

Gusmao's chief of staff misses Lobato appearance

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Darwin, February 13: Agio Pereira, chief of staff to East Timor's President Xanana Gusmao, is in Darwin - where he spent most of the Indonesian occupation of his homeland - for medical treatment. The treatment is reported to have delayed him from answering a summons to give evidence at the continuing trial in Dili of former Interior Minister Rogerio Lobato.

But he is now expected to take the witness stand sometime this week.

Defence lawyers want to question Pereira about telephone calls allegedly made on the president's telephone to army mutineer Vicente "Railos" da Conceicao.

Railos' allegations that both Lobato and then Prime Minister Dr Mari Alkatiri had instructed him to arm civilians for the assassination of their political opponents were used by President Gusmao to enforce the fall of East Timor's first parliamentary government.

Broadcast of the untested accusations also won the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's flagship programme, Four Corners, Australia's highest journalism accolade. Dr Alkatiri, who has since been exonerated by United Nations-appointed prosecutors, says he now intends to sue the ABC for damages.

Railos has since been reported as saying that he did not know it was the president's phone number and that he had only called it to give thanks for telephone credit that had been sent to him via SMS.

A senior administrator has told that trial that that Railos had used the phone number to talk with President Gusmao before he - Railos - attacked East Timor's army headquarters during last year's disturbances.

The exoneration of Dr Alkatiri has prompted rallies against the prosecutors in Dili.