



Nikolaos van Dam

An Umbu Title for a Dutch Diplomat

AS a radio station reported the event live, Dutch Ambassador Nikolaos van Dam received the traditional honorific of Umbu from the people of Central Sumba, at West Nusa Tenggara province. The *Gogali* radio station, a donation from the Netherlands government in collaboration with *Radio 68 H*, is expected to benefit the local people in raising the quality of education, in disseminating information on health and farming issues, as well as to prevent the theft of livestock. "I am proud to receive this title," said His Excellency.

During the ceremony, van Dam donned a complete set of Sumba traditional outfit, including the *parang* weapon. He was shocked at being asked to lead the ritual of slaughtering the sacrificial bull, which meant piercing its throat until it died. In all of his life, Nikolaos never came close to harming any being. Luckily, the whole ritual turned out to be purely symbolic.

It was van Dam's turn to shock the community when he gave his address, speaking in faultless Arabic. The people, including the local Islamic religious leaders, were in awe of this foreigner who spoke fluent Indonesian and Arabic. Of course, little did they know that he once studied Arabic Literature at Amsterdam University and that he was posted in a number of Middle Eastern countries. "In fact, I have written a few books in Arabic," he said. For that matter, if he stayed just a bit longer, Umbu van Dam might even be speaking in the Sumba dialect. ■