

On My Mind
12/31/04

If its deep blue skies, gentle breezes, warm sun and turquoise waters, its terrorist-free tranquility, and its stable economy aren't reason enough to be thankful one lives in the CNMI, the horror-laden stories of the devastation caused by Sunday's earthquake and tsunami that hit other Pacific areas clearly provides even more evidence that we are indeed fortunate to live in such a paradisiacal setting. Of course, we do have occasional typhoons. But their damage does not spread nearly as far, does not cause nearly as many deaths.

We are also fortunate that the CNMI is included in an eastern Pacific tsunami warning system, which India, Malaysia, Thailand, Sri Lanka and Indonesia's Aceh province are not. There was, after all, an interval of several hours between the earthquake that spawned the tidal wave, and the time it hit. So notice, forewarning, was possible. But there was no system for recording and reporting it, or for sending out warnings.

As stated in Monday's *Saipan Tribune*, contributions to help survivors may be made on-line to "redcross.org;" in cash or by check, in person, at the Red Cross office on Airport Road; or by mail (checks only). The Red Cross address is P.O. Box 500812, Saipan, MP 96950, and if "AP#2695" is written on the memo line of the check, the entire amount will be forwarded to the Red Cross in the afflicted areas.

The Red Cross has said it is not accepting goods because the cans of spam likely to be sent from here would not be useful to many of the tsunami victims, who do not eat pork, because among the largest needs are water and medicines, more appropriately purchased closer to the disaster sites, and, among other reasons, because of the damage to the port areas in many of the sites, which would add to the logistical difficulties of getting goods to those who needed them.

Several other local, national and international organizations are also collecting contributions for tsunami survivors. I do not mean to give them short shrift. So long as you give, it doesn't matter through whom - so long as you are sure they are reliable and trustworthy....

For those who may have wondered why the tsunami only went west, rather than also going east, according to my daughter Stacey, who studied geology as well as marine biology, the tectonic plates whose shifting causes earthquakes generally move in either an up and down direction, or sideways. This one moved up and down, sending the water in only one direction.

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Turning back to more local issues, there's a plan afoot to begin providing massage services on the island of Managaha. The agenda issued for the Marianas Public Land Authority December 22 meeting, which has since been postponed, includes under the heading of "New Business: Public Land Leases" the item: "Mirage Corporation - Request for Managaha health massage concession."

While it might be true that massage could add to the relaxation offered by Managaha's lovely setting and rewarding snorkeling, or that massage would help those who suffered cramps by over-doing the snorkeling, nonetheless, massage does not strike me as an activity appropriate to Managaha, which is, after all, Constitutionally-defined as restricted to only cultural and recreational uses - not health or therapeutic ones.

Mirage Corporation, according to MPLA, is a Japanese company; the phone book lists not only a Mirage Massage Parlor, but also a Mirage Beauty Salon, and four additional listings for Mirage Saipan Co. Ltd in Guala Rai.

Those who find the idea of a massage parlor on Managaha as offensive as I do might want to send an e-mail expressing your concerns to MPLA board chairman Helen Camacho at "helen@mpla.gov.mp" and/or to Commissioner Ed Guerrero at "ed@mpla.gov.mp." Another alternative is to attend the meeting at which this item is scheduled to be discussed. That meeting date has not yet been re-set.

John Oliver, who works with the compliance section at MPLA, said that one of the criteria for granting such permits is that they must be marine-related - which clearly, this is not.....

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Someone who spoke out on a much more sensitive issue is *Marianas Variety* Guam reporter and occasional columnist Mar-Vic Cagurangan, who wrote an excellent piece in last Friday's issue of the *Variety* on the proposed Constitutional amendment to bar same-sex marriage here in the CNMI. She points out, in the first place, that contrary to what our governor may have told the media, this is not a proposed law, but a legislative initiative, and accordingly, his signature is not required. If both House and Senate approve it by a 3/4 majority, it will be placed on the ballot at the next regular election.

Secondly, she asks why "CNMI lawmakers see a need to ban something that is not even contemplated in the commonwealth? Is there a group pushing for same-sex marriage in the CNMI? Is there a petition circulating calling for its legalization? Are there gay couples seeking marriage licenses from the governor's office?" And if the answer to all those is "no," then why is the speaker pushing for such a ban?

She points out that what the initiative will do, if it's approved by the voters, is "belittle, insult and offend the local gay and lesbian community, some of whom are our relatives, friends, neighbors and co-workers....most of [whom] are respected and productive members of the community."

My sentiments exactly! but she said it much better than I would have....

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Today's *Saipan Tribune* did a great job of reviewing a number of major stories that have

concerned the CNMI over the past year, from the La Fiesta buyout to the stateless persons' dilemma.. The *Variety*, on the other hand, looked to the coming year, with an opinion piece by well-known syndicated writer William Safire in its 12/30 issue. Safire lists a dozen fields, together with up to five possible events in each area, and then provides his own predictions of which ones will come to pass - from who will be appointed the national intelligence director and who will win the Oscar for best picture, to what political scandals will evolve and what the next medical breakthrough will be. Both make for fascinating reading.

More noteworthy, however, is the *Tribune's* pick of "the CNMI soldier" as person of the year. Very fitting, appropriate, humbling.

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One thing that will not happen next year is any suggestion that perhaps our sitting president should be held more accountable for the damage he has done to our country so far, and will, unfortunately, be able to continue over the next four years; that, in fact, he should be considered for impeachment. It won't come to pass not because there aren't reasons - such as his depleting the country's surplus, as well as creating its biggest deficit, or his lying about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, or the blundering [a serious mistake typically caused by ignorance and confusion, according to my *American Heritage College Dictionary*, 3rd edition] in that country from the very beginning, or his anti-environment actions home and abroad; or his tax gifts to the rich at the expense of the poor and middle class.

It will not come to pass, in short, not because there are not grounds, but because will is lacking, because both House and Senate now have a Republican majority, and because the president has established a aura of fear, a climate of suspicion and distrust, an atmosphere and a setting that tolerates no dissension, no voicing out of opposition, and consequently, no freedom to openly carry on intelligent discussions about alternative strategies.

Yet Clinton was impeached because he had an affair - if it can be called that - with a White House interne. I find that appalling. And alarming.

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As the shooting off of firecrackers and other noise-makers hopefully reaches its climax this evening - and, equally hopefully, stops thereafter - let us also hope no injuries result therefrom. But it sure would be nice if the legislature did its bit, and set some limits on when and where they can be set off in the future. In my neighborhood, the noise starts in mid-afternoon, and often doesn't end til after midnight - a pattern that has been in place since early December. Enough, already!

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May the New Year be good to you.

techno and wounded troops

Gay marriage ban?

U.S watered down results of Buenos Aires 10th UN Climate change conference, so next session is only a seminar where info will be exchanged, and no action taken.