

Marianas Hail U.S. With Bands and Feasts

By ANDREW H. MALCOLM
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SUSUPE, Saipan — When the local band strikes up "America the Beautiful" on the dirt basketball court near the legislature's Quonset hut, the people of the Northern Mariana Islands will officially begin a new phase in their long march toward becoming the first new United States territory in 51 years.

The feasting, singing and dancing, which will move from island to island on April 20 and 21, will mark the presentation here of the Northern Mariana's Covenant.

The document, which was approved by Congress and signed by President Ford on March 24, establishes a detailed procedure leading up to 1981. The people of these 14 strategic islands have voted to become in that year, a United States commonwealth, with status similar to that of Puerto Rico.

The covenant also permits the administrative separation of these islands from the Caroline and Marshall Islands, all of which were assigned to the United States as trust territories by the United Nations in 1947. The United States has said that it wants to end the trust status by 1981.

The Carolines and Marshalls have yet to choose their future. But after a Micronesian Congress rejected commonwealth status in 1970, the Northern Marianas began their own negotiations with Washington.

Plebiscite Held Last June

The result was a plebiscite last June in which 78.8 percent of the eligible voters favored American citizenship and commonwealth status with the American mainland 6,000 miles east of here.

The full provisions of the agreement will not take effect until 1981 after approval by the United Nations Security Council. The Council's approval is expected.

But a sunny euphoria reigns among the 14,000 residents of these jungle islands, the scene of bitter battles in the late stages of World War II.

"The covenant," said Joseph Tenorio, "means I am a quasi-American now and I'll be a full American in a few years."

The United States, the fourth foreign nation to con-

trol this archipelago since Ferdinand Magellan dropped anchor here in 1521, is spoken of only in the most respectful terms in Saipan. Close association with such a superpower, it is widely felt, is sure to cure many if not all of the ills on an undeveloped island where telephone numbers still have only four digits:

Economic Base Is Weak

Prime among the problems is the lack of an existing economic base other than the tourists—most of them Japanese—who stroll the miles of soft sand and swim in the bright blue 78-degree waters.

In recent days workers were out mowing down the 20-foot-high jungle growth that lines the road to the new \$10-million airport. Remedios Barcinas was collecting paper plates, cups, cash and food for the party. "We need three more cows," she said.

And Many Sablan was organizing the scheduled for the festive days, which, like last summer's voting day and this spring's Covenant-singing day, have been declared legal holidays.

"First," he said, "we will have a high mass and then the raising of the American flag and speeches, lots of speeches, and music. We're going to have music all over the place."

Covenant to Be Displayed

Children will sing. Women will dance. Everyone will eat. And the Covenant, plus the pen that President Ford used to sign it, will be on display under a palm tree.

Barry Duggan, general manager of the local airline office, will be the master of the master of ceremonies for the days' events on the beach where United States marines stormed ashore on June 15, 1944. A wrecked American tank still stands turret-deep in water offshore as a tribute to the 3,500 Americans and the 23,000 Japanese who died in the 24-day battle for Saipan.

Mr. Sablan hopes to hire a trained specialist to fire off less lethal fireworks. "But then we must get down to work," said Vicente N. Santos, speaker of the district legislature.

A constitutional convention must draft the territory's legal foundation. It must be

approved by the people and the President.

Perhaps the most important effect so far cannot be measured. "It is such a good feeling to have a permanent political status," said Francisco Ada, Acting Resident Commissioner. "We have had the Japanese, the Germans and the Spanish here. Now we are no longer insecure. We feel we belong to something."

Japanese Chief Investors

That association and political stability, it is felt, will attract investors. So far, Mr. Ada said, they have been primarily hotel operators from Japan, which is less than 1,300 miles north of here.

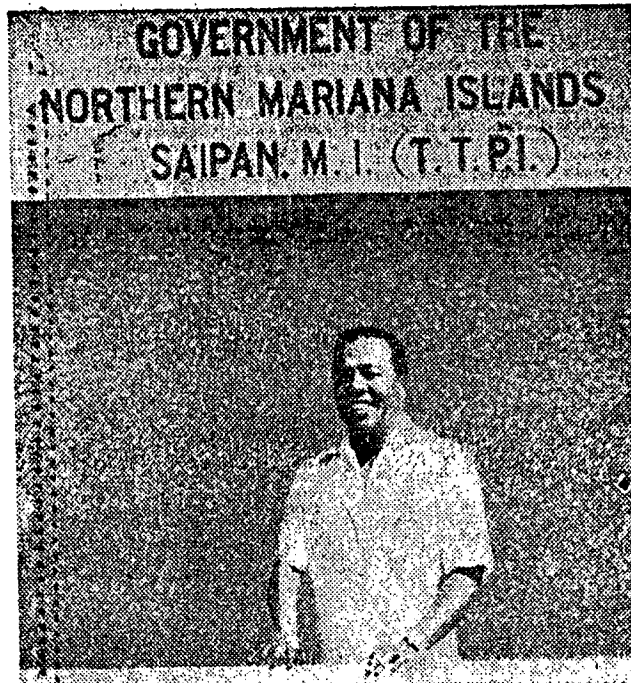
For the United States, the covenant means acquisition of a strategic string of politically reliable islands off the

coast of Asia. Perhaps more important, it means the denial of that land to any other power.

There are problems, of course. Costly facilities for housing, roads, water, sewage and other utilities must all be built or improved. There are no zoning or building codes yet.

There is racial tension between the majority Chamorro population and the island's Carolinians. And there is the question of immigration.

Once the concern here is not that many islanders will dash to the United States, where there is more than 7 percent unemployment: "What concerns me," said Edward Pangelinan, a local leader, "is a large migration from the mainland to the islands for the jobs and the sun."



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Francisco Ada, the Acting Resident Commissioner, says "It is such a good feeling to have a permanent political status." His office is at Susupe, the capital.

