

Australian minister visits East Timor to repairs relations

By ROD MCGUIRK | Published July 29, 2018 | [Markets](#) | [Associated Press](#)

Australia's foreign minister was visiting East Timor on Monday to repair bilateral ties after a bitter dispute over energy revenue and spying allegations.

Foreign Minister Julie Bishop said she is the national capital Dili to meet newly elected leaders. She is the first Australian minister to visit the near neighbor in five years.

Australia, a wealthy nation of 25 million people, ended an acrimonious dispute with the poor, half-island nation of 1.5 million people in March with the signing of a bilateral treaty that shares oil and gas revenue from the Timor Sea which separates them.

East Timor had challenged the validity of a revenue-sharing agreement signed in 2006 because it alleged Australia had bugged government offices in Dili in 2004 to gain an unfair advantage in negotiations.

"The signing of our historic maritime boundary treaty has opened a new chapter in relations between Australia and Timor-Leste," Bishop told Australian Broadcasting Corp. on Monday, referring to East Timor by its preferred name.

"It was a matter of ongoing tension, it was a concern for us in terms of our relationship with Timor-Leste and I'm pleased that we were able to commit to a process that led to a fair and balanced outcome and now we can get on with supporting Timor-Leste in achieving its economic potential," Bishop added.

East Timor dropped its case against Australia in the United Nation's highest court last year as an act of goodwill ahead of their agreement on the new treaty that gives most of the Timor Sea revenue to Dili.

Australia last month confirmed that it had charged a former Australian spy, who cannot be named, and his lawyer Bernard Collaery with conspiring to reveal secret information in relation to the espionage allegation.

The spy was to testify in East Timor's case against Australia in The Hague, but secret service agents raided his Canberra home and took his passport in 2013.

Bishop said the charges were not a cause of tension between the two governments.

"The Timorese government has been asked about it and they have said quite rightly that it's a matter for Australia," Bishop said.

The spy and lawyer will make their first court appearances on the charges in September.