THE COLOMBO PLAN
By Malcolm Fraser, Member for Wannon

Since the last war and particularly since he has learnt the secrets of Nuclear power, Mankind is slowly coming to the conclusion that it will continue to exist only if the different peoples of the earth live in peace and mutual co-operation. Even though the world is in many ways divided into two semi-hostile groups, it is still true to say that today we can find many examples of mutual co-operation and help that just did not exist before 1939.

The Colombo Plan is perhaps the finest example of international co-operation that the world has ever seen in peace time. Its basic idea was the co-operative economic development of South and South East Asia, an area holding over 600 million people, with an annual population increase of over 7 million. British Commonwealth Foreign Ministers originally conceived the idea and drew up the initial plans in Colombo in 1950. In the first place there were seven participating Commonwealth countries but now all the countries of South and South East Asia have become members. Its total of 21 members come from the four continents of Asia, Europe, America and Australia, a truly global partnership.

The Colombo Plan was designed specifically to help the countries of South and South East Asia. After the last war, many of these countries achieved their own freedom and democratic self-government. If the new democracies were to survive, it was essential that the peoples of these countries be helped and shown the way out of poverty, hopelessness and despair.

More of everything was needed, more food, more clothing, more money, better education, health facilities and more stable employment. Lack of capital and of technical knowledge and skill constituted serious limitation to the pace of development. If freedom and democracy were to survive it was and is essential that the rate of development in these countries be as quick as possible. Burma, Ceylon, India, Indonesia, the Federation of Malaya, Singapore, Sarawak, North Borneo, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Thailand, Viet Nam, Cambodia and Laos have all been helped under the Colombo Plan.

A major part of aid under the Plan has gone towards helping these peoples become self-sufficient in food. Water conservation, irrigation, modern methods of cultivation and the application of
fertilisers are all helping in this objective.

Industries are also beginning in many of the South East Asian countries, although on account of the compelling needs of increased food production, it has taken a definite second place. Most progress has been made in India, Pakistan and the Philippines, especially regarding cement, textiles, steel and electric power.

Capital aid from the donor members has mostly been provided in the form of special equipment for developmental projects, supplies of agricultural equipment and finance for certain projects. Although Colombo Plan Aid is only marginal, its operation in vital places has helped the pace of development.

To the end of June, 1956, Canada had spent $167 million in aid. India, herself a receiver, had pledged R 100 million to Nepal. To June, 1955, America had granted $841 million in aid. In the first six years of the Plan, Australia pledged just over $31 million which has gone to six receiver countries. Assistance included road making machinery, heavy earth moving equipment, rolling stock, tractors and agricultural equipment.

Despite this positive material aid, the greatest benefit to Australia and her neighbours may come from another aspect of the Plan. Asian students come here to our Universities or to take jobs where they can learn and be taught. They see Australia and I hope make many friends here. They come to understand us and we them.

If international relationship and friendship can be forged in this way, on a general basis, then if nothing else is achieved, the Plan must be called a success. It is worth noting that, in this respect, if you ever come across one of these Asian students, you may be able to help him, yourself, Australia and the whole of South East Asia.

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