

Up to 10,000 face relocation in Timor Leste

Airport expansion planned as ASEAN membership nears



An Australian aircraft at Dili airport

- Thomas Ora, Dili
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The Timor Leste government’s plan to expand a major airport in Dili might sound good for the development of the new nation preparing for ASEAN membership, but relocation looms for thousands of villagers.

Up to 10,780 people living in four villages located close to the Presidente Nicolau Lobato International Airporta may be moved to make way for the project.

Work is scheduled to begin in July and finish in 2015. Upon completion the runway will be nearly doubled in length. The airport currently serves only 120-seat airplanes with three routes, from Dili to Darwin in Australia, Denpasar in Indonesia, and Singapore. The extension is aimed at making the airport fit for larger international carriers.

Membership of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which Timor Leste requested in 2011, is one of the driving forces behind the expansion, given the importance of sound infrastructure and development agendas for the regional bloc.

Yet it comes at a cost: three options have been tabled for the airport project, one of which involves expanding the runway over the Comoro River. For the villagers of Anin Fuik, Beto Tasi, Terra Santa and Rosaria, home to more than 1,000 families, this almost inevitably means relocation.







“It’s okay if we have to get out of this village, but please give us compensation,” Gaspan Nono, from Anin Fuik village, said.

The government appears undecided about how it will compensate those forced to move. Two options are available: first, the government gives money to the villagers directly, and second, the government provides them with new homes.

“Principally, the government won’t let people live in misery because of the expansion project,” Vice Minister of Transport and Communications, Flavio Cardoso Neves, said. “It would be better if people live at the relocation site, which is better than the villages where they live now.”

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