

External Affairs
Supplementary Paper

No. 57/2 TOUR OF SOUTH AND SOUTH-EAST ASIA

Report made in the House of Commons, January 14, 1957,
by the Hon. Paul Martin, Canadian Delegate to the
Colombo Plan meetings at Wellington, New Zealand, on
his visit to 13 countries in South and South-East Asia.

... I was asked by the Prime Minister and my colleagues
in the Government to represent Canada at the consultative meetings
on the Ministerial level of the Colombo Plan which were held,
beginning on December 4, in Wellington, New Zealand and at the
same time to take advantage of that long journey to visit some
13 countries in South and South-East Asia with which Canada has
not had as great contact in the past as have many other nations
whose history and period of existence are longer than our own.

So on November 11 I journeyed first to the Philippines
and from there to Indochina to Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. I am
the first Canadian Minister of the Crown to have had the privilege
of going to Indochina at any time, certainly since the setting up
of the three International Supervisory Commissions which operate
in those three countries in that historic part of Asia. From
there I went to Indonesia and then to Thailand; from there to
Australia and to New Zealand for the Colombo Plan meeting. Then
back to Sydney, that great city in Australia, and on to Canberra
for consultation and talks with the Prime Minister and members
of the Government of Australia.

Afterward I journeyed to Singapore, to Malaya, to Ceylon,
to India and Pakistan, and then back home.

In all of these places I had the opportunity of discussing
matters with the head of every state where the head of the state
is actually the chief of government. In those countries where the
prime minister is the head of the government or, as in the case of
Singapore and Malaya where the chief minister is the head of the
government, I had the opportunity of conferring and talking with
these latter persons on matters of mutual and world interest.
Likewise in every country I had the opportunity of valuable talks
with all the foreign ministers but one and with my opposite numbers
in the field of health and welfare. I should like now to thank
all of those governments for the opportunities which they provided
me as a member of the Government of Canada to discuss with them
problems of common interest and of international concern.

Understanding Needed

It is I know difficult to draw conclusions from what one
has seen and heard. It is possible sometimes to formulate too
readily impressions which one has gathered, particularly in a continent
like Asia with its millions of people, more people than are to be
found anywhere else in the world, more in the two countries of China
and India than in all Europe and all the Americas together. The
overriding impression I gained is that in the formulation of policy
which has to do with the peace of the world, with the relations of
one state with another, we ought in the assessment we make of other
peoples' conduct and actions, of other governments' policies, to
seek to understand the circumstances and the context in which those
policies are formulated and projected. That certainly is true of
Asia.

Canada has consistently sought to express to all nations its friendship and understanding. It has not received in return the kind of collaboration and appreciation that one would sometimes think it should receive from certain quarters. But as between Canada and India, for instance, there has been, during the past half decade at any rate, a close understanding and a disposition on our part to appreciate the significant and potential role and actual role which that country can play in Asia and international affairs generally.

In spite of that, and although I in a modest way at the United Nations have from time to time been part of this desire to understand India, I must frankly say that I did say in India on several occasions that some of the attitudes taken in Asia did cause me personally at any rate on occasion to express some wonderment. In the light of this, with existing foreshadowings in terms of geography that confront that great nation and other Asian nations, I can well understand how important it is that each of us, officially and privately, try to understand the problems immediately confronting some of these countries and at the same time urge that there be reciprocal action on their part as to the reasons we in the West on occasion take the courses which, in our interests and in the interests of the world at large, from our point of view we regard as essential.

I neglected to mention that among the countries I visited was Burma, which borders on China, close to Indochina and India. It is a country of 18 millions of people dedicated to the principles of a strong religious belief. It serves as a symbol, in one sense, of the kind of forces that are at play in that great land mass we call Asia.

Wherever I went I sought first of all to affirm our friendship for these nations, and to indicate to them that the Canadian Government, regardless of party, and the Canadian people disposed as they are toward building a peaceful world, had for them nothing but a desire of friendship and collaboration to the extent of their capacity. I also told them that, as a member of the Commonwealth, Canada felt that that instrument had in its very concept the opportunity of providing not only for the good of its constituents but for the welfare of all nations in the world, in Asia as well as elsewhere, who are prepared to understand its good intentions and purposes. I also sought to indicate that while there had been differences between Canada and others in the United Nations on recent actions on the part of one member of the Commonwealth, because of that difference, while it reflected the objective character of Canada's approach to international affairs as certainly the Government saw it, there could be no justification for any nation's believing that Canada did not have absolute faith in the character of and the purposes which, generally speaking, Her Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom seeks to establish. I also sought to indicate that because we were the closest neighbour of the United States, with whom we did not always have full accord in matters having to do with problems affecting our two countries, we had, side by side, over 140 years, lived in peace; and that whatever may be the misgivings of certain countries about that nation it was my judgment, as one Canadian representing my government in Asia, that the basic foreign policy of the United States could only be interpreted as one directed toward the easing of international tension and the preservation of peace in the world.

I will not say that these interpretations were always acceptable but I thought that was the place to say these things, and I said them, I hope, in proper terms and in proper context; and I believe they were accepted as coming from a nation that has gradually built up for itself a reputation for an objective approach to international affairs.

Of course, in Australia and in New Zealand one felt that one was within, as it were, the family circle even though in respect to some matters of recent origin there have been honest differences of view. The position of Australia in this particular is well known. I had the opportunity of discussing these matters with Mr. Menzies, the Prime Minister of Australia, and his foreign minister and, indeed, on one memorable afternoon with all the members of his government. Mr. Menzies said of Canada that notwithstanding what may in particular instances be differences in point of view, one thing that the world could know of Canada was that it spoke as a member of the Commonwealth in the light of what it understood to be its obligations based on no consideration but the good of the Commonwealth and the good of all nations throughout the world.

In Ceylon, in India and in Pakistan, notwithstanding the fact that recent events have, understandably, caused a strain on certain relations I found that the situation there now -- based upon my conversations with the three leaders, namely the Prime Minister of Ceylon, Mr. Bandaranaike, Mr. Nehru in India and Prime Minister Suhrawardy in Pakistan -- is that there is on their part a recognition of the value of the Commonwealth not only as a sensible grouping of nations in this inter-dependent world but as an instrument which can and is being used to interpret Western opinion in many sectors of Asia. I believe that is an important fact to state and to remember. There may be dissident voices in some of these countries but my judgment would be that, for the most part, those who at the present time have to do with the conduct of government in those great countries recognize that in the consultations of prime ministers, in the consultations of Commonwealth foreign ministers and in the collaboration that takes place in the United Nations, the Commonwealth serves as a valuable instrument in a world that needs to move closer and closer together rather than diverge on an increasing scale.

I took occasion not only to discuss matters in accordance with the mandate given by my colleagues with those responsible for the conduct of government but to visit the people as well. I took occasion to go into their villages. Anyone who knows anything about the complex character of that great Asian state of India will understand what the village means to that country with its 360 millions of people, 80 per cent of whom live in the villages of which there are some half million which have the form, the character and the quality of centuries-old construction. I sought by going amongst the people to indicate, by manner and conduct, that it was the desire of the people of Canada that we should be friends with them, and as well with other nations in Asia, as indeed is the case with other countries in the world who are willing to accept our friendship.

There are some on this continent, and I suspect the same is true in other parts of the world, who possibly misunderstand on occasion a country like India; who sometimes feel that possibly India is disposed, because of its policy of neutralism, to give greater support to those who do not agree with the basic concepts of the free nations of the world. I should like to say this at once. There is a great undercurrent of spiritual conviction in India, as there is in the case of most of the countries I visited. The religion of Buddha, the Hindu religion, the Moslem religion, the Christian religion, together with the natural instinct so many Asians have for a philosophical bent, in my opinion all these things make these countries an impregnable fortress against the possible encroachment of totalitarian ideals of programs.

Based on these facts and the talks I had in India with many members of the Government, with one of them on five occasions and with another on four, I cannot believe that we are justified in suggesting that India would ever embrace dialectal materialism as it is projected to us frequently from the Kremlin or from any other source. This is an important consideration in the kind of world in which we live, where some time there may have to be a decision as to which form of society will prevail ultimately. I am satisfied that while there may not always be political affinity there will be what is even more important, a sort of spiritual affinity between these nations of Asia and the basic concepts of Western civilization.

In addition there is another reason for the conclusions I reached. India, Ceylon and Pakistan are deeply dedicated to the democratic form of government and to the parliamentary process. There is no disposition there to accept as efficient or as possible a totalitarian form of government, suppressing, as ultimately that form does, the kind of freedom out of which political maturity can only grow. Of course, that exists in Australia and New Zealand, as it does here. I spend little time on this because it is taken for granted, although in some places on this continent it is not taken for granted that the kind of fundamentals which I have postulated are accepted generally in Asia. I can only say that my belief, and it is a strongly entrenched belief now, is that these principles are widely accepted in India, in Pakistan and in Ceylon.

Colombo Plan

The Colombo Plan came into being in 1951 in Ceylon, in the capital of the country which was the first nation of the Commonwealth in that part of Asia which I visited. I think I can say, whether or not we all agree on the extent of the contributions made, that having in mind that the old world extracted from the great Asian land mass much of the wealth of that continent in another day, oftentimes for its own benefit, nothing is more salutary in our time, I believe, than the fact that now the Western nations of the British Commonwealth, in association with nations in Asia, have joined together for the purpose of promoting the improvement of the economic and social life of the people of Asia. It is a hopeful sign for the improvement of international relations between certain nations of the West and that section of the world that it should be possible for nations like Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Great Britain and the United States to share some of their skills and some of their resources according to their capacity with nations whose material standards of life admittedly are not as high as their own. I am firmly of the view that to the extent we follow this course we will be making an important contribution to the peace of the world.

I realize that one must be practical and realistic about the extent to which any nation can go. But, Mr. Speaker, I could not refrain from saying these things to this House, when I think of the hospitals I have visited, the maternity centres I have visited, the eye centres I have seen, the need for medical schools and hospitals and the like. I cannot help but feel that we, through the Colombo Plan, are really making a useful contribution in the kind of assistance which we are able to give. I saw a doctor in Chittagong, in East Pakistan, only 10 days ago, who had received his degree as an ophthalmologist at the University of Montreal under the Colombo Plan. He was the only eye specialist in that part of the country. I saw before him some 300 cases of glaucoma that might have gone without treatment if it had not been for the fact that he had received training under the Colombo Plan and in this particular case through Canada.

But one should not for a moment conclude that it is possible through a plan of this sort to take care entirely of the problem of reconstruction in a continent like Asia. The assistance given by the United States, and it is considerable, and by the other participating countries in the Colombo Plan, and that assistance too is considerable, is marginal only. If there is going to be a satisfactory measure of reconstruction on the economic and social side in Asia, it will be largely due to the efforts that are now being put forward by the people of Asia themselves. This I clearly indicated to them when I said, on behalf of Canada generally, that our assistance as a Colombo Plan power was made without any strings attached. It was not made for the purpose of effecting political alliances or of having them move from positions of neutrality to positions of antagonistic support. I said, what is the case, that our assistance -- and I indicated we were not all agreed in Canada on what the measure of assistance should be -- was based upon a sincere appreciation that in this inter-dependent world our humanitarian obligations demanded of us to render some assistance to those nations and to these people.

While that is the case, I could not help but feel, particularly at the Colombo Plan meetings, as I now visualize the political personalities who sat around the conference table, ministers representing every government of the Colombo Plan group, that while we might have our differences in economic and social terms, every minister there represented governments that share with us common beliefs in the value of individual freedom, and share with us our view of the importance of the individual human being in his or her relationship to the state, and the belief that, inadequate as it sometimes may be, there is no more effective guarantee for the preservation of human freedom than governments composed of men and women chosen by the people to govern the nation; in other words, a common belief in the parliamentary form of government. And with those common denominators, together with the spiritual foundations, which I have already mentioned, I have no doubt, whether or not we belong to the same military alliances, or the same political grouping, that the vast majority of the nations of Asia with whom I had these contacts can be counted on in the long term to give their expression in support of a society based upon freedom and not on its suppression.

While there was concern in some places about actions taken in Egypt, there were strong denunciations about the aggression of the Soviet Union in Hungary. I spoke on one occasion to the Indian Council on World Affairs. I do not know whether there were reports here of this meeting, but some critical comment was made by one or two individuals who interpolated questions at the meeting. I said in my remarks that there was a vast difference between the attitude of Great Britain and of France toward their obligations under the Charter of the United Nations and the reaction of the Soviet Union not to one but to 10 resolutions passed in the Assembly against the aggression it perpetrated in Hungary. The difference in the two cases was that in the one there was an acceptance on the part of the charged parties, if you like, of the resolution taken by the United Nations and in the other a complete flouting of the resolutions passed by the United Nations. And that I regard as a matter of the greatest significance.

International Supervisory Commissions

It would be wrong for me to overlook in this account the important work of the International Supervisory Commissions in Indochina. Whenever I use the phrase "Indochina" now I remember the correction made by a distinguished Australian who told me that I should no longer speak of Indochina but rather of three countries

in Indochina. Indochina is no longer a fact although at one time it did represent a geographical entity. Now there is no Indochina but North and South Vietnam, a nation in its undivided quality representing 20 millions of people; Cambodia, representing 3 million people; and Laos, a small nation representing 1½ million people. In each of these there is now a rivalry of varying dimensions for supremacy between competing interests.

The House will recall that the International Supervisory Commissions came into being not as a result of the action of the United Nations but of the accord arrived at in Geneva in 1954 by the great powers. Canada is represented on the three International Supervisory Commissions that exist in these countries. The chairman is a national of India and the third member is from Poland. If one wanted an example of the effectiveness of a United Nations paramilitary force in action to meet a specific ad hoc purpose one finds it in the three International Supervisory Commissions. Those three commissions have kept the peace in an area of the world that threatened us all, the House will recall, some two and one-half years ago. When those commissions will be able to finish their work I cannot say. Many Canadians are serving on these three commissions. I would like to pay a tribute, on the occasion of my return to the House, to the work of our fellow citizens who during the past two years, under the most trying of circumstances have upheld the dignity and the honour of this nation.

It is difficult, I know, to translate one's feelings about a matter such as this, and I am not doing it to the extent that I possibly could if I were less fatigued and better prepared; but I would like the House to appreciate for one moment the significance of an international supervisory body that has its scene of operations away up in the mountains of Laos, in a primitive part of the country, where the march of civilization seemingly has made but little impress, and where the troops of the Royal Government occupy strategic hills in their several thousands, and not far away are the forces of the Pathet Lao group, forces that have received assistance from the so-called Chinese People's Republic and from the Soviet Union, both holding fixed positions, positions that represent the situation on the date of cease-fire but who, thanks to the stabilizing influence of the International Supervisory Commission, are not at war but at peace with one another.

We shall hear more of these three countries in the course of the ensuing period. They may not be the most powerful countries in the world but they do occupy geographic areas of strategic interest, not only geographically but in terms of the acceptance or the rejection of political forces that are basic, Mr. Speaker, in the troubled world which confronts all of us. No one man represents Asia. When he was in Washington Mr. Nehru is reported to have said that he did not seek to be the single spokesman for Asia. I can well understand now what he meant and why he made that statement; but he hoped to provide a bridge between one important section of the Western world and Asia. I believe that Mr. Nehru is the bridge between that section of the world and those sections of the West who respect his judgment and who understand the basic purposes of his policies. It would be easy and popular to join in decrying some of his actions but I shall not do that because I believe more strongly than ever before that in the interests of world peace if we are going to have a proper acceptance on the part of Asia of our good intentions we for our part must recognize the dominating motives of the present great Prime Minister of India.

For us he has great respect and in our Prime Minister (Mr. St. Laurent), our Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Pearson) and the President of the United States he has great confidence, as he has in other political leaders in other parts of the world, and the existence of this confidence is a most important matter.

I saw Mr. Nehru for a few moments immediately upon his return from the United States and Canada; I saw him the next morning and later again that day. I found in him the same disposition to understand other points of view in a spirit of tolerance that I personally had experienced at the United Nations in my relations with spokesmen of India. It is not always possible to agree but it is essential, if constructive efforts are to be made, that there should exist a capacity to appreciate the reasons for certain attitudes and approaches. It is in this way that differences are composed and agreements are achieved.

I do not believe one can attach too great importance to the acceptance by political leaders of the good intentions of others and their appreciation of the factors involved in differing attitudes. Given conditions of this kind and an absence of vituperation in the conduct of one nation with another, I think it is possible to work out solutions that will result in a satisfactory disposition of the problems that divide mankind at this time.

I was not the only one travelling in Asia at this time. There were more important political personalities than myself, holding higher offices and representing greater power numerically and perhaps influentially. I could not hope to emulate some of the receptions accorded them or the influence which for the time being they may have sought to exercise. I spoke in one village to about 10,000 people one day where others only a week before spoke to several hundreds of thousands. We did not speak of the same things and I am sure that behind the things that were said there were different motivations and intentions.

I spoke of international friendship, of the importance of social and economic reconstruction and of improvements in health and living standards, of our belief in the value of the United Nations as an instrument for the discussion, and we trust ultimately the resolving, of some major world problems that divide us at this time. Behind my simple observations was based the pattern that comes from a belief in spiritual values, that comes from a belief in individual freedom as opposed to totalitarian power through which millions of people are caused to accept the dictates of a small group which constitutes itself as the government of the day. No one can tell whether my peregrinations will have the kind of effect which I in moments of deep sincerity would like to think possible. But I would say this, that as one man in the face of the situation attending that tremendously interesting and complicated continent, I did my best to put forward not only the point of view of the Government of Canada or of any political party but the point of view of all the people of Canada. In my discussions with members of governments of course, I could only speak for the Government of Canada. I would like to think I did put forward in those private talks, the results of which I hope will in the not too distant future become apparent, the point of view which we on this side believe to be the most desirable position to take.

I come back from this experience, Mr. Speaker, not as an expert but more humble than ever in the face of the great problems that stagger mankind in Asia today as they do elsewhere. I return confident in the belief that if we observe the principles embodied in the Charter of the United Nations, if we employ the media of

adjudication and conciliation instead of force, if we bear in mind at the same time that every country has its own problems and its own way of dealing with them, then assuming the necessary conditions of good faith, we shall, as mankind has in the past, surmount the tremendous issues that confront us all.

Having said all these things I would not want to indicate to the people of Asia, whose guest I was, who extended me their friendship and their collaboration, whose members of government listened understandingly to what I had to say on behalf of my colleagues, that I now make invidious comparisons between my country and the lot of the people of Asia. That is not my purpose when I say that having had the experience of visiting lands where long before this country came into being there was deep theological and philosophic thought, having in mind the fact that the industrial revolution has not touched them as it has reached us and as a consequence has not given them the same material benefits it has given us, I will not be misunderstood when I say to this House that I return to my seat, I come back to Canada convinced more than ever before of the richness of our heritage.

I can only express the hope that all of us will in the face of our good fortune seek to give expression to Him who in the final analysis is responsible for many advantages that have not yet been opened to peoples in other areas, and that this will stir us on to recognize that we are all our brothers' keepers in this inter-dependent world. Unless this attitude and the policy of the good neighbour prevail, we cannot look forward to the fulfilment of what we want to see realized in our times and for our children, those things without which we cannot preserve responsible measures of security and freedom in a world at peace.

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