

THE LAST AMBASSADOR

By Lien Ming-Wei

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Prelude: A History of the Republic of China's Diplomatic Ruptures

St. Vincent PM Announces Break in Ties; MOFA Terminates Diplomatic Relations Effective Immediately

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By Lin Chien-kuo

Taipei, Jan. 20 (CNA) – At an unscheduled press conference held at 1:30 p.m. the day after Taiwan's presidential election, Foreign Minister Chang Chi-ching announced that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has learned that Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is set to sever diplomatic ties with the Republic of China (ROC), citing United Nations General Assembly Resolution 2758 and the "one-China principle".

To safeguard national sovereignty and dignity, Chang said, the ROC will terminate diplomatic relations with Saint Vincent and the Grenadines with immediate effect, suspend all bilateral cooperation projects, and promptly recall embassy staff, technical mission personnel, and TaiwanICDF volunteers.

China has continued its brazen provocations against the ROC, leaving security in the Asia-Pacific region increasingly precarious and at risk of collapse at any moment. Wielding massive financial inducements, China has aggressively competed with the ROC for diplomatic recognition, poaching Taiwan's diplomatic allies as a means of political manipulation and coercion.

In recent years, Taiwan has successively lost a string of diplomatic allies including Guatemala, the Marshall Islands, Palau, Tuvalu, Saint Kitts and Nevis, and the Holy See. With Saint Vincent and the Grenadines now announcing the severance of ties, fellow Caribbean state Saint Lucia will become the ROC's sole remaining diplomatic ally.

The Government of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines has said the move is intended to serve the "best interests" of its people, the nation, and the world at large. It will immediately resume full diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China. The official statement read: "This means that Saint Vincent and the Grenadines will no longer recognize the Republic of China (Taiwan) as an independent state, but rather as an inalienable part of China's territory. Effective today, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines will formally sever 'diplomatic relations' with Taiwan and will no longer develop any official relations or official exchanges with Taiwan."

Foreign Minister Chang expressed indignation and issued a strong condemnation at the press conference. For decades, Taiwan has demonstrated the greatest sincerity toward its diplomatic allies, providing assistance in such areas as healthcare, agriculture, environmental protection, women's empowerment, employment, coast guard operations, and infrastructure development. Within its capacity, Taiwan has carried out a wide range of assistance programs and actively provided professional and technical support.

Disregarding the long-standing friendship between the two countries, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines demanded massive amounts of economic assistance from Taiwan, and threatened to sever ties immediately if its demands were not met.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in an official statement: "We once again urge the Beijing authorities to renounce confrontation, return to the proper course of the international order, and pursue the right path of mutual benefit for Taiwan, the Asia-Pacific region, and the world."

China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs welcomed the move and expressed appreciation for the decision of the Government of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. "There is but one China in the world. Taiwan is an inalienable part of China's territory, and the Government of the People's Republic of China is the sole legal government representing the whole of China. The decision of the Government of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to resume diplomatic relations with China once again fully demonstrates that the one-China principle reflects the will of the people and the trend of the times. China stands ready to open a new chapter in its relations with Saint Vincent and the Grenadines on the basis of the one-China principle."

In an official statement, the Office of the President of the Republic of China expressed "deep regret" over the decision by Saint Vincent and the Grenadines: "At a moment when democracies around the world are congratulating Taiwan on the successful completion of its presidential election and the triumph of democracy, the Beijing authorities have chosen to deliberately suppress Taiwan through such despicable means, in an attempt to undermine the harmony and stability of the Asia-Pacific region. This is both a retaliatory mockery of democratic values and a blatant provocation against the international order."

Foreign Minister Chang said the government's position remains unwavering: Even if Taiwan is left with only one diplomatic ally, even if it continues to face relentless pressure, and even if it is denied any formal international recognition, Taiwan will not lose heart. Taiwan will stand firm, conduct itself with dignity and composure, move steadily and surely forward, and strive to realize the progressive values of freedom and democracy.

Island Survivors

1.

The sea wind, laced with fragments of moonlight, passes over rough reefs great and small, over soft sodden earth, over fertile plains thick with green banana trees, then lightly taps at the

window, brushes past the curtains, and comes to him. A moment of dazedness, and at once a sharpening of the mind; on this other island ringed by sea, he never sleeps well. A restlessness stirs in the air, charged with a tropical wildness; even after waking, quiet remains out of reach. Shih Kang-lun rises, his head slightly heavy, his hands and feet faintly cold. He glances at his phone to check the time: It is already one a.m.

Sleep will not come again.

Three new messages appear on his phone from Saint Lucia's permanent secretary for infrastructure, the minister of agriculture, and the permanent secretary for education, all forwarded by Third Secretary Hsieh Tai-sheng.

The permanent secretary for infrastructure says that the Daren Sammy Cricket Ground in Gros Islet has fallen into disrepair. The lighting system is malfunctioning, parts necessary for repairs will have to be imported, and funds are also needed to refurbish the grounds. The message adds that "friendly sponsorship" from the Taiwan government would be welcome at any time. Just a few lines, not a formal request so much as a feeler, as though testing the limits of Taiwan's willingness to help.

The matter would have to be dealt with. Kang-lun knows there is little room to say no. In the end, everything has to be handled according to official rules: A detailed proposal has to be submitted, setting out itemized repairs, projected costs, personnel expenses, and the like, all with the proper follow-through. However the money is disbursed, it must bear a legitimate heading and go through the usual channels, no matter how "flexibly" applied. Frowning, he sighs and does not read on.

His wife, Hsiu, wakes. "Get some rest," she tells him. "Whatever it is can wait until morning."

He gets up, pours himself a glass of warm water, takes a sleeping pill from the bottle, breaks it roughly into thirds, and swallows one piece. Kang-lun likes to joke in private that Saint Lucia produces not only cocoa, bananas, and high-proof rum; it also has a way of making people take "candy" to sleep.

He lies down. In an instant, time flows backward with the pull of the tide.

At night, with the lights out, one is not blind; rather, one slips beyond the reach of sight, becoming a shade of black: the black of skin, the black the world refuses to face. To go unseen is one kind of pain; to be seen in plain sight is another – naked, unshielded, laying bare the fact that Taiwan is recognized by only one other island nation. His forehead burns. His breathing turns rapid and uneven. For no reason at all, he seems to be sinking into an incurable fever.

Taiwan's presidential election had concluded just six months earlier, and the pro-U.S. party had once again retained power with sixty-three percent of the vote. The very next day, while the island was still analyzing, digesting, and interpreting the implications of the result, China made two moves targeting Taiwan's democratic processes.

First, it launched military exercises. In a blatant act of intimidation, China adopted a threatening posture, cutting the island off on all sides, making its extreme displeasure with the election result unmistakably clear to the people of Taiwan. In addition to conducting live-fire long-range rocket drills around the islands of Matsu, Kinmen, Wuqiu, and Dongyin, China went on to fire a total of forty-two Dongfeng-series missiles into the waters off northern, southern, and eastern Taiwan. Dozens of those missiles even flew directly over Taiwan proper, including the cities of Taipei, Hsinchu, Taichung, Tainan, and Kaohsiung. China also deployed unmanned combat systems and next-generation J-21 stealth fighters, among other high-profile weaponry, to flex its military muscle for Taiwan and the world to see.

Second, without warning, the Government of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines severed diplomatic ties.

Kang-lun was serving as director-general of the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Sydney when he received the urgent notification: Taiwan's Caribbean diplomacy had been thrown into grave turmoil, warning lights were flashing, and another break in diplomatic relations could come at any moment. New blood was needed to replace Ambassador Hu. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs ordered Kang-lun to return to Taiwan at once. Soon after, he was dispatched to Saint Lucia, charged with doing everything he could to help Taiwan hold on to its last diplomatic ally. He traveled light and went straight into action; his furniture and belongings were packed into crates and shipped by container directly to the tropical island nation.

Based on key intelligence and secret strategic simulations, the Foreign Ministry predicted that, after Saint Vincent severed ties, Saint Lucia would likely turn to China within two to six months.

The intervening week in Taiwan he spent discussing strategy with the president, the foreign minister, and other senior officials before setting out.

He flew from Taoyuan to Los Angeles and changed planes for Miami. Travel-worn, he then boarded a small aircraft that was thrown about in heavy turbulence as it headed southeast over the sea towards its final destination of Hewanorra International Airport at the southern tip of the island.

Looking out the window on the plane, he saw white clouds above the sea, and blue sky above the clouds. There seemed to be no limit to his view, yet he could find no place in it for the people of Taiwan.

At hand were two documents he had been reading. One set out the basic facts about Saint Lucia; the other was a biography of the country's prime minister, Robert Anthony, titled *The Eternal Black Sun*.

He already knew the Foreign Ministry's briefing by heart. It had three parts. The first covered Saint Lucia's political and economic profile: 617 square kilometers; a population of 180,000, predominantly Black and mainly Catholic; a tropical maritime climate; gained independence from Britain on February 22, 1979; a history of having changed hands between Britain and France as many as fourteen times. Politically, it was a parliamentary democracy.

Second, Saint Lucia's relations with other countries, including its membership in the Commonwealth and the Caribbean Community.

Third, the work of the embassy and the Technical Mission over the years, including bilateral cooperation projects already completed and others currently under way.

Beyond these dry materials, he kept returning to *The Eternal Black Sun*. To save time, the Foreign Ministry had prepared an outline and a set of extracts. But Kang-lun wanted to read it himself, every word of it, hoping to better understand Robert Anthony, the man known as the "Caribbean Eagle". For the rest of his posting, unless something unforeseen intervened, he would have to establish a working relationship with the prime minister and build real rapport with him.

Know your enemy and know yourself, and you can fight a hundred battles without defeat. This time there was no room to fall back. Absolutely none. The slightest error could not be tolerated. Saint Lucia and Taiwan established diplomatic relations in May 1984. Later, following a change of government, Saint Lucia turned to the People's Republic of China in June 1997 before restoring ties with Taiwan in April 2007. Those ties had continued until the present, and Saint Lucia was now Taiwan's last diplomatic ally. The president and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

had made their instructions clear: No matter what, Saint Lucia had to remain in Taiwan's camp. The line had to hold.

Kang-lun studied the photograph of Robert Anthony in the book: honey-brown skin, of mixed Black and White heritage, short black hair already touched with gray, rimless glasses, a full beard. Beneath his furrowed brow, there was an eagle-like sharpness in his gaze. He looked proud, exceptionally bold, even a little too sure of himself. Of course, Kang-lun knew that all of this was a carefully constructed persona, an illusion built from the chosen photograph, the presentation of the text, the details deliberately revealed.

Kang-lun was uneasy, but panic would do no good. Whatever was coming would come. All he could do was negotiate in the utmost good faith. If homage had to be paid, he would pay it; if dinners had to be given, he would give them. Come hell or high water, he would do what was required.

Before leaving, he had tried to keep things light, joking with the deputy foreign minister, "If Taiwan's an expert at diplomatic breakups, then I'm an expert at keeping relationships alive. Still, representing Taiwan in a romance that may come to nothing does sting a bit. I'd better come up with a few good jokes if I'm going to win over the prime minister."

"To be honest, clinging to our last diplomatic ally is deeply sad," the deputy foreign minister said. "Sometimes I feel this whole business is more absurd than any joke."

Kang-lun froze for a few seconds, unsure whether such honesty depressed him or simply pained him. Then, in an even voice, he replied, "Back in Australia, the jokes I told were all White people's jokes. This time I'll have to learn some Black people's jokes."

"I never knew there was such a distinction. What exactly are Black people's jokes?"

"Probably the kind about being 'invisible'," Kang-lun said.

"That sounds a bit discriminatory, though I suppose those would also count as Taiwan's own jokes."

They looked at each other and smiled bitterly, with the same unspoken understanding as ever.

The plane banked slightly, passing through layers of beige clouds as it drew near the island. Then the sea, the beguiling sea, came into view and etched itself into his mind: first in a steep downward sweep, then, as the plane righted itself, in a broad, level expanse. He could almost breathe in the sea's all-enveloping embrace, feel it sink into his skin and work its way into every pore. The sunlight was bright, the earth warm, the sky blossoming with a myriad of white clouds. There was a faint scorch in the air, and the breeze brushed his face as gently as silk. Coconut palms stood tall, while ridge upon ridge of mountains leaned this way and that like broad, squat earthenware jars.

As he set foot on the island, Kang-lun said to himself: *On this great island, we can still do something extraordinary. We can. We truly can.*

He needed those words to give him strength.

By the time he cleared customs, it was already afternoon. He had made it known that he would be arriving alone, with his wife, Hsiu, to follow three days later. There was no need for a full reception party; the embassy in Saint Lucia had to keep running smoothly. He had asked that only Deputy Counselor Chang Chin-tung and Wu Ching-chih, the Technical Mission's chief project manager, come to meet him. With Chin-tung driving ahead, and Ching-chih following behind, they went to Island Breeze, a wooden restaurant on the eastern side of the airport, for lunch.

The twelve-hour time difference left Kang-lun groggy and without much appetite. In the end he ordered fish and chips with a glass of tart tamarind juice. Sitting on a wooden chair, he watched the waves roll in and break steadily on the shore. The sea on the island's eastern side, Chin-tung explained, was exposed to the North Atlantic, where the waves were rough; the western side faced the Caribbean, calm and good for swimming. He went on to explain that former Ambassador Hu had left only two days earlier, then gave a brief account of the bilateral projects still under way. Ching-chih, on hand to assist, added a brief explanation of the Technical Mission's staffing.

Kang-lun said he would go to the embassy first to meet the staff and say hello, then return to the ambassador's residence that evening to cope with his jet lag. He would officially start work the next day.

"What kind of man is Prime Minister Robert Anthony?" Kang-lun asked.

Chin-tung frowned slightly, as if weighing his words. "Ambassador Hu said the prime minister is a man who likes to make a grand show of things."

"And your own view?" Kang-lun said, looking straight at Chin-tung.

"I haven't had many chances to spend time with the prime minister," Chin-tung replied. "But judging from the Labour Party's victory in the election and the policies they have put forward, it's clear they're eager for large-scale infrastructure development."

Chin-tung paused for a few seconds. "Some of the projects for which they want our support go far beyond our budget. Ambassador Hu tried, but he couldn't strike a balance. From what I've seen, neither the opposition United Workers Party nor the ruling Saint Lucia Labour Party is easy to deal with. They keep asking for higher and higher sums. And, Taiwan has fewer and fewer bargaining chips. We're now down to our last diplomatic ally..."

Kang-lun nodded in agreement.

The two-and-a-half-hour drive took them north from Vieux Fort to Castries, the capital city, then farther north to Gros Islet, before finally reaching the embassy.

For the rest of the drive, Kang-lun gazed drowsily out the window. Each time the car climbed to a higher point, the sea seemed to appear wherever he looked. The calm sea, the dangerous sea, irresistible and impossible to fend off, bursting into white crests. Utterly besieged, his mind churned like the tide. If he could, he would stay here. No, he must not retreat or allow himself a shred of doubt. He had to stay on this island.

The Present Other. The somewhat paradoxical phrase suddenly surfaced in Kang-lun's mind.

2.

The Present Other.

Present, yet always seen as absent.

The Other: pointing both to the far edge of geography and to someone other than oneself.

Such is the pattern of his days.

He gets up at six-thirty every morning and has toast, avocado dusted with black pepper, scrambled eggs with cheese, and a green salad, with a glass of orange juice. He stops at around seventy to eighty percent full. Then, after a quick shower, he changes into a sharply tailored suit.

Kang-lun has always been particular about his appearance, down to the last detail. He shaves every day, works pomade into his hair, and combs it neatly to the left. A white shirt with a black suit; a bright yellow, vivid red, or pale blue tie secured with a gold tie clip; a rectangular Republic of China flag pin. Then a spray of men's cologne: sandalwood blended with rosewood, cedar, bergamot, and musk, fresh yet deeply woody. Before leaving, he studies himself once more in the mirror, and Hsiu always gives him a final once-over.

At eight, the driver leaves the residence for the embassy on Reduit Beach Avenue in Rodney Bay. It's a fifteen- to twenty-minute drive, and Kang-lun arrives by half past eight.

The embassy is enclosed by white walls on all four sides. The front boundary wall is set with deep brown iron railings, with the entrance on the right. Passing the sentry post, one steps onto a pale stone path laid through the smooth lawn, follows it in a half circle, and comes up before the building.

A row of coconut palms stands to either side of the building. Close to the walls grow Saint Lucia roses, the national flower, drawing bananaquits, Saint Lucia warblers, and green-throated caribs from time to time.

It is an elegant T-shaped building with creamy white walls and a sloping red-tile roof. Three symmetrical rectangular windows line either side, admitting ample light, while a central double door marks the entrance. A portico supported by six white columns shelters the doorway, with a tall arched opening in the middle. On the second floor, a large central French window opens onto a projecting balcony beneath the deep eaves.

The lawn before the building is manicured daily. At its center stands a square platform with a tall flagpole, topped by the flag of the Republic of China flying in gusts of sea wind.

Each time Kang-lun stands before the embassy in Saint Lucia, the phrase *The Present Other*, open to multiple interpretations, rises in his mind. It may have come from some bulletin of diplomatic correspondence, from the English-language *Taiwan Review*, or from a commentary by a scholar of Asia-Pacific diplomacy. Or perhaps it grew out of the firsthand understanding he had gained over all those years posted abroad: a state of unmistakable absence.

Standing there, he hears the coconut palms on either side of the embassy rustling, like fine sand sifting through spread fingers in the wind, a pair of black hands delicately stroking yellow arms, vitality streaming out through one opening only to pour in through another.

The embassy stands just south of the inlet to Rodney Bay Marina. Off to the left, beyond the curve of the road, is the police station. Past that, hotels large and small line Reduit Beach Avenue, in an area that draws crowds of international tourists, making it the island's affluent quarter.

Then there is the sea.

One Sunday afternoon, when relations with Saint Lucia had steadied for a time, Kang-lun left the embassy with Hsiu after putting in extra hours. They took the path to the right of the police station down to the beach, slipped off their shoes, and walked slowly from the north end to the south and back again, leaving deep and shallow footprints in sand that still held the day's heat. The fatigue showed plainly on his face.

Hsiu knows it well: An ambassador's life may look glamorous, worthy of veneration, but the pressure is immense. To live with it all, one has to know when to cut off one's own tongue, just to buy back a little peace.

Unless Kang-lun raises the subject, Hsiu never brings up work. She talks only about their children: their older daughter, pursuing a master's in psychology in Vancouver, and their younger

son, studying applied finance at the University of Melbourne. Kang-lun is not worried about them. They are good students, have a solid command of languages, and know how to get on with people. For now, all that matters is that they complete their studies safely. His only real concern is the future that awaits them and where they will eventually settle. Staying in Taiwan would of course be fine, but if they have the chance, better that they leave a place where war remains all too possible.

Facing the sea, there is nowhere to go; all he can do is throw himself into one last struggle.

That sea is full of the funereal air of white roses, enough to drown anyone who lingers. All the more so when the sun burns with its white flame, and everything is penetrated, saturated, and salted by that absolute powdery whiteness, forcing the mind backward. One looks back over the long succession of diverging paths, only to feel that the path ahead is gone. The waves surge up in an instant and recede just as suddenly, leaving nothing behind but emptiness, as though everything could only be occupied by some form of disappearance.

Kang-lun hears the sea's endless assault on the shore, the long palm fronds rasping against one another, the Antillean crested hummingbird beating its wings, trilling like bits of jade striking together. More distinctly still, he hears the probing, the requests, the demands, all tinged with Creole, that Caribbean blend of English, French, and island dialect. Equal exchange is a form of physical intercourse between two sides. Lubricated by bodily fluids, it is all touch, collision, and coupling. Yet for a country hemmed in on every side, equality seems an ideal too distant to attain.

Not everything can be measured in money, and yet capitalism now forms the basic logic by which the world operates. Even the Chinese Communist Party is gradually mutating into a form of party-state capitalism, wielding fist, muscle, and sheer mass to maximize the state's interests and national benefit. The very terms by which value is judged have become skewed and selective. And so, in search of international recognition, in the hope of making our beloved world open its eyes, we come before you with all due deference and, on behalf of Taiwan, offer up the island's breasts, its penis, and TSMC.

Spit and seawater, teeth and reefs: Faced with black faces, red ambiguity, and golden feelers, Kang-lun still has to remain an affable, presentable ambassador, skilled in pu'ann-nuá, the pliant art of social maneuvering. He must think of himself as a cornerstone, a bridge, a bond as firm as a tiger tally once its two halves are fitted together, linking the two sides across culture, the economy, education, medicine, and infrastructure.

"This is certainly a thorny problem," Kang-lun said at an internal embassy meeting. "But we can work it out in a straightforward way. There's no need to make it more complicated than it is. We need to find out who's telling the truth and who isn't. If we can't, then we look at our past dealings with them and the ties between us. Most of these demands, I think, are half true and half false, put forward largely to sound us out."

Two weeks after his arrival, there was still no progress. New to the post, Kang-lun was at work every day, pressing his staff to stay sharp, keep reaching out, and find every possible opening for meetings with senior officials. At the embassy, Deputy Counselor Chang Chin-tung, First Secretary Chen I-han, Second Secretary Lin Hsi-te, and Third Secretary Hsieh Tai-sheng worked on multiple fronts, sending formal letters to various ministries while making private calls and sending messages to ask after the latest developments.

The letters went unanswered. None of the major government departments replied. The prime minister and the ministers of foreign affairs, agriculture, national security, education, technology and commerce all cited busy schedules as they politely put off meeting him.

Beneath the surface, however, all sorts of shifting signals began to emerge. Officials held their breath, waiting to see which way the prime minister would lean: toward establishing ties with China or continuing diplomatic ties with Taiwan. The ministers gave no formal response, nor did they refuse outright; instead, they sent lower-ranking officials to feel things out and negotiate indirectly.

The permanent secretary for agriculture pointed out that, because the Taiwan Technical Mission was based on the northern coast, it did little to support agricultural development in the south, and asked whether new Fruit and Vegetable Crop Demonstration and Promotion Centers might be established in Micoud and Vieux Fort.

Meanwhile, the permanent secretary for technology noted that the existing Saint Lucia Digital Information Technology Training and Application Program had produced good results, and said he hoped additional service hubs could be set up across the island, with digiGov training courses offered more widely.

The first secretary for education raised the possibility of increasing scholarships and grants, both in amount and in the number of recipients.

The permanent secretary for health, in turn, suggested that a Taiwanese medical team might be stationed in Saint Lucia on a long-term basis. He also hoped the ongoing Strengthening Program for the Prevention and Control of Metabolic Chronic Diseases in Saint Lucia could be enhanced. This would include the provision of necessary facilities and equipment, one year of overseas training for medical staff, and assistance in building a specialist local medical team.

Of course, most of these proposals already had case precedents with established procedures to follow; they were simply taking the opportunity to reinforce them.

The jumble of messages kept coming in, almost like bids being shouted across a room. True or false, they still had to be weighed with patience. Most Saint Lucian officials spoke in terms of projects and construction rather than naming sums outright, because once completed, those projects would pass directly into Saint Lucian state ownership, not to mention the substantial economic interests they might generate in the process.

As word spread of the embassy's predicament, various people came forward claiming to be policy advisers, secretaries to members of the House of Assembly, or staff from the prosecutor's office. They said they had channels straight to the prime minister, but that arranging an introduction would require payment in various amounts. Kang-lun knew that, new to the post and unfamiliar with the island, he was bound to run into people looking to exploit the situation and line their own pockets.

And he still had not been given the opportunity to present his letter of credence.

Dawn still lay hidden in the dark, as if a silent revolution were quietly taking shape.

With the prime minister unwilling to see him, Kang-lun decided to break with protocol and show up unannounced. For three days running, he went to the government offices, only to be turned away. The first two times, he was stopped at the entrance. On the third day, he was allowed inside, and a receptionist led him to wait outside the prime minister's office. Before him stood a heavy dark-brown wooden door, its very presence marking a firm boundary, keeping people at a distance. The prime minister was on the other side, yet the door, as impenetrable as a fortress, would not open. What awaited him beyond it, Kang-lun wondered.

After three rebuffs, one learns the pattern. Word came from the prime minister's secretary: Once official business eased, he would meet the ambassador in person. On the fourth attempt, the secretary finally sent through a date and time. Kang-lun went in person, carrying

gifts and his letter of credence, only to be told two hours later that the prime minister had canceled the meeting because of urgent business. They would meet another day, the message said.

Face drawn and heart heavy, he could do nothing but wait. Kang-lun knew perfectly well that this was a low point not only in his own life, but in ties between Taiwan and Saint Lucia. A dejection he was unwilling to name weighed on him. To let himself fully register that dejection, still less to speak of it aloud and discuss it, would only drag him deeper into passivity. All he could do was keep trying, keep talking, and keep putting more of himself into it.

Kang-lun did not give up. After considering his options, he instructed the embassy secretaries and the Technical Mission's staff to organize all the bilateral cooperation projects, past and present, into a clear itemized report.

The Technical Mission side was relatively straightforward. Completed projects included the Medical Personnel Training Project, the Fruit and Vegetable Supply Chain Efficiency Enhancement Project, the Banana Yield Improvement Project, the Government WAN Project, the Information and Communications Technology Project, the Banana Leaf Spot Disease Control Project, and the Integrated Freshwater Fish and Shrimp Development Project. Ongoing projects were concentrated mainly in agriculture, commercial investment and development, and IT training. As for the embassy, its responsibilities extended beyond its regular duties to the various agreements it had signed in support of local development projects.

"Ambassador Hu actually did a good job," Kang-lun said. "He was steady-handed and circumspect, knowing when to press and when to hold back. He kept every bilateral project moving forward."

"Perhaps the problem doesn't lie in the projects," Chin-tung said.

"Then where does the problem lie?" Kang-lun said, fixing Chin-tung with a stern look.

Chin-tung fell silent.

"Ambassador Hu was steadier and more reserved, and handled things more cautiously," Tai-sheng said. "He was on his own. Sometimes, at local banquets, once the greetings were over, he seemed at a loss what to do next. He never really formed close ties with the locals."

"His transfer back to Taiwan at a moment like this means that one phase of the work here has been completed," Kang-lun said, looking at the Third Secretary. "Diplomatic work is hard. Very often, what looks like doing nothing is actually a great deal of work."

Tai-sheng suddenly realized how rashly he had spoken. He should not have put it in comparative terms: comparison itself carried an undertone of rivalry. Besides, speaking so freely against the previous ambassador meant overstepping his rank.

Some truths have to be told indirectly.

First Secretary Chen I-han and Second Secretary Lin Hsi-te remained silent.

"I think the bilateral projects we've been pushing can no longer keep up with the Saint Lucian government's expanding demands," Chin-tung said. "On top of that, China is watching closely, looking to 'buy' Saint Lucia. Ambassador Hu managed to fend off several of their demands. They had to be discussed internally first, he said, and then formally reported to the Foreign Ministry. But that kind of delay can only work for so long. My guess is that Saint Lucia may already be in touch with the mainland."

"There's no way we can meet those prices," Tai-sheng said.

"All we can do is wait," Kang-lun said firmly, before adding with patient deliberation, "Either we wait till the seas run dry, or we'll hear something this week or next. Once Robert Anthony has sounded out the mainland's terms, he'll definitely come back to us and ask what

we're offering. Saint Lucia is simply weighing up the offers. That's just how it is. As the saying goes, with money, you can make the devil turn the millstone; without it, you become the one doing the grinding."

"On the Saint Lucian side, a great deal still comes down to what Robert Anthony wants," Chin-tung said, pausing as if to let the point land.

"If anti-communism is Taiwan's inevitable nationwide cause, then the pursuit of maximum advantage is the endless drive for national development, a kind of modern marijuana throughout the world," Kang-lun joked, trying to ease the tension.

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