

On My Mind

7/01/05

(Posted 6/30/05) The sigh of relief wasn't audible, but it might as well have been. The visit of the Emperor and Empress of Japan to Saipan is over, the Imperial Couple are presumably safely back in Japan, and there's no longer any need to be on alert, ready for any contingency, on the part of the many U.S., CNMI and Japanese officials who had had to be on their toes 24/7 to ensure the couple's security. The couple's stay of 24 hours over two days went smoothly, without any discernible glitches. There were no protests, no demonstrations, no serious delays in the schedule, no traffic snarls, no unexpected complications of any kind - except for the weather, which didn't always cooperate. Though as one reporter explained, the Japanese believe that rain "is considered a good sign from the spirits of the departed." Those responsible (for the smoothness of the visit, not the rain) deserve our thanks, our appreciation, for a job well done.</P>

So far, the media have passed the "litmus test" I mentioned in last week's column with flying colors. (A litmus test is used in chemistry to detect the presence of acids.) I had said the occasion would test their sense of dignity, respect, understanding of what would be occurring here. My fears would appear to have been without foundation. Not only did the members of the media treat the Emperor and Empress with great dignity and respect, but they also treated the island and its residents with respect. In fact, I was somewhat surprised at how little attention the media did pay to Saipan and the CNMI as a whole. But I suppose that was just as well - in the sense of the less said, the better.....</P>

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I did have a problem, though, with the "rules of engagement" under which the media were supposed to operate. I thought the print media was given very short shrift indeed. No print media members were allowed to have pen, pencil, paper, or recorder at any of the stops on the Imperial Couple's itinerary. No reason was given for the restriction. Which events which members of the pool that had been set up could cover was strictly controlled. (As a print journalist with no photographic pretensions, and with no affiliation, I did not make it into the pool, nor did I make any attempt to be present at any of the prescribed sites.) In most cases, media assigned to event "N," for example, were prohibited from attending either events directly preceding or those directly following event "N." Presumably this was due to traffic and timing considerations - the media were bussed from spot to spot.</P>

However, according to media members I talked to, such rules are apparently the norm in Japan for events in which the Emperor is involved, or where tight security is required, such as at Olympic events.</P>

The effect, though, was that there hasn't been a single, coherent, account of what went on from beginning to end of the Emperor and Empress' visit. All that have been available are "sound bites," isolated accounts from whatever event a particular reporter was assigned to attend. In order to get an over-all picture of the whole trip, one would have to piece together the separate accounts produced by the various members of the press. (Not having access to tv/cable, I do not know what was shown there.)</P>

The only press kit available to registrants at the U.S./international (as opposed to Japanese) media center was a folder of MVA material. Bill Stewart's wonderful map was not distributed, nor was any information about the history of the CNMI, or about available publications related to the history of the CNMI or even about the NMI museum. There was no list of other media representatives, no list of dignitaries present on island, no background on the Emperor and Empress, or on their trip - none of the random and useful pieces of information one would normally expect under the circumstances. Given the handicaps under which they had to work - short notice and tight security - Talk Story Studios personnel nonetheless did a great job of operating the press room. I found them all very obliging, most helpful.</P>

And given the handicaps they had to work under - the limited access and forced reliance on memory since note-taking had not been allowed - I think our local reporters did a great job as well. I found the articles in Wednesday's Variety and in Wednesday's Saipan Tribune particularly satisfying. They provided some coherence, some sense of what actually transpired at what point in the day's proceedings.</P>

All in all, a fascinating, exciting, inspirational and educational event!</P>

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Back to the more mundane. There's been discussion of developing an "education industry" in the CNMI as a new source of revenue - to offset the losses from the decline of the garment industry, to cushion the ups and downs of the tourism industry. But before the discussion gets very far, objections are heard that applying the word "industry" to "education" cheapens education, and is inappropriate. I beg to differ. One of the definitions of "industry" found on the website www.hyperdictionary.com/dictionary/industry reads "the organized action of making goods and services for sale." Thus, the organized action of "making" services such as the teaching of English as a second language available for a price can be defined as an industry.</P>

Another definition found on the same site reads, "Any department or branch of art, occupation, or business; especially, one which employs much labor and capital and is a distinct branch of trade; as, the sugar industry; the iron industry; the cotton industry." Thus, teaching, a branch of art - or occupation - which does employ much labor and capital, and is a distinct branch of trade, again can be defined as an industry.</P>

There should perhaps be a distinction between private sector and public sector endeavors insofar as development of an education industry is concerned, however. Government is mandated by the CNMI Constitution to provide free, compulsory and public elementary and secondary education to "every person in the Northern Mariana Islands." The CNMI Constitution also states that Northern Marianas College's mandate is to "provide the best quality and meaningful post-secondary and adult educational opportunitiesfor the individual and for the Commonwealth as a whole."</P>

Both of these mandates have been interpreted as applying to the residents of the CNMI. The CNMI government does not have a similar mandate to provide education for anyone not a

resident of the CNMI. It follows, therefore, that this is an area that should be left to the private sector to develop. As former education official Alvaro A. Santos expressed it some time ago in an article for *American Pacific Business Magazine*, "Higher education as an industry...should be left to private, proprietary colleges and universities. Those are the higher education institutions that should actively recruit international and out-of-state students." (Nov/Dec 2003 issue)

The role of government, he asserts, is to "provide the industry with appropriate support, cooperation and collaboration....the role of government should be that of supporting private business, not competing with it." Santos noted that "the administration and the legislature should work in harmony to promote the establishment of private colleges and universities and to actively encourage U.S. accredited universities to extend their programs to the CNMI."

Moreover, an education industry for the CNMI has been promoted for a number of years by Dr. Wali Osman, formerly Bank of Hawaii Senior Fellow for Economics and the East West Center and now economist for the Office of Insular Affairs of the Department of Interior. The question is: Who will take the leadership to make this happen?

This may have been mentioned in this column before, but it bears repeating. The concern with immigration and immigrants is not exclusive to the CNMI. It is an issue all over the world. Policy-makers believe that if the country of origin were helped to become more economically viable, people would not leave it to seek jobs elsewhere. The long-term solution, then, is to provide financial aid to the country of origin, rather than to the emigre of that country as s/he becomes an immigrant somewhere else.

This does not mean that one should shut one's doors against the immigrant. But it does mean that one should pursue, and persuade others to pursue, national policies that provide increasing economic assistance to the countries from which the immigrants are leaving, until the need to emigrate in order to survive no longer exists.

More food for thought: I've just begun reading a book called "Don't think of an elephant," by George Lakoff. His thesis is that the Republicans are using language deceptively. For example, President Bush's "tax relief" program isn't really a relief - except to the very wealthy. His Healthy Forests Initiative doesn't really support healthier forests, rather it opens them to increased lumber-cutting. The No Child Left Behind program doesn't so much support childhood education as it undercuts schools public schools and benefits private schools.

What's more, Lakoff says that ever since the 1970's, conservatives have been setting up institutes like the Heritage Foundation and the Olin Institute to do research, write books, endow professorships, to teach people "the right way to think." He writes, "People associated with such institutions have written more books than people on the left on all issues. The conservatives support their intellectuals. They create media opportunities. They have media studios down the hall in institutes so that getting on television is easy. *Eighty percent of the talking heads on television are from the conservative think tanks.* (emphasis added.)"

"Nothing like this happens in the progressive world...[there] the emphasis is on providing direct services to the people who need the services: grassroots funding, not infrastructure creation." Insightful. Interesting. Well worth reading!</P>

Please note: There will be no new column until July 29, as I will be off-island to visit with family. Thank-you for your understanding.</P>

Emigration - should help people at home.....

The Dekada group, which is seeking improved working conditions for its members in the CNMI, raises issues that go far beyond the CNMI's borders. A recent UN report on migration notes that migration can keep populations from declining, stimulate the economy, and provide much-needed income for poor nations, or migration can be used as a tool for regulating labor supplies.

Intelligent design

Judicial retention "at the general election immediately before the end of the initial term" - constitutional provision

CPA profit - Trib 4/27 p 5, MV 4/25 p 6, MV 4/28 p 5

PSS - and others - need to build accountability into funds granted by legislature - Trib 5/9 p 2

F. Atalig re need to stop bleeding local funds to meet fed obligations - what about reverse???

Trib 5/13

small scale venture: publish Sam's students' works

what are Chinese tourists going to do? Jap/ war sites not of interest

availability of info not necessarily an FOIA issue - but of who knows, and who is willing to share on Guam, see truck emitting black smoke, told to report it (PDN 4/26) True in CNMI?

Western Micronesian Chief Executive Summit, with Fed DOI Office of Interagency Affairs to speak - and Babauta did not attend. What a slam! Trib 4/23, p 3

government by cliff-hanging - CUC fuel payments, PSS teacher payments, HPMR renewal

Iraq war - technology keeps more wounded alive - though wounds may be terrible.....(clipping)

NMC accreditation satisfied by La Fiesta transfer - who accredits NMC gov't for acquisition?

Illegal dumping at PR dump shows need for transfer station

whatever happened to social eyesore beauty contest?

From Ed Klingsberg: Randy Fennel says law requires member of Treasury present at opening of

poker machines; metered NMC reduced cost in half! ; JoeTen opposes increase in minimum wage since it hires so many locals

punitive fee for littering not big enough to deter people from doing so

need for large meeting places when JoeTen library space gone

corporations not held responsible, held accountable since not considered person

war on terrorists being won; war on terrorism is not.

Give aid, education, to countries where immigrants coming from. If have it there, won't emigrate...from UN report on economic and social affairs

Two public hearings with low attendance - HPO and Tony P's project - how get community involved? Mother's clubs? Church? But then Lagoon use hrg well attended - Kathy gave it TLC!

New dock at San Antonio - would solve ferry problem - did I already mention?

Loren Sutton re bankruptcy filings - good advice! MV 4/19, p 7

Open airport to other vendors - magazines and books and newspapers (need to check!)

check out comment on double-dipping - what happened to that proposal? See Rita Inos' letter

Kagman watershed

Highway bill

Zoning priority - strip malls

sad that doctors who go into nursing deprive community of doctor services

would add, in addition to very limited tourism infrastructure, the failing local infrastructure generally--power of late, the constant beach pollution and lack of responsiveness (here and Guam) to federal threats of fines for maintaining a healthy community, water quality problems on both islands. Also, year after year, vandalism of property and purse snatchings, graffiti and litter, show (at best) no improvement in solving the problem.

Also, the hotels are now entering the maintenance upkeep stages of their lives (note the upgrades and improvements being made); the newness factor gone. The challenges of dealing with ever-changing local laws and regulations re: labor and other threats (I think the attempt to take back the Nikko by Ted Mitchell left a big imprint on Japanese investment/economic observers as JAL/Nikko was prepared to implode the hotel before they left if forced out of their multi-year agreement) has made this a tough place for someone to sensibly try and get something started.

The days of venture (risk) capital are gone for Japan. There aren't too many Willie (deep pockets) Tan's around who have the money to put up now, and even if things

continue to slide, or crash, he will own a major chunk of the island when things start to turn around some day. Plus, he is getting things on the cheap these days. Also, he has long known the ways of the island, which buttons to push, which local people to lobby, his local staff being well-paid to protect his interests.

The Chamber and others (existing businesses talking about CDA's QC) say not enough attention paid on longtime investment folks, keeping them happy. True, from my observation point. They are taken for granted. Frank points out that the hotels are changing hands; new buyers. But the sale price has to represent a major loss.

The cliff-like falloff in new business started with the advent of the \$100,000 security deposit. But it took years for its cumulative effect to take hold. And, finally, just recently, has it been done away with.

The CNMI is surely its own worst enemy when it comes to understanding the economic world. Bill Stewart has said for years, not for publication, 'the CNMI has done wrong just about everything possible, to undermine its own economic future.'

I can't believe someone in MVA isn't meeting with airline executives, hotel executives, and tour executives every week. Airlines, hotels, and tour companies are the life blood of our tourist industry. Somebody should be on top of this at all times. (Bud)

It would be irresponsible to pretend that I have any answers. But one can speculate. One of the tertiary reasons could very well be the increase pressures to be put on the tourism industry with a closure and downsizing of the garment industry. Any hotel manager who has been here any time at all would probably realize that far more pressures is going to put on the industry to make up for the losses in tax revenues. This at a time where media challenges of increased fuel costs and airline transportation is tempting JAL to seek greener pastures.. Combine that with the somewhat overenthusiastic and optimistic projections about the benefits of the new Chinese tourism market could have raise alarm bells within the Japanese community. I would also add that the Commonwealth has done very little to improve the tourism infrastructure in the past 20 years. This is leading more and more tourist to select more aggressively marketed destinations. Unfortunately, we have consistently been convinced that our proximity and historical ties with Japan would guarantee a constant market. No matter what happens in the rest of the world. (Sam)