

YOUR MONEY

Conference highlights buildup jobs

By Amritha Alladi

Pacific Daily News
aalladi@guampdn.com

Strengthening economic and social links between the Marianas and the mainland was one of the main points emphasized during the first day of a conference aimed at highlighting \$20 billion in investment and job opportunities that will open up as a result of the Guam military buildup.

Organized by a community-based group called Hita I Marianas, which means "We Are the Marianas," the conference this week hosts top federal, military and industry officials for onsite discussions of the opportunities associated with international infrastructure development projects in the Marianas, a press release from Hita stated.

California Governor's Office of Economic Development Director Joel Ayala on the first day of the conference said the infrastructure buildup alone represents an incredible economic opportunity for California and specifically the city of San Diego.

"This expansion comes at a time when California is actively working to strengthen its economic standing through the support of businesses, job creation, and increased international economic activity," Ayala stated in the press release.

Guam's Consolidated Commission on Utilities Chairman Simon Sanchez said there are about \$2 billion in investments to upgrade water, power, and wastewater systems to serve all of Guam, and what the San Diego community has to offer is a large pool of federal contractors who know how to sell to the military.

"The rationale is there's a lot of contractors who know about the military, (and a) large Chamorro community ... people that used to live on Guam," Sanchez said.



Photo courtesy of Market Research and Development Inc.

Opportunities: Participants listen as a presentation is given during the Hita I Marianas conference on May 25. Business representatives from the Marianas and federal government officials are in San Diego this week to share with stateside investors and job seekers the opportunities available on Guam and the CNMI as a result of the military buildup.

Younex Enterprise Senior Vice President David Tydingco, one of the conference organizers, said the links between the Marianas and the mainland are very deep, and he hopes future partnerships between companies and communities can increase the economic development benefits of the buildup.

In fact, some conference speakers think the buildup has the potential to bring many former residents of the region back to the Marianas.

"In the past ten years, thousands of residents from our region migrated to California during the economic decline and this infrastructure buildup now provides an opportunity for those residents to come home and participate in rebuilding the regional economy," said Guam Gov. Felix Camacho.

According to event organizer Jay Merrill, and Guam Chamber of Commerce President David Leddy, an underlying consideration is to get stateside investors to pursue oppor-

tunities on Guam so the island can thrive even after the main construction period of the buildup.

"This conference is about more than just military activity, it's also about creating sustainable development for the long term," Merrill said last week. The conference continues through Wednesday in the mainland.

Concerns

Even as representatives from Guam's business community seek stateside investors to help build a sustainable economy after the peak of the buildup, Sen. Ben Pangelinan yesterday sent a letter to the Navy saying the Defense Department is only paying "lip service" to the "One Guam, Green Guam" initiative proposed earlier by President Obama.

"All of the current signals from the Department of Navy are that green energy technology will be built behind the fence with no benefit to the people of Guam," Pangelinan

stated in a press release.

He's also questioned the Navy's sincerity because of all the errors in the draft Environmental Impact Statement and lack of solutions to mitigate the burden to Guam. Both the Legislature's finance office and Claret Ruane, an economist with the University of Guam, have concluded independently that the dollar amounts of the economic benefits of the buildup were grossly exaggerated and erroneous by a margin of between 75 to 125 percent.

"One Guam, Green Guam" should be more than just lip service," Pangelinan's release stated. "We are more than a strategic rock in the Pacific to be used and abused by the Department of Defense. This military expansion should be a true partnership where the military and the Federal Government show appreciation for the sacrifices being made by all the people of Guam by helping to improve our quality of life."