

## How the Colombo Plan Began

The Colombo Plan owes its name to the fact that it was initiated in Colombo, the capital of Ceylon. In January 1950, the Foreign Ministers of Australia, Canada, Ceylon, India, New Zealand, Pakistan and the United Kingdom met in that city to discuss a number of political and economic matters of common interest. The Ministers, framing in the context of public affairs a proposition which is of great human significance, agreed that economic development of South and South-East Asia is vitally important to the maintenance of political stability in the countries in that area, and to the growth of an expanding world economy based on multilateral trade.

This was by no means a new idea. Its importance with respect to all the under-developed areas of the world had already been recognized in the aims of the United Nations, in the activities of its Specialized Agencies and of other United Nations organizations such as the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and, in the assistance programmes of national governments such as that of the United States with its Point IV programme. But up to this time the main effort had been directed toward restoring the shattered economies of European countries and other areas afflicted by the war. This in itself had channelled some aid to under-developed areas, but their need was still very great and the achievements in these areas had been relatively small.

### Conditions Which the Plan was Designed to Meet

Perhaps three-quarters of the world's 2,400,000,000 people live in what we have come to call under-developed areas. It is impossible to generalize over such a wide and varied region, but some idea of the standard of living in such areas may be gained from the fact that in South Asia the average weekly food ration is about 12 ounces of grain per person, the per-capita national income is well below \$100 a year and life expectancy is about half what it is in North America. Under-developed areas exist in almost every continent but most glaringly in Asia, Africa and South America. The Commonwealth Foreign Ministers concentrated on Asia—specifically that part of it commonly described as South and South-East Asia. Three-quarters of the people in this area live in Commonwealth Countries or in territories still controlled by the United Kingdom, and the whole area has long had economic relations of the first importance both with the United Kingdom and Western Europe and with North America.

South and South-East Asia is vast enough in itself. It contains some 600,000,000 people—almost a quarter of the world's population. During the war and the years immediately following it, vast changes affecting the lives of these people took place. The first was the physical impact of the war itself. In many parts of South-East Asia, east of the Assam hills where the skeletons of tanks once readied for the Burma road may still be found rusting, the war left physical devastation and a legacy of personal misery.

The second change was psychological. There had already arisen among the peoples of this region, urgently among their leaders and dimly but persistently among the masses, an upsurge of national feeling. Peoples with ancient cultures and traditions but relatively little experience of modern self-govern-