and flown to the East Timorese capital, Dili, on Sunday.

He would stay in East Timor for five days and visit a number of villages by helicopter.

Before returning to Australia on Saturday Mr Whitlam would be received by President Soeharto, Vice-

President Malik and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dr Mochtar.

He would also have talks with Dr Ali Murtopo, the Minister for Information and head of the Centre for Strategic and International Studies which organised the visit.

Journalists were surprised at Mr Poernomo's announcement that the foreign editor of the Sydney Morning Herald, Mr Peter Hastings, was accompanying Mr Whitlam.

The former Portuguese colony has been closed to foreign correspondents in Jakarta for more than a year.

Australian journalists have not been allowed into East Timor since Indonesia took it over, in December, 1975.

Mr Poernomo said Mr Whitlam had asked for Mr Hastings to accompany him and two academics, and Mr Hastings also had high-level contacts in Jakarta.