

ment had begun reaching toward national self-realization. The war and its aftermath quickened this aspiration.

This led to the third change, which was political. There are still parts of South and South-East Asia which are not self-governing—Malaya and New Guinea, for example; but enlightened efforts are being made, often in the face of enormous difficulties, to lead the peoples of these areas toward self-government. A few small states in South and South-East Asia, which never came directly under colonial rule, retain their own traditional forms of independent government, in some cases modified by the introduction of democratic processes. Thailand and Nepal, of the countries associated with the Colombo Plan, fall in this category. The Associated States of Viet-Nam, Laos and Cambodia, which we commonly cover with the name Indo-China, are emerging out of the crucible of war into a condition of independence as yet difficult to define. The Philippines, on the eastern fringe of South-East Asia, has been self-governing for several years. Perhaps the most striking political change in this area in recent years has been the emergence of five new independent countries—India, Pakistan, Ceylon, Burma and Indonesia. The governments of these countries, which contain the bulk of the people of the area, are all trying, in their own ways and according to their own lights, to build up stable, democratic societies and to throw off the shackles of feudalism and outmoded caste structures.

The fourth change was economic. While populations increased faster than ever, overall production of food grains failed to keep pace—partly as a result of natural calamities and because of disruptive civil wars in the main rice-producing areas, but mainly because there had been insufficient advance in agricultural methods and in systems of irrigating dry land and controlling floods to keep pace with increasing populations. At the same time the dollar surplus which the area had enjoyed before the war was replaced by a chronic dollar shortage, only intermittently relieved by demand for the area's raw materials. Also, the steady flow of capital into the area, which marked the pre-war period, dwindled, either as a result of disturbances caused by the war or because private investors became afraid to risk their savings in the face of new uncertainties.

Drawing up the Plan

These changes launched South and South-East Asia into a new era of its history. It was to the problems attendant on these changes that the Commonwealth Foreign Ministers addressed themselves in January 1950. Having agreed on the urgent need to quicken the pace of economic development, the Foreign Ministers set up a committee to consider in greater detail what might be done. This committee was and is known as the Consultative Committee on Co-operative Economic Development in South and South-East Asia, and it held its first meeting in Sydney, Australia, in May 1950.

It was decided that a comprehensive plan should be prepared, and at its next meeting in London in October 1950, the Consultative Committee drew up the Colombo Plan.* The Plan consists of a review of the conditions it is designed to meet, an outline of the development programmes of the Commonwealth countries and territories of South and South-East Asia, and an estimate

* The Plan, entitled the Colombo Plan for Co-operative Economic Development in South and South-East Asia, was printed by H.M. Stationery Office, London.