

SAIPAN – Imperial Pacific International’s target of opening its casino is on March 31 as the project is now 47 percent complete, but Casino Commission Vice Chairman Joseph C. Reyes wants the IPI to consider looking into extending their contract agreement with the T-Galleria in case target opening will not be meet.

The IPI representatives during the Casino Commission’s public meeting on Thursday updated the commissioners and the members of the House Committee on Gaming of the progress of the Imperial Pacific Resort.

According to the contractor’s report to the commission, they are now 47 percent complete with the construction of the ground floor of the building where the casino gaming industry is situated and they are still working on occupational permits from the Department of Public Works.

The contractor said they are targeting a soft opening for March 31, while the hotel will be completed before August.

The deadline for the completion of the entire project is this August.

However, Commissioner Reyes advised the IPI officials to consider looking into the agreement between IPI and T-Galleria, as the contract is set to expire in April.

IPI’s Senior Vice President for Operations Donnie Browne in a brief interview said they will open in March 31 and there will be no extension of the agreement.

IPI’s contract to use a portion of the duty-free shop for their live training facility will end in April.

“My concern is it is now the time to address the possibility of asking for extension in case there will be delays and in case the target soft opening is not met. There will be disruption in time and

Written by Administrator

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a lot of factors can cause the delays like the bad weather so my point is, just in the event, IPI should start looking into the possibility because that possibility exists, so they should start addressing it now because everything takes time most especially in dealing with the government. They said they will be moving in the casino area by late March, but I don't know. This is just to make sure that we are on top of everything as this casino industry is best for the CNMI economically," Reyes said in an interview after the meeting.

Representative Ivan Blanco, a member of the House Committee on Gaming said the meeting is important as it helps them resolve some issues encountered during the process of completing the project.

"I think we are on the right track. Of course with the new industry, there's always areas where we are unsure of, we encounter some barriers but with this kind of meeting, it's good and it's important as it help us resolve them and finalize any issues if there's a need for regulation and what are the needs there but we are seeing the progress and they are moving forward so it's good to be always hopeful that things move according to the plan," Blanco said.

In related news, the Casino Commission's executive director said during the meeting that the total value of the rolling chips being played at the casino for January 2017 was \$5.5 billion and the actual collected revenues from the activity is \$326 million, while the GGRT is over \$16 million.

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