

How the international banks forced zero population growth on Thailand

by EIR's Bangkok Bureau

Given all the malthusian doomsday propaganda surrounding the birth of the five billionth person on Earth, it would be instructive to look at one of the population control lobby's "success stories": Thailand. This short history will demonstrate how international financial institutions, working through their privately funded "family planning" agencies together with the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the United Nations, created a population-control movement in Thailand which managed to collapse the Thais' population growth rate from 3.2% in the 1960s to 1.5% as of mid-1987. The goal is to limit the population growth rate to 0% and to halt the population level at not more than 100 million by the year 2045.

The malthusian policy for Thailand is in reality economic policy. Endowed with rich resources and lush agricultural potential, Thailand is one of the most prosperous nations in all of Southeast Asia. The basis for this prosperity is a high level of agricultural production. In the last 80 years, Thailand's food production has quadrupled, keeping up with the simultaneous quadrupling of the population. But this increase in agricultural production has not been the result of increased input into agriculture or any increase in agricultural productivity, but has resulted from a precise quadrupling of land put under cultivation. Thailand has now reached the limits of such cheap linear expansion of acreage dedicated to agriculture.

To maintain its population and permit the nation to grow requires that agricultural productivity be increased through irrigation, electrification, fertilization, and mechanization. Thailand can easily solve this potential crisis through industrialization for which it has the financial means, the labor force, and the physical resources. However, for the World Bank et al., industrialization is out of the question. Thailand is to remain a purely agricultural nation—a nation of zero growth.

Almost all the funding for the malthusians has come from international agencies and governments. However, the implementation of population planning came from key individuals in the ministry of public health, and especially the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB),

the government agency which formulates Thailand's five-year economic plans.

The NESDB, composed mainly of technocrats schooled in monetarist economics, represents a World Bank-IMF lobby in Thailand. When the international banks give an order, the NESDB translates that order into a financial policy. Therefore, when the World Bank ordered zero population growth for Thailand, the NESDB formulated and implemented a plan that fit the specifications of Thailand's international creditors.

Until the late 1960s, the population planning advocates were strongly opposed by the pro-growth military leaders who viewed population growth as a definite asset to national security. Between 1900 and 1968, the Bangkok government supported this view by promoting pro-growth policies. For example, during World War II an official Wedding Promotion Committee encouraged early marriages under the slogan, "Get Married Young and Make the Nation Prosper." As late as 1956, an act entitled "Welfare of Persons with Numerous Offspring" authorized payment of bonuses for large families.

The first major challenge to these pro-growth policies was the 1958 World Bank Report dealing with economic development programs in Thailand. The report warned that Thailand's "excessive" population growth would cause problems such as shortages in housing, schools, public services, etc., and would seriously affect national development. The World Bank advised the adoption of birth control measures as a solution.

The Cabinet responded to the World Bank Report in 1960 by appointing several committees to investigate the population problem. However, in 1961, the government declared that birth control would remain a private and voluntary matter only, and that dissemination of birth control information was prohibited. Even in the late 1960s, hospitals and health clinics could only provide birth control information to married couples upon request. The fact is, Thailand in the 1960s averaged an 8% annual growth in GNP together with 3.2% population growth. All this, however, did not deter international "family planning" agencies from converging on Thai-

land to impose the World Bank's demand for population planning.

In 1963, the first national population seminar was held in Thailand, sponsored by the Rockefeller-funded Population Council of New York City and the National Research Council of Thailand. Shortly afterward, the government set up a pilot project on birth control in the rural district of Potharam. While the National Research Council and the Ministry of Public Health conducted the study, the Population Council provided the finances and advisers. Naturally, the zero-

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growthers used the study's result to show that an "overwhelming" majority of women were eager to practice birth control.

In October 1967, Prime Minister Thanom Kittkachorn endorsed the World Leaders' Declaration on Population sponsored by the United Nations. This gave added legitimacy to the burgeoning zero-growth movement in Thailand. The first real policy change on population by the cabinet came in 1968. They ruled that the birth control services which had been introduced into the Potharam project could be extended to married women in other areas of the country. The King then also publicly expressed concern over the high birth rate and endorsed the extension of birth control services.

The Ministry of Public Health became directly involved in population planning by training over 4,000 nurses and midwives in birth control methods. Also during this time, the U.S. Agency for International Development (AID), the Population Council, and UNICEF financed the distribution of contraceptives, clinic equipment, vehicles, fellowships, advisory services, and training funds.

By 1969, seminars on population planning were broadcast on television, radio, and widely covered in the press. These seminars, again, were sponsored by the Population Council and the National Research Council; also at this time, the NESDB established a population section and drew together a policy report to submit to the cabinet. This policy report led to the "National Family Planning Policy," which was announced as official government policy in 1970. The government was now stating that population growth was a

detriment to economic growth.

The health ministry was made responsible for implementing the population planning program. Midwives were soon authorized to distribute birth control pills (a crucial step for population planning in the rural provinces). Medical educators were indoctrinated in birth control, and the Ministry of Education introduced "family life education" into their adult education programs. In another major step, the 1971-76 NESDB five-year plan included a plan for population planning, with a goal of reducing the population growth rate from 3% to 2.5% by 1976. Major funding from the United Nations Family Planning Agency started pouring in at this time.

A glance at the developments leading up to the 1970 National Family Planning Policy shows that population planning actually became institutionalized long before it was ever authorized by the government. By 1968, money was already pouring in from foreign associations, especially AID, the Population Council, and UNICEF, seminars were being organized, and policy papers churned out by both foreign and domestic zero-growth institutes. Crucial in setting it all in motion was the NESDB, together with the health ministry. In fact, a veritable incestuous relationship existed among the NESDB, the health ministry, and the private population planning agencies, with certain key individuals sitting on the same committees in both the public and private sector.

Officials in the health ministry also coordinated the aid from international agencies. Between 1972 and 1976, 75-85% of the family planning policy direct costs were financed by international agencies. This percentage remains high to the present day. The AID has been the major donor. Other major foreign donors include the U.N. Family Planning Agency, UNICEF, the Population Council, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Denmark, and Japan. All this funding allowed the government to distribute oral contraceptives free of charge, beginning in October 1976.

In 1974, the Ministry of Public Health initiated a village volunteer program to bring birth control to the rural areas. The program involved recruiting volunteers from each village, who would then receive only two weeks of paramedical training, along with an initial supply of basic household medicines as well as contraceptives. The term volunteer should be used loosely, since a money-making scheme was developed to encourage these villagers to recruit as many people as possible to birth control. The so-called volunteers were permitted to sell the initial supplies at a 35% mark-up and continue to replenish their stocks with additional 35% profit margins. The services they were supposed to provide included pill and condom distribution, maternal and child health care, and nutrition. Imagine all this on two weeks training! This village volunteer program was initiated as part of the Lampang Project, a pilot project designed to develop a cheap birth control system for the rural population, whereby the

villagers would “self-administer their own contraceptives.”

These rural programs went from bad to worse. Allowing basically untrained personnel to administer birth control pills was certainly bad enough. But in 1976, a program began to train midwives to insert IUDs. Government officials believed that the villagers would be more willing to use IUDs if they were administered by the village midwives than by an “outsider,” that is, a physician. In the Lampang Project the midwives were given the respectable titles of Traditional Birth Attendants, and received, again, only two weeks of professional training at a health ministry facility.

The fourth NESDB Plan (1977-81) was a top-down assault on the remaining pro-growth government policies. Specifically the plan called for:

- 1) giving family planning agencies priority financing;
- 2) ending subsidies and benefits, such as allowances for maternity leave and free education for government officials with more than four children;
- 3) revising the law on sterilization, which permitted it upon request only after giving birth to four children;
- 4) requiring the government to pay the cost of sterilization for low-ranking officials, government employees, and personnel of state enterprises.

Mechai, the ‘Condom King’

No discussion of population planning in Thailand would be complete without a look at Mechai Viravaidya, Thailand’s “Condom King.” A former development planner with the NESDB, Mechai holds leadership positions in a variety of zero-growth agencies in Thailand, including the Planned Parenthood Association of Thailand and the Community-Based Family Planning Services, which was founded on a grant from International Planned Parenthood. Since the distribution of contraceptives alone could not explain the collapse of population growth in the last 15 years, a look into Mechai’s methods is necessary. These methods, carried out mainly by his various family planning agencies, could only be described as psychological warfare against the Thai population.

During its first two years of operation, the Community-Based Family Planning Services recruited between 6 and 8 million people to use of birth control, emphasizing the rural areas. Mechai, adopting the “grass roots” approach described earlier, had the villagers themselves distribute birth control devices, especially pills and condoms. Recruited to distribution were the village shopkeepers, grocers, farmers, teachers, even noodle vendors. Mechai adopted incentives such as a free stud service for pigs and special bank loans for those accepting birth control services. Individuals choosing sterilization received more generous loans than those choosing less permanent forms of birth control.

Mechai also integrated the Buddhist religion into population planning appeals by popularizing so-called little known sayings in the Buddhist scriptures, such as “many births cause

suffering.” Mechai stressed the Buddhist philosophical position that one can have “too much of anything,” insisting that this also meant children. He organized monks to publicly stress condoms and pills. Claiming to have once consulted monks to learn the Buddhist position on abortion, he said, “They told me that if you regard the termination of pregnancy a sin, it is a small sin that will prevent many bigger sins.”

His campaign to popularize condoms and overcome their “negative connotations,” e.g., prostitution and venereal disease, is what Mechai is certainly most famous for. His calling card became a brightly colored package of condoms, referred to as “mechais.” He sponsored condom-blowing contests for teachers and students to “desensitize” people to birth control. His Community Based Family Planning Services developed “family planning songs,” learned by children in school with the message for their parents, “Too many children makes you poor.” They also developed family planning games, calendars, savings banks, bikini panties, and T-shirts.

Given the goal of an overall reduction in the population, contraceptives alone would not be adequate, so Mechai has worked overtime to promote vasectomies. Since 1980, more than 50,000 Thais have had free vasectomies, courtesy of the Community Development Association. Mechai created mobile medical units, decorated with birth control slogans, complete with doctors and nurses, and equipped to perform “instant vasectomies.” “It only takes seven minutes,” Mechai tells people. These units operate all around Bangkok and are especially visible whenever there are holiday celebrations. Dr. Apichart Nirapathpongorn, director of the Community Development Association’s medical and nursing bureau and one-time TV personality in a popular game show, claims that the association broke a world record in 1983 when 1,190 people turned up for vasectomies in one day! Dr. Apichart credits these successes to the association’s promotional campaigns.

A product logo of a flying dove, the Thai symbol of virility, is used to counter fears of impotence, as well as eye-catching posters, billboards, and a TV variety show entitled, “Happy Vasectomy.” Their annual “sales blitz,” he says, coincides with the King’s birthday, the biggest holiday in Thailand. In 1984, the Community Development Association won the Marketing Award from Thailand’s Business Management Association, when the vasectomy number rose to 45,173!

At present, the Ministry of Public Health, together with the Community Development Association and the Planned Parenthood Association of Thailand, are zeroing in on their latest birth control targets, the Khmer and Laotian refugees. Funding for their latest program is expected from the New York-based Family Planning International Assistance, which financed the previous unsuccessful programs targeting the refugee camps. Khmer leaders have told Thai officials that they are opposed to birth control because they want to in-

crease their population with the hope of regaining their homeland, and to fill the void left by the deaths of millions of their countrymen during the rule of the Khmer Rouge.

Sombhong Pattawichaiporn, executive director of the Planned Parenthood Association of Thailand, currently responsible for birth control programs in the Laotian camps, recently hinted at plans for coercing refugees into birth control by threatening to withhold their food rations! At present, the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees grants a weekly ration of 3,500 grams of rice to each refugee over nine years of age and 2,000 grams to those younger than nine. Sombhong, along with Dr. Thawat of the Community Development Association, believe that the food rations given by the U.N. refugee agency encourages the refugees to have too many children, and have publicly stated so.

It is not surprising that agencies and individuals in the zero population growth movement would also be pushing zero economic growth. As it happens, Mechai himself is an executive in both the World Wildlife Fund International and the World Wildlife Fund of Thailand. Mechai's rural development schemes being carried out by the Community Development Association, are based strictly on the "small is beautiful" approach, using the "appropriate technology" methods that have been popularized by the World Bank and IMF.

What Mechai introduced into the poorest areas of Thailand, especially the rural northeast, is a scheme whereby impoverished villagers would be forced to practice birth control in order to receive a loan or some other form of assistance. The Community Development Association introduced into rural villages a 50,000 baht fund, divided into 10 baht shares. A vasectomy entitles a villager to 80 shares; female sterilization gets 40; IUD users get 20; pill users get 10; and condom users only get 5. Villagers were then advised on buying chickens, water buffalo, pigs, rain barrels, etc. Obviously, this "development plan" will not only keep those villagers hovering around subsistence levels, but will eventually cause these Thai villagers to die out for lack of offspring. Perhaps this is what the NESDB had in mind all along, since they never considered actual rural development based on the modernization of agriculture a "viable investment." Instead, the NESDB chose to impose the World Bank-IMF model of population reduction and labor intensive farming and production. And to legitimize this backwardness, Mechai's "family planning" groups applaud the lack of people as "quality of life," just as the World Wildlife Fund's environmentalists praise the lack of development as "conservation of nature."

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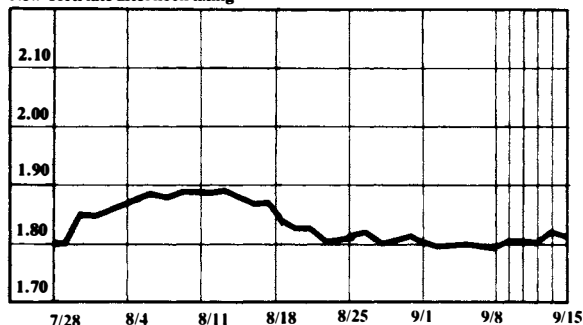
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Currency Rates

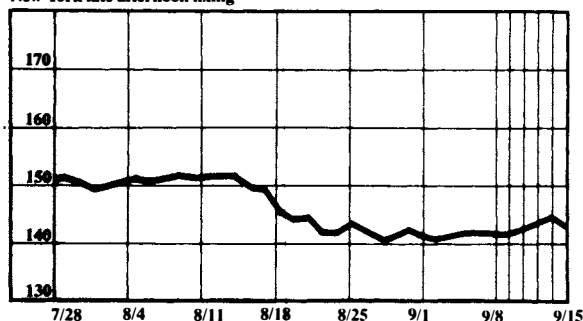
The dollar in deutschemarks

New York late afternoon fixing



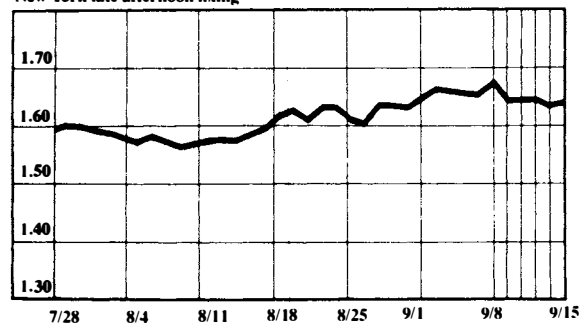
The dollar in yen

New York late afternoon fixing



The British pound in dollars

New York late afternoon fixing



The dollar in Swiss francs

New York late afternoon fixing

