

US may set up air base on Tinian

From T. V. PARASURAM
Express News Service

WASHINGTON, July 8.

The United States is expected early next year to set up a "commonwealth of Northern Marianas" and establish a \$ 300-million air and naval base there on Tinian.

At present this area is part of a trusteeship administered by the United States. When the area, which has a population of 14,000, becomes a commonwealth, presumably on the Puerto-Rican model, the US will be acquiring the first permanent addition to its territory since purchase of Virgin Islands half a century ago.

The area proposed for commonwealth status is now administered as part of a trust for the whole of Micronesia. However, the Congress of Micronesia wants free association with the United States or complete independence. The US offer of commonwealth status like that of Puerto Rico was rejected by Congress of Micronesia in 1970 and the US refused to grant free association status.

Negotiations between those who will secede from the rest of Micronesia and accept commonwealth status have taken place without much notice over the past 14 months between an official American delegation, headed by the Special Presidential Representative, Mr Franklin Haydn Williams. In an interview to Washington Post, Mr Williams said he hopes for agreement on final terms this fall and submission to the US Congress possibly in first part of next year.

"Major reason for American interest in new territory" said Post "is plan to build \$ 300 million air-naval base on Tinian, the flat-topped volcanic island from which the US air force launched its 1945 atomic bomb raids on Hiroshima and Nagasaki".

Mr Williams said joint Chiefs of Staff and Defence Department had

officially determined a national requirement for Tinian base "including air operations and forward deployment of war material and war reserves." According to him Mr Nixon approved the plan in 1971 and reaffirmed it in 1972.

As part of commonwealth negotiations the US has tentatively agreed to pay \$ 13.5 million yearly for seven years plus \$ 3 million yearly in federal services to support commonwealth.

The proposed Tinian base and the US installations in Guam acquired by the US from Spanish in 1898 are widely expected to be American fallback position in Western Pacific if and when the US forces leave South Korea mainland, Japan, Okinawa, Philippines, Taiwan and other present base areas in Asia.