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TAIWAN INFO

Taiwan-European Union and Taiwan-Hungary Relations

The European Union is Taiwan's fifth largest trading partner, with bilateral trade valued at US\$46.4 billion in 2015.

The EU is also Taiwan's largest aggregate source of foreign investment, with total investments reaching US\$33 billion by the end of 2014. The European Commission on October 14, 2015 released

a new trade and investment strategy for the EU: Trade For All, in which it expressed interest in holding bilateral investment negotiations with Taiwan.

This, as President Ma Ying-jeou said, shows that the EU desires to strengthen its economic, trade, and investment relationship with Taiwan.

Since 2008, the European Union and European Parliament have passed resolutions and issued statements in favor of the ROC, and have backed the signing of an Economic Cooperation Agreement and Bilateral Investment Agreement with the ROC. They have also voiced support for the deepening of bilateral cooperation in all aspects and Taiwan's meaningful participation in international organizations. In addition, they have paid close attention to the peaceful development of cross-strait relations and domestic affairs. These actions demonstrate our ever deepening friendship and encourage the 28 EU member states to boost their relations with us.

Regarding institutionalized consultations with the EU and member states, the Tai-

wan-EU Annual Consultation mechanism is currently the most important communication framework between the two sides. Rotating between Taipei and Brussels, the annual conference has been held 27 times. In many respects, ROC-EU cooperation unrelated to economic and trade have made substantial progress through this platform. Taiwan also established an institutionalized consultation mechanism for senior and top level officials of Taiwan and many EU member states, so as to better deepen and broaden the ROC's substantive relations with the EU and its member nations.

As for Taiwan-Hungary relations, most recently, Hungary was the guest of honor at 2016 Taipei International Book Exhi-



Photo: Jan Cernoch

bition held in February, introducing various aspects of Hungarian culture to the Taiwanese people. Following that was an academic conference in Budapest organized by the Budapest Business School in mid-February, bringing together 10 scholars from Taiwan and 15 Hungarian scholars. And last year saw the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the National Central Library, Republic of China (Taiwan) and Hungary's National Széchenyi Library. In October, the first

Taiwan documentary festival took place in Budapest.

Last year, Hungary was Taiwan's 11th trading partner among the 28 EU member states and bilateral trade totaled US\$685.32 million. The two countries have signed several agreements and MOUs including one on agricultural cooperation. It is hoped that Hungary and Taiwan will continue to build on existing relations and expand cooperation in different sectors this year.

Taipei Representative Office in Hungary

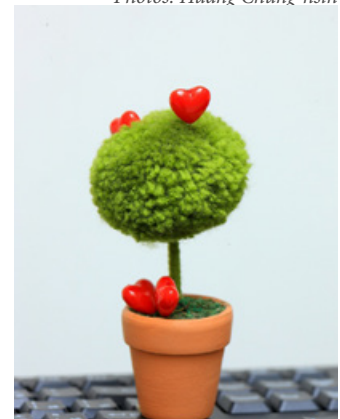
GOODS FOR THE MIND

Companies offer products with reputed psychological benefits to tap into growing consumer demand.

Like many office workers these days, 33-year-old Sandy Yang, a bank employee in Taipei City, is under a lot of pressure due to her heavy workload. Fortunately, she has found that she can manage her stress by having succulent plants on her office desk or around the house. "I particularly like houseleeks, and the dense basal rosette of the plant's pinkish flowers and leaves," she says. "I find their chunky,

rounded leaves somewhat amusing, which relaxes me. What's even better is that I can get a feeling of enjoyment out of them without spending a lot of money or having to go out." For people like Yang who are cooped up in an office all day, a

By Kelly Her, Taiwan Review
Photos: Huang Chung-hsin





succulent plant can provide a small dose of “green therapy,” allowing them to get in touch with nature and relieve some stress. Plants such as these are among the various products on the market today with claims of healing powers. In recent years, products advertised as therapeutic have grown in popularity and commercial viability.

Wang Ming-tang, an associate professor

that claim to enhance emotional well-being can be traced to companies in Japan in the late 1990s. At that time, the country had been mired in economic doldrums for a decade, and savvy manufacturers began to promote a “healing series” line of goods – beverages and music, for example – that boasted of therapeutic capabilities. Eventually, this type of merchandise made its



Courtesy of Vulkan Yan

in the Department of Industrial Design at National Kaohsiung Normal University (NKNU) in southern Taiwan, has conducted research on toys as a medium to restore emotional well-being. He points out that many people are looking for ways to overcome the mental exhaustion they experience due to pressure from family, school, work and economic and social responsibilities. Consequently, products that profess psychological healing benefits are much in demand, he adds, even though the properties of a wide variety of such items are rarely clearly delineated.

The growth in popularity of products

way to Taiwan. “Basically, emotional healing products are those that are purported to induce positive feelings in people through any of the five senses: hearing, vision, smell, touch and taste,” Wang says.

The professor based his research on a 2012 survey of consumers, product designers, psychological counselors and toy manufacturers. His research results show that so-called healing products in the shape of cute animals or human characters with light, soft colors can transform moods and help people find comfort, peace and relaxation. “It’s not only children that like toys, but also young adults and senior citizens,



although separate designs are important in order to meet the needs of different genders and age groups,” he says. Andy Lin, creative and lifestyle products team manager at online retailer books.com.tw, has noticed an increase in the number of people shopping for products that claim to reduce stress and depression. In view of the rising demand for products that promise emotional well-being, his online store has established a category for “healing toys” that currently features nearly 5,000 items.

A partial list includes desk plants, essential oils, figurines, lucky charms, music boxes, ornaments, remote control cars, and stuffed and plastic animals. Sales of such items on the website have increased by about 10 percent annually over the last few years, he says.

Easing Anxiety

In line with Wang’s findings, Lin believes that products with emotionally soothing features are typically cute and engaging, and can help people put their minds at ease, albeit temporarily. Animal models, cartoon dolls, miniature potted plants and toy cars have sold especially well on books.com.tw. In addition to offering foreign-made brands, the firm collaborates with a number of Taiwanese artists such as graphic designer Lee Han, and companies such as Light Plus Bio-Tech Co., which is based in New Taipei City. According to Lin’s sales records for 2013, 70 percent of purchasers are female, and 45 percent of the women buyers are aged 25 to 35.

The retailer also offers new products in response to popular trends and large-scale exhibitions in Taiwan. One event in particular that boosted the sales of the online store’s healing toys was the display of Dutch artist Florentijn Hofman’s giant yellow inflatable duck in Taiwan in 2013. Hofman’s floating sculpture in the shape of a bathtub toy attracted millions of visitors when it was exhibited at three locations

around the country last year. Book.com.tw took advantage of this phenomenon by introducing a series of therapeutic yellow duck-themed toys, stationery sets and everyday items that quickly became bestselling products. Urtale Creative Marketing Co. also operates an online store. Watson Chi, the Taipei-based firm’s executive director, says products promoting emotional reassurance or stress relief appeal to a wide range of customers – young and old, men and women alike – though needs and preferences may differ. Urtale’s primary target group is financially independent women aged 24 to 40.

In anticipation of growing consumer demand, Chi’s company has teamed up with hundreds of designers and manufacturers both at home



and abroad in order to expand and regularly renew product offerings that may help ease feelings of anxiety and stress. “The market demand for items that can evoke positive emotional responses is increasing, which is why our company is constantly searching for new products with such effects,” Chi says.

There are many people like Sandy Yang who enjoy the simple restorative pleasure of adorning their workplaces with plants. Vulcan Yan, manager of Fuhsiang Cactus and Succulent Garden in Hsinchu County provides further explanation for why succulent plants are increasingly sought after by people who lead busy lives and long for psychological comfort.

To better seize business opportunities arising from the growing popularity of succulents, Yan says he has endeavored to add value to his plant products and business by developing creative floral and potted arrangements, offering personalized gifts and organizing DIY activities.



Taiwan ranks as world's 3rd strongest baseball power



Taiwan has achieved a new high in terms of its baseball power, after grabbing the world's third strongest place, falling behind only Japan and the United States, the World Baseball Softball Confederation (WBSC) announced on March 18.

According to the WBSC, Taiwan scored a record high of 4,702 points in its Baseball World Ranking, moving a notch ahead of its previous ranking and edging out Cuba, which had 3,727 points, to fifth place. Japan holds the world's No. 1 spot with 5,154 points, followed by the U.S. with 5,091 points.

The number of points is calculated by the number of games each country's team

scores in competitions around the world. South Korea has also secured a record high place on the WBSC ranking, coming in fourth with 4,641 points, up from eighth place, thanks to its final victory in the 2015 WSBC Premier 12.

Rounding out the top 10 powers are Venezuela at 6th place, Mexico at 7th, Canada 8th, Italy 9th and Holland 10th, according to the WBSC.

FocusTaiwan

Ma wraps up fruitful Central America tour

President Ma Ying-jeou said March 19 that his visit to Guatemala and Belize strengthened bilateral ties and mutual understanding between the ROC and the two Central American diplomatic allies.

The seven-day trip helped consolidate relations on the basis of viable diplomacy, Ma said. "This pragmatic policy expanded Taiwan's international participation under the guidelines of legitimate purpose, lawful process and effective implementation."

The president made the remarks upon touching down at Taiwan Taoyuan International Airport at the head of a delegation comprising government officials and

business leaders. This was Ma's 12th and final overseas visit during his two four-year terms in office. He met with five heads of state in the region on the trip, and received warm welcomes during his two U.S. stopovers. During the first in Houston, the city of Point Comfort declared March 13 President Ma Ying-jeou Day in honor of his presence in Texas.

The second stop March 18 in Los Angeles



allowed Ma the opportunity to hold phone conversations with several U.S. political leaders. US House Speaker Rep.

Paul Ryan praised Taiwan's role as a peacemaker in the South China Sea, while Sen. Orrin Hatch expressed support for Taiwan to join the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade bloc in due time. While in Belize, Ma had a round-table meeting with Belizean Prime Minister Dean Barrow and the leaders of three of Taiwan's diplomatic allies in the



Caribbean – St. Kitts and Nevis Prime Minister Timothy Harris, St. Vincent and the Grenadines Prime Minister Ralph Gonsalves, and St. Lucia Prime Minister Kenny Anthony.

On the first leg of his Central American trip, Ma visited Guatemala, where he met with the country's new president, Jimmy Morales, and addressed the

Central American Parliament (PARLACEN), which is headquartered in Guatemala City.

Taiwan catches global smart city wave

Taiwan is embracing the smart city concept and capitalizing on its information communications technology sector advantages to lead the way in forging new digital frontiers in the 21st century and beyond.

The naming last month of New Taipei City and Hsinchu County in northern Taiwan among the top seven intelligent communities by New York City-based Intelligent Community Forum (ICF) illustrates this trend.

Six municipalities in Taiwan have made the list since 2004, with Taipei and Taic-

hung in central Taiwan winning the top ICF award in 2006 and 2013, respectively. The free public Wi-Fi service in Taipei is one of the best in the world, according to UK-based website Business Insider. The three outlying counties of Kinmen, Lienchiang and Penghu are also rolling out smart city policies.

Kinmen plans to launch an integrated circuit resident card, Lienchiang runs an e-government platform offering streamlined services for residents and Penghu maintains an app providing tourist information.