

Canadian Aid for the Aborigines of Malaysia

IN 1955, during a brief stay in what was then Malaya, the Secretary of State for External Affairs (later Prime Minister of Canada), the Right Honourable Lester B. Pearson, visited an aborigine-research station at Gombak, a few miles from Kuala Lumpur. The station at that time consisted of a thatch-roofed long-house erected on stilts, which served as a communal hall for a group of aborigine families, a number of small thatched huts in which the families lived, and an administrative building housing the administrative staff of the station. The shy but friendly aborigines had been brought from the deep jungle in order to teach them better methods of food production and hygiene, after which they were to return to their home communities to put into practice what they had learnt.

If a 1955 visitor were to return to the Gombak research station today, he would find it hard to believe that it was the same place. It has since become the headquarters of the Aborigine Medical and Radio Services. There is a 420-bed hospital with separate accommodation for families of patients, who refuse to be separated. A six-month medical-training programme for aborigines (*orang asli*) has been established, and 270 of them are on the Aborigine Medical Service staff serving at Gombak and in the jungle. At present there is a Malaysian, non-aborigine staff of 12 and a volunteer and expatriate staff of 13. Dr. J. D. F. MacLean, a Canadian serving with CARE/MEDICO, has recently arrived to replace a fellow countryman, Dr. E. J. Ragan, who also served at Gombak. Miss Elaine Wach, a Canadian nurse, recently returned to Canada after serving at Gombak.

A Successful Canadian Project

At the request of the Government of Malaysia, the Canadian Government, in one of its most successful current projects under the Colombo Plan, has provided equipment costing over \$300,000 for the medical service of the Malaysian Department of Aborigine Affairs. This project has involved the provision of two-way radio equipment for the development of a medical-services communications system for the benefit of the *orang asli* living in remote jungle areas of West Malaysia. A total of 50 two-way wireless sets and petrol-generators have been provided by the Canadian Government under this project.

The project this year has been expanded to include the provision of five ambulances for the Gombak Aborigine Hospital to assist in bringing *orang asli* patients from the jungle fringe to various medical posts and to Gombak.

At a ceremony at Gombak on September 10, 1968, the five Canadian ambulances were presented by the Canadian High Commissioner, Mr. John G. Hadwen, to the Acting Minister of Lands and Mines of Malaysia, whose