

How ‘Captain Condom’ turned the tide in Thailand’s war on AIDS and overpopulation

BANGKOK — Mechai Viravaidya twice saw Thailand in desperate trouble — first from a ruinous population explosion and then from the AIDS epidemic — and he responded to both crises the same way: with condoms and his own considerable charisma.

Birth control was something Thais neither talked about nor very much practiced in the early 1970s, when the country’s population was growing at an unsustainable pace and the average family had seven children.

So Mr. Mechai decided to tackle the subject that no one else would touch, spearheading a nationwide campaign to publicize and demystify contraceptives.

“It wasn’t a job for intelligent people, smart people, respectable people, aristocratic people,” he said in a June interview.

Mr. Mechai, now 81, is in fact all of these, the foreign-educated son of two doctors, the husband of a former private secretary to the king and, over the years, a government minister, organizational leader and senator.

But he is also uninhibited, unpretentious and always willing to put on a show to persuade people.

His goal with the family-planning campaign, he said, was to make condoms just one more item shoppers picked up in the market, along with soap, toothpaste and dried fish. To pull that off, he knew it would help to lend condoms positive associations, something that made people smile.

“If I can accomplish that by blowing up condoms or filling them with water,” he said, “then fine, I’ll do it.”

Mr. Mechai was speaking not far from the Bangkok offices of the Population and Community Development Association, the organization he founded nearly 50 years ago to fight poverty in Thailand, with family planning a linchpin.

He toured the country, village to village, with an endless array of gimmicks and publicity stunts that linked condoms with fun. Filling them up with water past the point of breaking was a staple performance.

“Who can blow up the biggest condom?” he would call out to the crowds. “Who can make it burst?”

He opened what he called family-planning “supermarkets” at bus stations to distribute contraceptives and persuaded Buddhist monks to bless condoms, distributing videos of the ceremonies. To educate younger Thais, he produced a safe-sex English alphabet that included letters like B for birth control, C for condom and V for vasectomy.

In addition to the spectacle, the campaign had serious infrastructure behind it. He mobilized and trained a network of 350,000 teachers and 12,000 village community leaders.

And he did not limit his family-planning efforts only to condoms. In Bangkok, he offered mass free vasectomies on a parade ground near the palace to celebrate the king’s birthday.

It all added up to more publicity, the main weapon in his arsenal, and the results of his campaign were dramatic. Thailand’s population growth rate fell from more than 3% in 1974 to 0.6% in 2005, and the average number of children per family shrank from seven to fewer than two.

The World Bank called Mr. Mechai’s campaign “one of the most successful and effective family planning programs in the world.”

In 1970, both Thailand and the Philippines had equivalent populations of 36 million.

“Now we have about 70 million, and they have 107 million,” Mr. Mechai said in the interview, actually understating the Philippines population, which is more than 110 million. He added that if Thailand had not addressed its population issue, it too would be sending millions of its citizens abroad to find work.

“If we hadn’t stepped in, it would have been to the deep detri-

ment of the economy of Thailand and the quality of life,” he said.

When the AIDS pandemic began to overwhelm Thailand in the late 1980s, Mr. Mechai employed the same knack for publicity, persuasiveness and showmanship in combating the disease.

As with his first condom campaign, he initially struck out on his own, as the government refused to back a safe-sex campaign, fearing it would hurt the lucrative sex-tourism industry.

So Mr. Mechai turned instead to the military, a powerful institution beyond the reach of civilian government, which agreed to air regular safe-sex announcements on its 300 radio stations and five television stations.

Then in 1991, a new prime minister, Anand Panyarachun, embraced AIDS prevention, making Mr. Mechai his minister of information and tourism. Every government ministry was now called on to play a role in AIDS education.

“We had condoms out everywhere on the streets — everywhere, everywhere,” Mr. Mechai said in a TED Talk recounting his approach. “In taxis, you get condoms, and also, in traffic, the policemen give you condoms.”

And Mr. Mechai — despite or perhaps because of his MBA from Harvard — took it upon himself to become the recognizable symbol that he said every successful marketing program needs, dubbing himself “Captain Condom” and going to schools and nightclubs to promote safe sex.

The World Health Organization called Thailand’s approach to the AIDS crisis “the quickest response to the problem that we have ever seen.” The United Nations said Mechai’s program had achieved a 90% decline in new infections, and the World Bank estimated that it had saved 7.7 million lives between 1991 and 2012.

In his role as a government economist, he toured the country and saw firsthand the poverty and the social and economic dislocations that he later devoted his life to addressing.

“There were children everywhere,” he said of Thai villages. “This was the great problem. And I realized I was wrong in thinking the government could do everything. So I decided to go out on my own.”

In 1974, he left government to found the Population and Community Development Association. It flourished and branched out to address a range of social and economic issues, from rural development to environmental protection.

In the years that followed, his career path took him in and out of government roles, including as Cabinet spokesperson, deputy industry minister and three terms as a member of the Senate between 1987 and 2006.

In addition to his work on family planning and safe sex, developing Thailand’s rural economy has been a decadeslong focus of his activism. In the 1990s, he founded the Village Development Project, which aims to foster entrepreneurship and create income-generating activities in rural Thailand.

It has set up small factories in the countryside to lure workers back home from sweatshops in Bangkok, part of an effort to combat the urban migration that has debilitated rural economies.

His said his greatest pride now is the Mechai Bamboo School in northeastern Thailand, set up to “reengineer rural education” by turning the school into a lifelong learning center and an active contributor to life in its community.

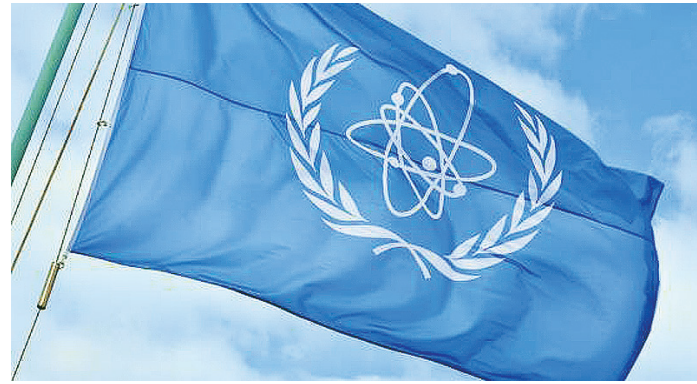
Although now at an age when most people are slowing down, Mr. Mechai has no plans to stop addressing what he said were his life’s main concerns: “to combat economic and social inequality by reducing births, reducing deaths from AIDS and reducing poverty, financial dependence and ignorance.” — © 2022 The New York Times

IAEA chief condemns shelling at nuclear power plant in Ukraine

ZURICH — The head of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) raised grave concerns on Saturday about the shelling the previous day at the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant in Ukraine, saying the action showed the risk of a nuclear disaster.

Both sides accused each other on Saturday of engaging in “nuclear terrorism”. Ukraine’s state nuclear power company Energoatom blamed Russia for the damage while Russia’s defense ministry accused Ukrainian forces of shelling the plant.

“I’m extremely concerned by the shelling yesterday at Europe’s largest nuclear power plant, which underlines the very real risk of a nuclear disaster,” IAEA Director General Rafael



from the Ukrainian electricity system and cause blackouts in the south of the country. Moscow’s forces, it said, had placed weapons and explosives in two of the power-generating units and mined the shoreline outside the plant.

“It is highly probable that all of this will cause a nuclear and radiation disaster,” it said in a statement on Saturday.

Russia’s defense ministry said damage to the plant had only been avoided thanks to the “skillful, competent and effective actions” of its units.

Mr. Grossi said that military action jeopardizing the safety and security of the Zaporizhzhia plant “is completely unacceptable and must be avoided at all costs”. — Reuters

Mariano Grossi said in a statement.

Mr. Grossi, who leads the United Nations nuclear watchdog, urged all sides in the Ukraine conflict to exercise the “utmost restraint” around the plant.

Shells hit a high-voltage power line on Friday at the facility,

prompting its operators to disconnect a reactor despite no radioactive leak being detected. The plant was captured by Russian forces in early March in the opening stage of the war but it is still run by its Ukrainian technicians.

Energoatom said Russia wanted to disconnect the station

Chinese and Taiwanese ships circle in high seas ‘cat and mouse’

TAIPEI — Chinese and Taiwanese warships played high-seas “cat and mouse” on Sunday ahead of the scheduled end of four days of unprecedented Chinese military exercises launched in reaction to a visit to Taiwan by the US house speaker.

Nancy Pelosi’s visit last week to the self-ruled island infuriated China, which responded with test launches of ballistic missiles over the island’s capital for the first time and the cutting of communication links with the United States.

Some 10 warships each from China and Taiwan sailed at close quarters in the Taiwan Strait, with some Chinese vessels crossing the median line, an unofficial buffer separating the two sides, according to a person with knowledge of the matter.

The island’s defense ministry said in a release multiple Chinese military ships, aircraft, and drones were simulating attacks on the island and its navy. It said it had sent aircraft and ships to react “appropriately.”

As Chinese forces “pressed” the line, as they did on Saturday, the Taiwan side stayed close to monitor and, where possible, deny the Chinese the ability to cross, the person said.

“The two sides are showing restraint,” the person said, describing the maneuvers as high seas “cat and mouse.”

“One side tries to cross, and the other stands in the way and forces

them to a more disadvantaged position and eventually return to the other side.”

Taiwan said its shore-based anti-surface missiles and its Patriot surface-to-air-missiles were on stand-by.

The Chinese exercises, centered on six locations around the island that China claims as its own, began on Thursday and are scheduled to last until midday on Sunday, the official Xinhua News Agency reported last week.

China’s military said on Saturday the sea and air joint exercises, north, southwest and east of Taiwan, had a focus on land-strike and sea-assault capabilities.

The United States called the exercises an escalation.

“These activities are a significant escalation in China’s efforts to change the status quo. They are provocative, irresponsible and raise the risk of miscalculation,” a White House spokesperson said.

“They are also at odds with our long-standing goal of maintaining peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait, which is what the world expects.”

‘DAMAGING PEACE’

China says its relations with Taiwan are an internal matter and it reserves the right to bring the island under its control, by force if necessary. Taiwan rejects China’s claims saying only Taiwan’s people can decide their future.

China has also warned the United States not to “act rashly” and create a greater crisis.

Referring to the response to Ms. Pelosi’s visit, the Communist Party’s *People’s Daily* newspaper said China had adopted “effective measures that fully demonstrates that China is fully determined and capable of safeguarding national unity and safeguarding ... sovereignty and territorial integrity.”

Taiwan’s Premier Su Tseng-chang told reporters that China had “arrogantly” used military action to disrupt peace and he called on Beijing not to not flex its military muscle.

Taiwan’s defense ministry said on Saturday its forces scrambled jets to warn away 20 Chinese aircraft, including 14 that crossed the median line. It also detected 14 Chinese ships conducting activity around the Taiwan Strait.

The ministry released a photograph showing Taiwanese sailors closely watching a nearby Chinese vessel.

Taiwan’s forces on Friday fired flares to warn away drones flying over its Kinmen islands and unidentified aircraft flying over its Matsu islands. Both island groups are close to China’s coast.

‘WORLD FACES A CHOICE’

As part of its response to Ms. Pelosi’s visit, China has halted communication through various channels with the United States including between military the-

ater commands and on climate change.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken accused China of taking “irresponsible” steps and moving away from prioritizing peaceful resolution towards the use of force.

Ms. Pelosi, a long-time China critic and a political ally of US President Joseph R. Biden, arrived in Taiwan late on Tuesday on the highest-level visit to the island by an American official in decades, despite Chinese warnings. She said her visit showed unwavering US commitment to supporting Taiwan’s democracy.

“The world faces a choice between autocracy and democracy,” she said. She also stressed that her trip was “not about changing the status quo in Taiwan or the region.”

Taiwan has been self-ruled since 1949, when Mao Zedong’s communists took power in Beijing after defeating Chiang Kai-shek’s Kuomintang nationalists in a civil war, prompting their retreat to the island.

Speaking during a visit to the Philippines, Mr. Blinken said the United States had been hearing concern from allies about what he called China’s dangerous and destabilizing actions but Washington sought to avoid escalating the situation.

He said China’s cessation of bilateral dialogue in eight key areas were moves that would punish the world. — Reuters

Pompeii discoveries shed light on middle class life



A TOURIST visits the archaeological site of the ancient city of Pompeii, Italy, April 27, 2021.

MILAN — Archaeologists have discovered four new rooms in a house in Pompeii filled with plates, amphoras and other everyday objects, giving a snapshot of middle-class life at the moment Mount Vesuvius’ eruption buried the Roman city in AD 79.

The remains of bowls, a hastily emptied trunk, a bed and a crib-shaped terra-cotta perfume burner were found on two floors of a previously-excavated building, the Pompeii archaeological park authority said on Saturday.

Some were more valuable than others — vessels made of bronze or glass next to everyday tools.

“A large slice of the population in the Roman Empire were people who sweated for their daily bread but were also anxious to raise their social status,” the park’s director, Gabriel Zuchtriegel, said.

Archaeologists took plaster casts to reproduce some of the objects from the site in Pompeii, one of Italy’s main tourist attractions near the modern city of Naples.

The rest of the structure, excavated in 2018, includes a courtyard decorated in frescoes of plants, birds and hunting scenes. A niche hosting the household guardian gods, or Lares, gave the “Larario house” its popular name.

“The owners of the Larario house in Pompeii had been able to decorate the courtyard hosting the Lares site and a well with outstanding paintings, but evidently they didn’t have enough money for all of the rooms,” Zuchtriegel added.

“We don’t know who lived here but the pleasurable life depicted in the courtyard was probably more of an aspiration than their everyday reality.” — Reuters

JOB VACANCY

GLAXOSMITHKLINE PHILIPPINES, INC.
23rd Floor 26th St., Finance Center, Bonifacio Global City, Taguig City, 1634 Philippines

Contact Person and Contact details of the Company:
Michelle Torralba
michelle.b.torralba@gsk.com
+632 88920761

Number of vacancy: **1**
Position: **Business Unit Manager**

Job Description
As Business Unit Manager, you would be responsible for creating and implementing the launch strategy in the country.
BUM would be responsible for creating the team structure, resourcing the team, driving execution excellence of the operational plans and deliver the plan. The incumbent will be required to work closely with the global medical and marketing teams, global and regional supply teams and local cross functional teams to support the business.
This role will provide YOU the opportunity to lead key activities to progress YOUR career.

These responsibilities include some of the following:

- Create a strong launch team of marketing and sales for successful vaccine launch in Philippines
- Define the opportunity size, work with the global and regional marketing teams to create the launch plan including brand strategy, customer strategy, consumer strategy, and in collaboration with the medical team to facilitate the creation of medical strategy
- Work closely with medical and CGA to shape the market and develop upon the latent need of adult vaccination
- Develop the template for creating successful adult vaccination brands in the country
- Work closely with the global/regional teams to develop promotional assets and activities
- Drive Execution Excellence in deploying the promotional campaigns and deliver on Lead and Lag KPIs. Deliver on the plan
- Develop sales and financial forecasts and liaise with global supply chain to ensure supplies
- Develop strong cross functional collaborative alliances (Marketing, Sales, Medical, Regulatory, HR, CGA, Supply chain, CTC, Market Access, Comex) to ensure best in class brand launch and beyond
- Effectively align with the business unit to manage A&P behind the brand
- Create strong advocacy with top KEEs and medical societies
- Oversight on the supply and distribution of the brand in the market

Qualifications:

- Degree in Science/Pharmaceuticals
- Marketing/ Business Administration
- Vaccinology/Immunology
- Medico Marketing/ Sales experience with vaccines
- Experience of launching innovating medicines
- People management roles
- Project management expertise
- Strong performance track record
- Strong written and oral communication in English
- Marketing fundamentals
- Strategic orientation
- People agility
- Learning agility
- Ability to navigate a matrix organization
- Strong collaborative mindset
- Performance mindset