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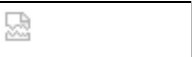
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Wednesday, April 29, 1998

Modern-day Gullivers find Holland a Liliput country

DEUTSCHE PRESS AGENTEUR

BLARICUM, (NETHERLANDS), April 28: Foreigners in The Netherlands often feel small when they meet tall Dutchmen. In lifts in the small northern country, an average-sized European's scalp often only reaches up to other people's chests, and in the cinema, fellow Dutch movie-goers sitting in the front rows are frequently so tall that their heads obstruct one's view. The Dutch are the world's tallest people - at least that is what the Dutch government says.

Nearly one million of the 16 million Dutch measure more than 1.93 metres in height. "We shoot up into the sky", the weekly magazine Elsevier said recently.


But being tall in Europe's most densely populated country is not always an advantage: the country seems to have been built for smaller folk.


"Compared to Germany, everything is about three sizes smaller in the Netherlands", complains Rob Brintjes from Blaricum near Utrecht.

Brintjes, who measures 2.21 metres in height, knows what he is talking about. He is the founder of the Dutch Association of Tall Persons and also the chairman of the European Tall Persons' Association.

"In Holland the houses are smaller, the staircases steeper and the streets narrower, which does not exactly make life easier for us", he says.

Sometimes, he says, he feels like Jonathon Swift's hero Gulliver travelling in Lilliput land, where everything is pocket-sized. Especially dreaded among the nation's tall people are the small Dutch railway carriages.

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``I can only stand up inside with my head ducked", says Bruintjes. ``And no one will readily get up to offer me a seat", he says. ``Usually I have to give them a threatening look first. That's the good thing about being tall: people respect you".

The country recently introduced a new law under which employers must ensure that the workplace of ``king size" staffers matches their physical requirements.

Industry is also slowly beginning to discover tall people as a consumer group. In many cities shops are opening up offering clothing and furniture for ``langemensen" as the Dutch call them. Groningen University recently regrouped the rows of seats in a lecture hall to give taller students a bit more space for their legs.

Scientists are meanwhile trying to find out what causes people to grow so tall. Is it a diet rich in proteins with lots of cheese and milk? or the liberal education which, according to some experts, acts as a ``psycho-sexual stimulus"?

Or is it caused by the Dutch prosperity, which encompasses virtually all parts of society? Rob Bruintjes has yet another explanation to offer. ``We never have cold winters here. I've been to Germany. They had temperatures of nearly 20 degrees below minus there". ``Gosh, I've never experienced anything like it before. I figure that all that energy that people need in cold countries to keep warm goes into the people's growth here", he says.

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