

Micronesia in Review: Issues and Events,
1 July 1989 to 30 June 1990

Reviews of Guam and Marshall Islands are not included in this issue because of unforeseen circumstances.

BELAU

The Operation Fruit Bat drug raid, revelations about the illegal activities of the Sali administration, the political status issue, youth suicide, and economic growth were the main issues in Belau during the year under review.

On the night of 11 July 1989 the US Drug Enforcement Agency swept into Belau and arrested eleven men on charges of importing, distributing, and using heroin and marijuana. The group included former national congressmen Frank Asanuma and Hokkons Baules, as well as Melwert Tmetuchl, son of Belau businessman and unsuccessful presidential candidate Roman Tmetuchl. Several other Belauans were arrested on Guam. The group was part of a huge drug network that extended to Asia and the US mainland. Each of the Belauans pleaded guilty to charges of conspiracy to import or distribute illegal drugs and received prison terms varying from two to twelve years. The guilty pleas of Baules and Asanuma, close associates of the late President Sali, vindicated earlier charges that highly placed government officials were involved in the narcotics trade.

A month after the drug bust, the investigative arm of the US Congress, the General Accounting Office (GAO), released a report commissioned by Congressmen Udall, de Lugo, and

Miller of the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs. The committee had run into the strong opposition of the departments of State and Interior and several other congressional committees over its refusal to approve the Compact of Free Association until allegations of intimidation, violence, drug use, and trafficking, were investigated. After Operation Fruit Bat and the publication of the report, which indicated that many of the allegations had a factual basis, Congressman de Lugo reintroduced legislation to implement the compact, and US Public Law 101-219 was signed into law on 12 December 1989.

In Belau, compact revitalization work was carried out by the Commission on Future Palau-US Relations in the latter half of 1989. This twenty-two-member group, chaired by Vice President Nakamura, critiqued the compact document in village meetings throughout Belau, negotiated a number of improvements with the US State Department, and carried out a political education campaign. President Etpison sponsored legislation calling for a seventh referendum on the compact and united Belau's leadership behind the significantly enhanced document. However, the February 1990 referendum on the compact was a disappointment, with only 61 percent of the electorate voting in favor of adoption, far short of the 75 percent required by the constitution. It seems that the new sense of unity had faded by the time the

vote took place, and that many people were simply tired of compact referenda. The voter turnout was only 69 percent, the lowest in seven votes on the issue. Also, the *Ta Belau* party, which was formed in September 1987 to support the reelection of Salii, reversed its consistent support for the compact and voted no. Other former compact supporters turned against it because they favored amending the constitution to allow nuclear transit rights through a simple majority vote.

Attitudes toward the political status issue went in opposite directions after this seventh failure to achieve a 75 percent approval vote. Chair of the Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs Minuro Ueki led a petition drive for a three-year moratorium on further political status actions, arguing that Belauans need time "to let the dust of division settle and allow us to clearly see and determine where we want to go, and to rationally consider the alternatives in a relaxed and non-coercive atmosphere." More than one thousand people signed the petition, which was sent to President Bush, congressional leaders, and the United Nations.

Many senators in Belau see a constitutional convention as the best method for dealing with the status question. However, officials in Washington seem to favor a three-step process, with voters first asked to approve the idea of accepting the Compact of Free Association via a constitutional amendment. If this vote were positive, the constitution would be amended to allow a simple majority to approve US nuclear transit rights. Finally, the eighth referendum would be held, and the compact approved by a simple majority vote.

During the year, a joint Special Investigative Committee on Police Procedures heard some damaging testimony about the Salii regime while probing alleged corruption in the higher ranks of the police force. The information was in a letter from Senate President Koshiba and House Speaker Kyota to Assistant Secretary of Interior Stella Guerra. The letter indicated that certain policemen had details about the killers of Bedor Bins, about President Salii and his staff's involvement in illegal importation of firearms, and about Mr Salii's offer to promote a police officer if he killed two national congressmen who vigorously opposed him (*Guam Tribune*, 2 Mar 1990, 4).

President Etpison struggled throughout the period under review. He was soundly criticized for what were viewed as irresponsible and politically motivated pardons of convicted individuals. He failed to get the Senate to endorse new heads for the four major ministries and was unable to move forward on the political status question. His less-than-positive reputation as a leader is further burdened by several advisers who have been associated with the darker aspects of the Salii administration. Etpison was also hurt by an ill-conceived scheme to build a second airport and ancillary road system costing \$100 million. He pushed this venture, which involved governments of three small states on Babeldaob, despite resistance from local authorities in his home state of Ngatpang, as well as serious questioning from the national congress and the US government. By mid 1990, the Japanese investor, Copros Japan Company, had serious doubts about both the via-

bility of the project and Mr Etpison's integrity. Once again a president of Belau was having major problems that generated talk of corrupt activities and impeachment.

Youth suicide has been relatively rare in Belau compared to Chuuk (Truk) and the Marshall Islands. However, during a six-month period three youths under twenty years of age (two males and one female) committed suicide. All of them were adopted and had experienced some emotional trauma. According to Dr Polloi, Belau's mental health specialist, the incidence of child abuse, divorce, alcoholism, and family feuding has increased. Roles for youth, especially males, have eroded and they have little to absorb their energies except occasional sport activity. Most people are deeply concerned about these issues.

Economically, Belau did well during the period under review. For the first time since self-government in 1981, the government finished the fiscal year without a deficit. The private sector boomed, especially in local construction and tourism. In 1989 more than 26,000 tourists came to Belau, nearly half from Japan. The rush of visitors accelerated small business development, especially in diving, hotel, video shops, restaurants, and transport. Another 4000 people visited Belau for business and employment. Some 13 percent of the total population are foreign workers with valid work permits. Most are from the Philippines and work in construction, restaurants, and as domestic helpers. Concern for the cultural changes that significant numbers of Philippine residents could bring

to Belau pales in comparison with the explosive events in its political arena.

DONALD R. SHUSTER

COMMONWEALTH OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS

On 9 January 1990, Lorenzo I. Guerrero was sworn in as governor of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, after easily defeating the Democratic candidate, Froilan T. Tenorio, in the elections of 4 November 1989. Guerrero's running mate, Benjamin T. Manglona helped to assure victory by carrying a majority of the Rota vote for the Republicans. Tenorio may have lost votes because of his plans to privatize many government services and centralize the elementary school system on Saipan.

After the elections, Senators Jose P. Mafnas and Jose Inos both claimed the position of president of the Senate. Inos took the podium alongside Mafnas during the swearing-in ceremony, causing a scuffle during which Inos was shoved down the podium steps by Mafnas supporters and thrown to the ground. The incident was covered by the local cable television station and received wide coverage in the press. Mafnas took Inos to court, but Inos was eventually declared the legitimate president.

The proposed referendum on the covenant establishing the commonwealth did not eventuate. Then Governor Pedro P. Tenorio kept it off the November ballot by arguing that satisfactory progress had been made to resolve differences with the United