

On My Mind
10/13/00

The bribes being offered by Korean developers - because that is what they are: the promises of scholarships, of local jobs, of a revitalized tourism, of making the CNMI a prime competitive shooting center - certainly sound tempting. Why shouldn't the CNMI accept the developers' offer of all of the above, in addition to their promise to invest up to \$45 million in the CNMI, not to mention construction of major commercial infrastructure, and who knows what other goodies? The economy sure could use such a boost.

What's more, the Korean developers claim that the establishment of shooting resorts on Saipan, Tinian and Rota is absolutely safe - that all sorts of security and restrictions and controls will be put into place. "No guns will be brought into the CNMI," a local representative of the developers is quoted as saying. The regulations developed by Union Rich Saipan (whatever that is supposed to mean) would be very strict, and if people did bring in their own guns, they'd have to bring them without gun powder, the <I>Tribune</I> quotes the representative as saying.

First of all, who would enforce such regulations? If they were promulgated as the rules of a private club, they would not have the force of law, and the CNMI - the Department of Public Safety, the Attorney General - would have no authority to enforce them. If they were passed as government regulations, what government agency would sponsor them? And in that case, there'd be no guarantee that the developers' regulations would be the ones finally implemented.

Moreover, the amendment to the Weapons Control Act being proposed to accommodate the establishment of shooting galleries in the CNMI does not restrict the importation of either guns or ammunition. It simply adds patrons of shooting galleries to the list of exemptions from the existing provisions of the Weapons Control Act.

However, the biggest problem with the rosy picture being painted by the developers and their so-called experts is that a very crucial part of the picture is being left out: the fact that too many government officials in the CNMI are not wholly trustworthy. According to the Office of the Public Auditor, corruption in government is pervasive.

Given that situation - and it is, after all, probably not all that different from what exists in Korea either - there is no way anyone can guarantee absolute control over anything. Illegal guns (or should one say <i>more</i> illegal guns?) will be brought into the CNMI. Illegal ammunition will be brought into the CNMI. Guns at the shooting resorts will conveniently get "lost." And so will ammunition.

Indiscriminate possession of guns is guaranteed to increase their indiscriminate use - in domestic quarrels, in barroom brawls, in hold-ups, thefts, robberies, in reckless threats and random shootings. And increase in indiscriminate use is guaranteed to increase the inevitable maiming and killing.

There are other types of development - with the same potential for bringing the CNMI the

benefits promised by Union Rich Saipan - that carry far less lethal risk. There just isn't any justification for subjecting the people of the CNMI to all the dangers the proposed "shooting resorts" would bring.

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One such "other" development that comes to mind has been suggested for Guam, but there's no reason why the CNMI couldn't co-opt the idea for itself, and that is the establishment of a "medical economic zone." The idea was proposed to the Guam Chamber of Commerce recently, as a means of finding support for establishing a private hospital on Guam. The support would come from neighboring Asian countries, to whom the doctors and clinics on Guam would offer advanced medical care.

The CNMI has an excellent hospital with a broad variety of medical services already in place. Could it not become a regional resource? Interest has already been expressed in providing health care services for Japan's growing older population - perhaps that would be the way to start building up a more extensive "medical economic zone."

Families of patients brought to the CNMI would need accommodation and entertainment. The provision of services to patients - from beds to meals to specialists and their tools and equipment - would generate a broad ripple effect in boosting the economy.....

Wouldn't it be better to advertise the CNMI as a place where healing, rather than shooting, takes place?

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Despite the vast differences between the CNMI and Guam, it is difficult not to make occasional comparisons. Take the recent confrontation between Guam's governor and its legislators. Some legislators - all called Senators over there - had become so unhappy with the governor's actions (or lack thereof) that they'd begun calling for his removal. They wanted the question of whether to recall the governor put on the ballot in November.

When CNMI legislators became unhappy with the CNMI governor's actions, they took a different route, threatening the governor with impeachment rather than a recall vote. The possibility of "deposing" the governor by way of a recall vote was not discussed - at least not in public.

On Guam, there was much rallying, waving of placards, signing of petitions - accompanied by accusations that not only was there abuse of political position, in that government employees attended the rallies, circulated the petitions, waved the placards, on government time, but also abuse of political power, in that government employees were "asked" by the governor and his supporters to sign petitions opposing the proposed recall.

On Saipan, the intimidation came by way of bullets aimed at the homes and properties of impeachment proponents, though the connection between the shootings and impeachment oppo-

nents was never proven, and no arrests were ever made.

But intimidation similar to what occurred on Guam is also evident in the CNMI, with political rallies and “pocket meetings” where government employees are told - allegedly, in this election, by the lieutenant governor and his supporters - that their presence is required - that attendance will be taken - and their contributions mandatory.

The biggest difference, though, is in how the dispute was settled. On Guam, a number of senators sought what they termed “peace and reconciliation” by drawing up and presenting to the governor a plan for resolving the differences between them. According to stories in the <I>Pacific Daily News</I>, the governor has accepted the terms of the proposed plan. The vote in the Senate on whether to place the recall referendum on the ballot was then defeated, though only by a single vote.

Though it was not referred to, the resolution of the conflict is reminiscent of the traditional “island way” of dealing with confrontational issues: a meeting of the parties and eventual agreement by consensus. (Though in this case, the consensus was between only the five senators who met with the governor, and presumably the three additional ones who voted against the recall, not with all of Guam’s senators.)

In the CNMI, there was no effort to restore peace, no effort to reconcile. The vote on whether to impeach failed, leaving many unresolved conflicts.

The objections to the Guam governor's performance by the Guam legislature certainly seemed legitimate. If memory serves, the objections to the CNMI governor threatened with impeachment did not seem as warranted. The CNMI's present governor, however, would seem far more accommodating than Guam's.

But in terms of style, Guam's method of settling the dispute was a lot more graceful than was the CNMI's.

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Readers who may know Dr. Chris Ebert-Santos and her family might want to check the account at <http://www.insidedenver.com/rockypreps/0927sant1.shtml> of the football accident that has befallen her son. Attorney Ben Salas is handling community gifts and donations for the family. He can be reached at 670-234-7455.