

PIGEON POST

Slovenians receive visa-free entry status

VISAS

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) announced on Sunday that effective immediately, holders of Slovenian passports would no longer require visas to visit Taiwan for less than 30 days.

MOFA Department of European Affairs Director-General Anne Hung (洪慧珠) said the decision was based on the friendly relations between Slovenia and Taiwan and the fact that the move poses no threat to national security.

Slovenia became the seventh Central or Eastern European country to enjoy visa-free privileges, Hung said, following Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia.

In total, 27 EU countries have been granted visa-free privileges, with Bulgaria, Romania and Cyprus being considered for the same treatment, Hung said.

TransAsia Sisters offer drama lessons to immigrants

SOCIETY

In cooperation with the Assignment Theater Troupe, the TransAsia Sisters Association, Taiwan (TASAT) will begin offering drama lessons to immigrant spouses from Southeast Asia next month, the group said in a statement on Sunday.

A total of 18 courses will be taught until a final performance in December. Participants will perform the roles of playwright and actors in the production of their own drama.

"In class, we will learn to express ourselves through sounds, speech, body language, as well as parent-child education, interpersonal communication, makeup for stage performance, [selecting] background music, and posture," the statement said.

Children's courses will also be offered. For details or to sign up, contact TASAT at (02) 2515-9943.

African handicraft sale to begin in May

SOCIETY

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs will hold an exhibition of African handicrafts for sale in May as part of its efforts to promote cultural and commercial exchanges with the continent.

Department of Economic and Trade Affairs Director-General Weber Shih (施文斌) said that as Africa has suffered from the global economic slowdown along with the rest of the world, he hoped sales at the show would contribute to the economies of the participating countries.

The African countries offering handicrafts for sale will be diplomatic allies Burkina Faso, Gambia, Swaziland and Sao Tome and Principe, as well as three non-allies that are friendly to Taiwan — South Africa, Nigeria and Libya — Shih said.

Police help South African retrieve portion of stolen money

CRIME

Yunlin County police on Saturday arrested Huang Yen-ming (黃彥銘) on suspicion of stealing a bag from a South African man and taking cash from it. Police said the South African man, surnamed Cassim, was a teacher at National Yunlin University of Science and Technology's language center.

Police said on Friday afternoon that Cassim brought US\$15,000 in cash and US\$45,000 in traveler's checks to a bank in Douliou City (斗六). Cassim talked to the bank clerks for a while after he finished the transaction but forgot to bring the bag with him when he left.

Police said Cassim returned to the bank 15 minutes later, but his bag was gone.

Police checked surveillance cameras and found that Huang, who was the next customer in line after Cassim, had taken the bag and left. Police ordered Huang to come to the police station to return the bag on Friday night, but Huang did not show up.

On Saturday evening police arrested Huang and recovered the bag.

Police said the US\$45,000 in traveler's checks with Cassim's signature were recovered, but the US\$15,000 cash was gone. Huang said he spent it.

Cassim told reporters he had been in Taiwan for nine years and that he still loved the country and people here regardless of the incident.

STAFF WRITER, WITH CNA



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A Dutch chieftain's tale

The Dutch representative has become a member of a Rukai chieftain's family

BY LOA IOK-SIN
STAFF REPORTER

On the sunny day of Feb. 9, Dutch Representative Menno Goedhart and his wife Ingrid arrived at Kinuran, a remote Rukai Aboriginal village in the mountains of Wutai Township (霧台), Pingtung County, and received a warm welcome from the villagers. However, they were not just ordinary visitors — they were there to become members of a female Rukai chieftain's family.

Menno and Ingrid were not the first Dutch to be in touch with the village. In fact, the Dutch had traveled to Kinuran as early as the 17th century when they ruled part of south Taiwan, Menno said.

"The Dutch feelings strengthened around 1900 when the Rukai princess married a Dutchman, who became the tribal chieftain," Menno said. "He was loved for his generosity and honesty. Some tribe members do still remember him."

Since the Rukais have a very strict social hierarchy, with chieftain status being passed down in the family from generation to generation, current chieftain Zuruzuru is the fourth generation descendant of the Dutch chieftain, said Ullun, Zuruzuru's niece.

Some elder members of the village, such as Kuay, in his 80s now, still remember the stories that people passed down of the Dutch visits in the 17th century.

"My ancestors passed down stories about the visit from people who looked different from us — they had a different skin color, a different hair color, they had longer legs and hands," Kuay said. "They brought us very useful gifts such as rifles for hunting and metal pots."

The Rukais still make pottery in a specific shape today that they call "Dutch pottery."

"The Dutch pottery was brought here by the Dutch [in the 17th century], but it's actually from Thailand," Menno said, citing the result of his own research.

Menno and Ingrid are both very interested in Taiwanese Aboriginal cultures and have visited many remote Aboriginal villages across the country since they were sent to Taiwan more than six years ago.

"I found out about the Rukais' Dutch connection four years ago when I first visited the village, but it was not until about three months ago when I met Princess Ullun that we talked about giving me Rukai tribal membership," Menno said.

As soon as the Dutch couple set foot in the village, members of the Rukai tribe rushed to their side to shake and kiss their hands.

One village elder explained that kissing the hand of a guest is the Rukai gesture of respect.

Showing appreciation in return for the Rukais' hospitality, Menno brought gifts, including wine, beer, vegetables, fruits and — most importantly — a live pig.

Kinuran villagers invited Menno and Ingrid to join them in a traditional group dance, while others sang to the side.

The villagers did not forget what their guests were there for. A ceremony to confer Rukai membership to Menno and Ingrid soon began.



Zuruzuru along with other elders first helped Menno and Ingrid to dress in traditional Rukai outfits. Zuruzuru then crowned the two with Rukai headwear — a symbolic gesture that Menno and Ingrid had formally become Rukai, Ullun said.

"Now you may put your hands on the sacred pottery," Ullun told Menno and Ingrid.

Menno and Ingrid followed her instruction and placed their hands on a black earthenware pot embossed with the design of the hundred-pacer snake.

Zuruzuru, Ullun and other elders in the chieftain's family also joined by putting their hands on the pot. The Rukais believe that they are descendants of the hundred-pacer snake.

"Only members of the chieftain's family may touch the pot — outsiders and Rukai commoners cannot touch it at all. By allowing you to do so, you're officially part of our family," Ullun said.

Menno and Ingrid completed the ritual of becoming Rukais by sipping locally brewed millet wine from an aged hand-carved wooden container.

The villagers could not wait to drag the new members of their tribe to another round of dance.

"Wait, please wait, there's something we still need to do," Zuruzuru said, recalling that something was missing as she stopped the party.

"The Dutchman and woman have come from afar to join us, and we can feel that they are very sincere about it," she said. "As they've become Rukais, I think it's more appropriate to give them Rukai names so that it will be easier for us to interact later on."

Her people supported the proposal straight away.

"My dear fellow Rukais, I have names for them in mind, please listen and see if the names are suitable," Zuruzuru said after a short pause. "We will call the man Daganaw, and his wife will be Lavaus."

The other members of the Rukai tribe agreed.

"Daganaw was the name of a respected chieftain — the name means honor, glory, responsibility and power," former Wutai Township Council chairman Sasaru said. "Lavaus is a name for a tender, virtuous and pure woman who is able to render a lot of help to her husband."

Ullun said that Daganaw was actually the Rukai name of her



great-great grandfather, the Dutch chieftain.

"Now that you've become one of us, we have a lot of expectations of you," Sasaru said. "Don't forget about us, we expect you to come visit us often, and you should start fulfilling your responsibilities as a Rukai as well."

Menno said that he understood what membership in the tribe meant and was prepared to fulfill his responsibility.

"I'm a member of the Rukai [tribe] now — it's not a membership for one day, it's a membership for life," Menno said. "It gives me responsibility also, as a Rukai member and a member of a Rukai chieftain's family."

"I promise you that I'll frequently come here, and when you need me, you know where to find me, I'm always happy to help," he said.

Menno told the *Taipei Times* that he planned to help his tribe by raising funds for the local elementary school and promoting tourism in the area.

"We've raised funds for the Wutai Elementary School before, and I'll do it again," he said. "I'm also planning to write a book about tourism in Taiwan, especially the less traveled roads — I'll include this part of the country and hopefully more people will come visit."

Menno said that the book would be in English and he would also have it translated into Chinese.

"I've asked around in Taipei and found that most locals in Taipei don't know about this wonderful place," he said.

FEATURE



Right: Menno Goedhart, the Dutch representative to Taiwan.

Top: Dutch representative to Taiwan Menno Goedhart carries a pig that he gave to the Rukai Aboriginal village of Kinuran in Pingtung as a gift on Feb. 9.

Left: Picture of the Dutchman, known by his Rukai name Daganaw, who married a Rukai princess in around 1900 and later became a chieftain in the village of Kinuran in Pingtung. The picture has been kept by the chieftain's family.

PHOTOS: LOA IOK-SIN, TAIPEI TIMES

Women's club celebrates the Year of the Ox

BY JENNY W. HSU
STAFF REPORTER

Amid jovial laughter and heartfelt greetings, 78 ladies of all ages from the Taipei International Women's Club (TIWC) gathered last Tuesday to celebrate the arrival of the Year of the Ox at a special luncheon featuring the Lucky Money God.

"We are indeed like sisters here," said Ling Chang (張玲玲), 80, who has been a member of the TIWC for 30 years, recalling the times when she was a young dancer performing at charity events with another member, Jane Lin (林改莊), now 90.

Founded in September 1951 by Roberta Auburn, a wife of a USAID officer, TIWC has become one of the most important all-female charity groups with the foreign community.

Its principal goals are the promotion of education, cultural exchange and philanthropy.

"The club was established with the purpose of allowing foreigners, especially women, to give something back to Taiwan. The demographics of the membership might have changed throughout the years, but the goal remains the same," Chang said.

She said the club was originally

composed mostly of diplomats' wives and wealthy Taiwanese women.

But the number of foreign members quickly dwindled after the US severed relations with Taiwan in 1979.

"What we do here at the club is a form of soft diplomacy by holding activities with women from other nations and learning about each other's cultures," TIWC president Ruby Sung (宋美玉) said, adding that her organization was an affiliate of the Washington-based General Federation of Women's Club.

Ida Meyer, the wife of the

“What we do here at the club is a form of soft diplomacy by holding activities with women from other nations and learning about each other's cultures.”

— Ruby Sung, TIWC president

South African representative to Taiwan, said she had learned a lot about leadership skills and how to motivate others in her role as the first-vice-president of the women's club.

This year, the goal of the club's social service committee is to raise at least NT\$400,000 in donations to be given to the TWIC Education Foundation, the Taiwan Foundation for Rare Disorders and to pay school fees for 410 elementary students in Tainan County.

The donation will be presented at an annual Charity Gala in April.



Members and leaders of the Taipei International Women's Club stand for a photo at the annual Spring Festival dinner last Tuesday.

PHOTO: JENNY W. HSU, TAIPEI TIMES