

# Talks 'Successful,' If Secret

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SAIPAN—“Very soon Saipan and Tinian will become very noisy with B52 airplanes,” said Akira Murabe, a young Japanese business manager in broken English, pointing across the dusty Chalan Kanoa dirt street to the Saipan Legislature building. “It would be better if the Marianas stays peaceful and quiet and not become like Okinawa.”

While Murabe was speaking, a top-level U.S. delegation comprising State, Defense and Interior Department officials and headed by an ambassador specially appointed by President Nixon, arrived at the legislature chambers. Ambassador Franklin Haydn Williams and his aide were chauffeured by a policeman in dress uniform and the rest of his delegation arrived in rented cars or TT government vehicles.

“We had very successful talks last week,” an aide said as he entered the building, “and we anticipate very successful talks again this week.”

The aide was speaking, of course, of the second round of political status negotiations now underway with the 15-member Marianas Status Commission, headed by Congress of Micronesia Sen. Edward Pangelinan. Although the meetings are closed to the public and official statements to the press are lacking in specifics, the talks are geared towards achieving a “commonwealth” status for the Marianas similar to the arrangement now enjoyed by Puerto Rico.

Five meetings between the two groups last week centered on issues such as the source of political status, the degree of internal self government, the applicability of the U.S. Constitution and U.S. laws, citizenship, foreign affairs and defense and features of a Marianas constitution.

The Marianas delegation met privately for an hour discussing their own positions on certain issues before the U.S. delegation arrived for a 2½ hour meeting that began at 10 a.m. yesterday.

A private meeting of the Marianas group was again held in the afternoon. There was no official word on the substance of either meetings.

The most important aspect of the U.S. commonwealth plan for the Marianas is the permanency of the arrangement. If accepted, U.S. laws would apply here, the future constitution of the Marianas could not conflict with the U.S. constitution and Marianas laws would be subject to U.S. veto.

Sources have indicated that the main thrust by the U.S. in the negotiations is for continued political control—a status requested by the Marianas themselves. It is not only a matter of maintaining a strategic presence in the former Japanese-ruled islands, but one of strategic denial for other powers.

Important issues yet to be tackled in the talks are whether or not the United States government would retain the ultimate power to take Marianas land for military or other purposes and whether

U.S. citizens and businesses could likewise acquire real estate.

For sure, Tinian has already been pinpointed by the military for “concentrated” activities and investors are already selecting future business sites on Saipan, Tinian and Pagan.

Consequently, there are sentiments within the Marianas group that a cemented political future within the confines of commonwealth would be too restrictive for locals and too free for outsiders.

It is said privately that the U.S. delegation is pressing hard for full U.S. citizenship for the islanders, but that the Marianas position seems to be “let the people decide themselves.”

In essence, then, locals would be U.S. nationals with the option for full citizenship, according to the Marianas position. The problem for the U.S. side is how to make such an arrangement reciprocal to accommodate American interests.

“Too many of our people are blinded by what they think U.S. citizenship means,” quipped one Marianas delegate. “They associate it with good salaries, good roads, hospitals and houses. But this isn’t always the case. I have seen the slums in New York, California and San Juan (Puerto Rico).”

Asked what type of citizenship most local residents would prefer, the delegate said:

“Full citizenship is their preference. In fact, many expectant mothers here usually visit their relatives on Guam shortly before delivery time, so that the baby will be born a U.S. citizen.”