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The Colombo Plan

What is the Colombo Plan? Why is it needed? What are its aims and objectives? What is Canada's interest in it? How is the Plan progressing? These are questions which are currently being asked and which this article will attempt to answer.

THE full title of the Colombo Plan is "The Colombo Plan for Co-operative Economic Development in South and Southeast Asia". It emerged from a meeting of Commonwealth Foreign Ministers held at Colombo in February 1950, the first occasion when the Commonwealth Foreign Ministers met in Asia and the first such meeting at which Foreign Ministers of the new Commonwealth countries in Asia were present. The use of the name "Colombo" in the title of the Colombo Plan has no other significance than that the idea took shape at a meeting held in that city. In fact, the Colombo Plan, though established on the initiative of Commonwealth Governments, is not even restricted to Commonwealth countries but was always intended to encompass the general area of South and Southeast Asia. The original members were Commonwealth countries, India, Pakistan and Ceylon, (as well as the British Territories in the area, Malaya, Singapore, Sarawak, etc.), the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Since then, membership has been extended by the addition of Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Nepal and Viet Nam, and by the United States which, in the implementation of its own Point Four Programme of economic aid in the area, is co-operating fully with other Colombo Plan countries. All these countries are full members of the Consultative Committee, an intergovernmental body which exercises a general supervision over the execution of the Colombo Plan. The Consultative Committee meets annually, normally in the Colombo Plan area, to exchange views on policy matters and to review progress. The remaining countries in the region, namely, Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand, have been represented at Consultative Committee

meetings by official observers and Indonesia has indicated its intention, subject to the approval of its Parliament, to become a full member. The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development is naturally interested in the Colombo Plan and also sends an observer to Consultative Committee meetings.

Need for Help

Even a most cursory examination of the economic and social situation in South and Southeast Asia makes clear the urgent need for something to be done to help the peoples in that region towards a better life. The total population exceeds 570,000,000, roughly a quarter of the world's people. For the great majority, food is scarce and lacking in variety. Health conditions are deplorable. Eight out of ten are unable to read or write. Housing conditions are desperately poor, a one or two-roomed hut of mud or bamboo commonly serving the needs of a whole family. Living standards were low before the war, but the war has made conditions worse. Countries under Japanese occupation were despoiled and neglected and economic assets, such as rubber and tea plantations, power stations and transportation facilities, which had been painfully built up over long periods, were destroyed or fell into disrepair. In the Indian sub-continent, the very heavy strain on transportation and factories, the diversion of productive capacity to defence needs, and the inability to keep pace with the requirements of maintenance, repair and replacement, took their toll of economic assets.

Political and social disturbances have added to the difficulties in South and Southeast Asia. The transfer of power to the new Governments of India and Pakistan was carried out smoothly. But the

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