

Guam's political status quest in focus in Washington and efforts by Guam's leaders and the Organization of People for Indigenous Rights to bring to bear the moral authority of the United Nations. It took the White House six months to find a replacement for negotiator Michael Heyman, who had crafted a number of breakthroughs. Further, political energies will be directed toward the 1996 presidential campaign and the Republican-controlled House, although open to allowing more authority to territories in some areas, appears unwilling to change existing relationships in any fundamental way. For instance, just when Guam believed it had agreement on the concept of mutual consent, along came Congressman Elton Gallegly, chairman of the House Subcommittee on Native American and Insular Affairs, to question this keystone notion, throwing negotiations practically back to square one. Guam's quest for commonwealth and its place in the American political family may no longer have sufficient support in Washington to bring about the kinds of changes island leaders believe are long overdue.

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REPUBLIC OF THE MARSHALL ISLANDS

Nuclear issues dominated politics in the Republic of the Marshall Islands during the year, after President Amata Kabua proposed to use one of the nuclear affected islands in Bikini Atoll as a global nuclear waste storage site. Other issues that surfaced during the review period include the Marshall Islands' third constitutional convention, a new law raising the minimum wage, a flood of new claims filed with the Nuclear Claims Tribunal, and the selection of the Baha'i affiliated Education and Development Management Team to head the Marshall Islands School Improvement Project. The year 1994-95 also saw the Marshalls bracing against funding cuts from Washington and courting Asian Development Bank funds to help make up shortfalls.

On a sad note, Paramount Chief Kabua Kabua, who retired as a district judge in 1986, died in early October 1994 at the age of eighty-four. He represented the last of a generation of paramount chiefs whose legacy predated World War II. President Amata Kabua declared a week of national mourning, requiring all flags to be flown at half-mast (*MIJ*, 14 Oct 1994).

After almost a year of meetings, a general referendum was held in April 1995 seeking ratification of 35 proposed constitutional amendments. Only the first amendment, which requires the Marshallese version of the constitution to prevail in the event of a conflict with the English version, received the required two-thirds majority to pass. All of the others

received majority votes, but none high enough to pass. The least popular amendment was one that would have given the Traditional Rights Court power over all land and customary title disputes (*MIJ*, 21 and 28 April 1995). Another failed amendment would have limited the tenure of the president to two consecutive terms (eight years) and required that presidents be elected alternately from the Ralik and Ratak chains (*MIJ*, 21 Oct 1994). Possibly the lowest voter turnout in the Marshall Islands' history (only about one-third of all registered voters) was blamed for the failure of some of the amendments (*MIJ*, 21 and 28 April 1995).

The *Nitijela* (parliament) weathered the usual storms and personality clashes during the year to pass a series of new laws, including one to raise the minimum wage from US\$1.50 to US\$2.00 an hour, a 10 cent increase in the tax on diesel fuel sales, and a bill prohibiting government offices and statutory agencies from hiring private attorneys.

President Amata Kabua told a UNFPA-sponsored "Population and Development" seminar held in Majuro in 1995 that reducing the birth rate and building up the local economy are "two sides of the same coin" that must be integrated for national development goals to succeed. President Kabua said that while a reduction in population growth rates over the last seven years was an important accomplishment in a country that had one of the world's highest population growth rates in the 1980s, the development of domestic resources was equally important. He also stated that the Marshall Islands

has been too dependent on foreign economic assistance and has failed to develop its domestic economy. This was the first such seminar to be held in the Pacific Islands region since regional governments agreed in late 1994 to shift the focus of development planning from just population numbers to quality of life issues associated with population and development (*PR*, 17 July 1995).

One development success story for the Marshall Islands is its foreign ship registry, managed by International Registries Incorporated of Virginia (which also operates the Liberian flag of convenience register). The registry is growing rapidly as more American companies reflag their ships in the face of waning US government subsidies, and is now reported to have more than eighty vessels. This is good news for the Marshalls, but not so good for American seamen, three hundred of whom stomped and spat on the Marshall Islands flag as part of a demonstration in early July 1995 in San Francisco. American trade unions, whose lawsuits against US shipping services switching registry have been largely unsuccessful, charge that flagging the US vessels in the Marshall Islands will cost Americans jobs (*PR*, 22 May 1995, 31 July 1995). The Marshall Islands registry is one of five "Effective US Control" registries that may be mobilized by the United States in times of war or national emergency (*SSD*, 2 June 1995).

The forty-first anniversary of the 15-megaton "Bravo" hydrogen bomb test at Bikini falls in 1995. In February, Rongelap Islanders who were exposed to high doses of radioactive fallout

from the Bravo test became alarmed when a Japanese medical report indicated that almost 40 percent of them may have cancer. A year ago Brookhaven National Laboratory doctors reported there had been no new thyroid tumors or cancers discovered among Rongelapese since 1991. According to an *International Herald Tribune* report (1 March 1995), a group of doctors from the Byotai Seiri Laboratory in Tokyo who accompanied a delegation of the Japan Council against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs, took blood samples from Rongelap people now living on Majuro, Ebeye, and Mejjatto Islands and found positive readings in just over 37 percent of them. The laboratory cautioned that it was not possible to establish a causal link between the possible cancer and the residual radiation from the bomb tests. Nevertheless, the administrator of a US-funded project to identify ways to clean up and resettle now-abandoned Rongelap, James Matayoshi, stated that the Japanese findings were "very alarming" (*MIJ*, 3 March 1995).

The Japanese report, and rumors of secret US military conduct of medical tests on radiation-affected Marshallese under "Project 4.1," has prompted Senator Tony DeBrum to accuse the United States of covering up information about nuclear tests on the islands in the 1950s and 1960s. A former foreign minister and chief nuclear compensation negotiator, DeBrum said the American Department of Energy and other agencies had only selectively released documents on the tests (*RA*, 26 July 1995). He requested that a presidential commission be formed to ensure that all previously classified

documents are turned over and that assistance is given to help in their interpretation. The doctors on the Japanese team that did the Rongelap study have also urged Washington to make public all relevant data so that findings may be further verified.

These developments resulted in a rapid increase in the number of claims being filed with the Nuclear Claims Tribunal. "Now, more than ever, it is clear that there will not be enough money," said tribunal judge Greg Danz (*MIJ*, 24 Feb 1995). While the personal injury awards continue to grow, the tribunal hopes to begin hearings on the Enewetak land claim by August 1995. It has class-action claims from Enewetak, Bikini, and Rongelap, and individual claims from every atoll and island in the Marshall Islands group (*MIJ*, 24 Feb 1995).

In the hope of turning a major disadvantage into an advantage, the Marshall Islands offered its "radioactive atolls" as an international nuclear dump in return for much-needed revenue to help victims of two decades of US atomic testing. The nuclear waste proposal, made public by President Amata Kabua at the 1994 South Pacific Forum summit in Brisbane, Australia, could raise billions of dollars in revenues and further the goal of economic self-sufficiency. However, the proposal is protested by neighboring islands, particularly the Federated States of Micronesia. The population of the Marshall Islands is also divided over the idea. Responding to the critics, Ambassador to the United States Wilfred Kendall noted that the atolls in question, which cannot be used for other purposes for ten thou-

sand years, are "geologically stable for storage of nuclear waste and the technology exists to build secure facilities into the atolls." The Marshall Islands, he argued, was "trying to contribute to a world problem in a methodical, controlled and constructive way" (*IBP*, August 1994).

Not surprisingly, Greenpeace disagreed in a forty-page report that called the proposal a "time bomb." Citing concerns about the impact of climate change on low-lying coral atolls, the report concluded that storing nuclear waste, which can last for thousands of years, in such places is "a recipe for disaster." Greenpeace further argued that, in the absence of any legal or liability framework covering such a repository, the proposal is unlikely to receive international support.

US Secretary of Energy Hazel O'Leary had indicated earlier that US laws alone would prevent the United States from participating in such a scheme. Likewise, Japan rejected an offer from the Marshalls to store nuclear waste in the islands, indicating its intention to continue storing its waste inside Japan. Japanese Ambassador to the Marshall Islands Takakazu Kuriyama noted that neighboring governments were "not responding in a positive way to this project. . . . we must take this into account" (*PR*, 8 May 1995). However, Chairman of Taiwan's Atomic Energy Council Hsu Yih-yun said that the Marshall Islands will "very likely" become Taiwan's first overseas nuclear waste dump should the plan go through (*PR*, 19 June 1995).

On the domestic front, the Bikini

Local Government Council overwhelmingly rejected the proposal, reiterating their goal of commencing "a radiological cleanup and resettlement of the atoll" in 1996.

In June 1994 the government authorized the Baha'i-backed Education and Development Management Team to operate and maintain the seven public elementary schools in Majuro for the next three years. Specific goals included enhancing student learning skills, expanding the curriculum (including the development of a morals component), training and empowerment of teachers and administrators, increasing parent and community involvement, and upgrading school facilities. According to the management team, results are already visible. With the objective of "world class" education by the year 2000, the management team is working with the Goals 2000 Project on two major initiatives, Goals 2000 State Improvement Plan and School-to-Work Opportunities Implementation Plan. These will be submitted to the Ministry of Education and the US Department of Education for possible funding support (*MIJ*, 14 April 1995, 12 May 1995). Meanwhile, Japan has agreed to provide more than US\$6 million to fund improvements to the Marshall Islands High School in Majuro, and the first phase of the project is already under way (*SSD*, 14 July 1995).

The establishment of a new airline was announced after a meeting of a subregional group consisting of Kiribati, Tuvalu, Nauru, and the Marshall Islands. The new company has already acquired an aircraft and is looking into acquiring a second. Initially, the air-

craft will be leased to Air Marshall Islands and a new route, Majuro–Nauru–Funafuti, will be introduced. In addition, the northern Kiribati island of Butaritari will be added to the Majuro–Tarawa sector of the Majuro–Tarawa–Funafuti–Nadi route when the airfield there is upgraded to international standard. The airline's ownership structure and articles of association should be finalized by the end of 1995 (*PR*, 5 June 1995).

Following payments in early 1995 of United Nations membership arrears of US\$250,000, the government attempted to organize regional support for a change in funding arrangements for the UN budget. The Marshall Islands claims that small nations are paying proportionately higher levels of contributions to the world body than larger and richer nations, and are often marginalized in the UN system. A meeting in New York involving six other Pacific nations decided to seek further support from at least twenty-eight small nations in Asia, Africa, and Europe (*RA*, 12 June 1995).

During 1994–95 the Marshall Islands applied for associated membership of the European Union, sought to expand its diplomatic ties with European nations, and signed four agreements with the Peoples Republic of China (*MIJ*, 17 March 1995). The agreements, covering economic and technical cooperation, education, fisheries, and health, were signed after a meeting between President Kabua and Chinese President Jiang Zemin. However, the two countries were unable to reach an agreement on operating a Chinese-financed garment factory in Majuro that was completed in April

1995 with a soft loan of US\$2 million. According to Foreign Minister Phillip Muller, the breakdown of talks with the Chinese has led the government to contact other overseas companies that might be interested in operating the factory (*SSD*, 19 May 1995; *WPR*, 15 July 1995).

Despite base closures in other parts of the world, the United States is discussing with the Marshalls government the possibility of expanding its missile-testing range at Kwajalein. Currently, the United States pays about US\$11 million in rent for the use of the facility, where it has reportedly already invested US\$2 billion. The United States is interested in using land on at least four additional atolls to the east and north of Kwajalein, most of which have small subsistence populations. Foreign Minister Muller indicated that a key sticking point will be the level of US financial compensation, possible restrictions on use of land, and the environmental impact of the US testing program. However, an American spokesman in the Marshall Islands, Tom Murphy, said that Washington has already approved an agreement drafted in early June 1995 by negotiators from both sides (*WPR*, 15 June 1995; *RA*, 14 June 1995; *PR*, 5 June 1995; *SSD*, 28 July 1995).

In other developments, Marshall Islands officials are lobbying against proposed US legislation that would lead to a massive reduction in aid to American territories and former territories in the Pacific. At the end of 1995 the second planned US\$5 million drop-off in annual funding to the Marshall Islands under the Compact of Free Association takes effect, amid rumors

that the Republican controlled US Congress wants to cut some compact funding, despite its full endorsement by an earlier congress. In addition, there is discussion in Washington of cutting a series of federal programs that the Marshall Islands fought hard to get reinstated during the past several years. These include Chapter 1 and 2 educational funds, Pell scholarship grants, and the Head Start program (MIJ, 7 April 1995). The US House of Representatives in Washington has already voted to abolish the Office of Territorial and International Affairs, although the move has yet to be approved by the US Senate and President Bill Clinton. It would mean the loss of millions of dollars of aid to the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Belau, and American Samoa. Meanwhile, the US Departments of the Interior and of Defense have provided Rongelap with an additional US\$5 million for resettlement assistance once slated for the budget axe (MIJ, 7 April 1995; 19 May 1995; RA, 23 July 1995).

Since 1992, the Asian Development Bank has become a major player in the economy of the Marshall Islands, providing a combination of loans and technical assistance valued at more than US\$40 million. Under a new agreement the bank is expected to lend an additional US\$8.25 million to the country (which will also contribute US\$2.75 million) for a water improvement project. Improvements are expected to include increasing the size of the airport reservoir to 33 million gallons by adding a new eight-million-gallon reservoir, and increasing the height of the walls of the present reser-

voir to add space for four million gallons. Other improvements include building new pipelines and extending a salt-water sewer line (RA, 11 May 1995; SSD, 16 June 1995).

The Marshalls have been seeking additional assistance from the Asian Development Bank in an attempt to minimize the impact of a drastic fall in living standards when funding under the present Compact of Free Association comes to an end in 2001. The bank has indicated that the economy needs to be restructured and aid projects coordinated, before loans are directed to developing basic social infrastructure (such as health and education), as well as the fisheries and tourism sectors where the growth potential is high. The bank points out that tough economic choices are ahead if further declines in gross domestic product in the Marshall Islands are to be avoided (MIJ, 26 May 1995; RA, 5 May 1995).

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