

On My Mind
7/23/04

The August 2nd deadline for submitting names for Garapan's new pedestrian mall is fast approaching. Much as I'd like a chance at the \$1,000 prize, the only names I've been able to come up with, though, don't stand a chance – names like Jordan's folly, or "Tumon Two" or "Mini-Waikiki." The mall may be broad and open, but with its extensive concrete surfaces, it sure doesn't reflect Saipan's tropical island beauty. Before going further, the Garapan "revitalization" designers might want to bear in mind what Admiral Fargo is reported to have said – that he sees the CNMI's role as a place of rest and recreation for the military. In which case, making the CNMI more like Guam isn't going to add to its attraction, but only detract from it.

While, contrary to the Governor's stance, I would not welcome a greater military presence in the CNMI, I suppose one should at least be grateful that the military – if the Admiral is at all representative – appear to value the CNMI for its natural beauty rather than its commercial or industrial aspects. Perhaps this, if concern for the environment per se is not enough, will persuade those in power to be more concerned for the preservation of the CNMI's natural resources than with its increasing commercialism.

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The protection and preservation of the CNMI's natural resources got short shrift last night, when only four members of the general public attended and gave testimony at the Division of Environmental Quality hearing on amendments to its Water Quality Standards regulations. Three of the four spoke against the changes; only yours truly supported them.

Some objections were broad and general – that the regulations were too rigid, did not reflect local, as opposed to federal, conditions, were too demanding. Others, more specific, opposed the protection of coral spawning, arguing that the statements that sedimentation harmed the entire spawning process were only theory, or that coral spawning protection was too unfriendly to businesses, or that the definition of wetlands was too broad.

But given that the CNMI's natural resources are limited, chiefly consisting of its tropical setting, its lagoon, beaches, green hills and

all that inhabit them - be they animal, vegetable or mineral - and given that other than the garment industry tourism is our biggest industry, it would seem only prudent that every effort be made to protect and preserve those natural resources. What the DEQ regulation amendments do is just that – setting higher standards and stricter requirements for use of and activity in the CNMI's marine waters, which are, after all, at the heart of its tourist attraction – whether it be deep-sea fishing, near-shore snorkeling, beach-combing, wading, swimming, surfing, windsailing, or just admiring the sunsets.

It is doubtful that CNMI's marine waters will ever regain their former pristine state, but at least these amendments will guarantee that the waters are not further degraded, and just possibly, they might even contribute towards improving their quality. The proposed amendments also protect the CNMI's precious groundwater.

Copies of the presentations, of the proposed amendments, and other supportive documents are available at the DEQ office in the Morgen Building in San Jose. The deadline for public comments on the proposed amendments is August 6. If you care about Saipan – and the CNMI's – marine water quality, I would urge you to let DEQ know. You can e-mail them at deq@saipan.com, or call 664-8500 and ask for Brian Beardon, DEQ's environmental engineer.

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The agonizing and ““what-if”” and attempts at strategizing alternate scenarios, should the November elections be disrupted by terrorists – as described in an opinion piece in the Tribune earlier this week – must surely delight the terrorists - that just the thought of their potential for disruption is causing major headaches in the country's highest circles. From the other side, though, it is downright embarrassing. The country's strength is in its democratic processes. This year people will vote not only for members of the house and senate, but also for president - the leader of their country. That postponement of these elections is being publicly considered is not prudent, not precautionary, not even intelligent. It is, instead, downright cowardly.

The United States, the strongest country in the world, cowering, cringing and wringing its hands, so to speak, at the possibility that middle-eastern terrorists will cross its borders and disrupt its

elections? Shameful! President Franklin D. Roosevelt said it many years ago, and while he was admittedly a Democrat, not a Republican, his words still ring true: ““We have nothing to fear but fear itself.””

The United States, its leaders - both elected and behind the scenes – should instead, state in no uncertain terms that of course the elections will be held as scheduled, and that no one, no matter what his or her beliefs or organization or sponsor, will be allowed to disrupt this quintessential act of strength, democracy, self-government. They should unequivocally declare that neither Osama Bin Laden, nor the Al Queda, neither terrorist nor madman, will be allowed to interfere with, interrupt, this most basic of rights of the people of the United States – casting a vote for the leaders of their government.

Instead, we have been given an image of fearful weaklings, so afraid of worst case scenarios that they cannot even defend the rights of the people. Pitiful!

Which is not to say that precautions should not be taken, that possible disruptions should not be discussed, that plans should not be made. It is the public image that is so distressing, that shows such poor judgment.

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An article in last week’s Tribune spoke of the imbalance in population that is occurring in China and India, where the preference for male children has resulted in a severe shortage of potential brides as those male children become adults. In these Asian cultures, girl children were- and continue to be - aborted, or killed, and now young boys outnumber girls by a ratio of as much as 126-100, where the norm for that age group is 105 or less. The Chinese term for young men is ““bare branches,”” and the article predicts that the growing predominantly male population – these bare branches - will have a negative effect on the world’s stability, and on peace.

On the other hand, the lack of women means there will be fewer births. In countries where over-population has been a major concern in terms of the world’s ability to support a rapidly increasing number of people, could the lack of women be considered a blessing in disguise?

Short takes:

It’s not clear who used the word first – whether it was the Attorney

General or whether it was injected by the news reporter - but the use of “manhunt” in the story about overstayed foreign workers was pretty crude. It isn’t as though the people being sought are hardened criminals. It isn’t as though they’ve committed harmful criminal acts. It isn’t as though their presence endangers anybody. They may have broken the law, but that doesn’t excuse the “vigilante” images (snarling dogs and flaming torches) that use of the word “manhunt” implies. Surely we are more civilized than that?

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We hope legislators will not pay too much attention to the concern expressed by Senate President Joaquin G. Adriano that the more reasonable FY 2005 budget figure of \$190 million in revenue is unacceptable because it will cause a reduction in the government’s bloated work force. Yes, jobs may be lost under a smaller revenue projection, but the alternative – increasing government indebtedness – poses larger problems, and has more severe long-lasting consequences.

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Congratulations to Lillion A. Tenorio for having the courage to open her own law office. What a model and inspiration to the islands’ aspiring young women!

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And finally, in addition to the re-cycling of paper, bottles, plastics, aluminum cans, now there’s a way to re-cycle plastic bags as well. With plastic bags, though, rather than turning them into the re-cycling center for others to dispose of, a group of creative Carolinian women has begun fashioning them into lovely, sparkling white mwaars – typically accented with bright red plastic flowers. Stay tuned for more news on availability – and, maybe, even instructions