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INDIAN COUNCIL OF WORLD AFFAIRS

THE BANDUNG CONFERENCE



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By

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

THE analysis of the Bandung Conference presented in these pages has been reprinted from *India Quarterly* (originally published in that Journal with the permission of the Secretary-General of the Conference) as it was felt that a wider circle of readers were interested in its contents. It aims at no more than a presentation of the background and the decisions of the Conference ; the position which the author held as a member of the Joint Secretariat of the Conference precludes him from taking up a comprehensive study.

30 September, 1955.

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THE GENESIS OF THE CONFERENCE

The Asian-African Conference is an important landmark in the growth of co-operation among the Asian-African peoples. The proposal to hold the Conference was specifically made by Dr. Ali Sastroamidjojo, Prime Minister of Indonesia, on 13 January 1954.¹ The first expression of an Asian sentiment can historically be traced to August 1926 when the Asian delegations to the non-official International Conference for Peace held at Bierville declared in a memorandum that Asia must have its rightful place in the consideration of world problems. 'There is one thing,' they said, 'which cannot fail to strike anyone who studies the peace movements of Europe. It is the fact—which even your deliberations today have emphasized—that when European people think of peace they think of it only in terms of Europe. In the imagination of European thinkers the world seems to be confined to the areas inhabited by European races. The vast continent of Asia, containing as it does some of the most ancient civilizations, and holding the vast majority of the world's population, and Africa, with its particular problems, do not come into the picture at all. This, we submit with all humility, is a wrong point of view.' The Asian Relations Conference, which met in New Delhi in March-April 1947 under the auspices of the Indian Council of World Affairs, was the next important landmark: to that Conference came representatives from practically all the countries of Asia, except Japan but including the Soviet Republics of Central Asia, to consider the common problems which all Asian countries had to face, such as national movements for freedom, racial problems, colonial economy, industrial development, intra-Asia migration, the status of women and cultural co-operation. The growth of Asian sentiment and co-operation was facilitated by the achievement of independence by Burma, Ceylon, India, Pakistan and the Philippines between 1946 and 1949—witness the conference at New Delhi in January 1949 called by the Prime Minister of India to consider the situation in Indonesia arising out of the second

¹ *Merdeka*, Djakarta, 13 January 1954.

Dutch 'police action' against the infant Republic of Indonesia. That official conference, in addition to condemning the Dutch military action against the Indonesian Republic, expressed the opinion 'that participating Governments would consult among themselves in order to explore ways and means of establishing suitable machinery, having regard to the areas concerned, for promoting consultation and co-operation within the framework of the United Nations'.

Reference may also be made in this context to the value of the conference of some of the South and South-East Asian countries² in addition to Australia which met in May 1950 at Baguio in the Philippines. The conference recommended that they must consult each other to further the interests of the peoples of the region and to ensure that in any consideration of the special problems of South and South-East Asia, the point of view of the peoples of this area be prominently kept in mind. The formation of an Asian-African group in the United Nations is also of some significance in promoting Asian-African co-operation. Though not an organized group with a permanent secretariat or a rigid programme, the group did facilitate the taking of a more or less common attitude on the part of the members of the region in the United Nations on such common problems as colonialism, racial discrimination and the like.

When, therefore, the Colombo Powers—Burma, Ceylon, India, Indonesia and Pakistan—met at Colombo in April 1954 to discuss the attitude that they should take towards such problems of common interest as peace in Indo-China, the recognition of the People's Republic of China in the United Nations and the ending of colonialism in Tunisia and Morocco, they were not meeting as strangers: years of co-operation in some form or other between most of the countries in the region had given the idea of Asian-African co-operation some place in the public mind, and they were aware of it. The joint statement issued at the end of the Conference on 2 May 1954 stated that the Prime Ministers had discussed 'the desirability of holding a conference of Asian-African nations and favoured a proposal that the Prime Minister of Indonesia might explore the possibility of such a conference.'

Between May 1954 and December 1954, when the Bogor Conference finally took the decision to convene an Asian-African Conference, the Prime Ministers of India, Indonesia and Burma had had fruitful discussions regarding the purposes of the Conference and the problems which the organization of such a Conference involved.

² Ceylon, India, Pakistan, the Philippines and Indonesia.

On 25 September 1954, Prime Ministers Sastroamidjojo and Nehru issued a joint statement which stated in part: 'They discussed also the proposal to have a Conference of representatives of Asian and African countries and were agreed that a Conference of this kind was desirable and would be helpful in promoting the cause of peace and common approach to these problems... It was also considered by them that, prior to the meeting of such a Conference, it would be advisable for the Prime Ministers of the Colombo countries to meet together, preferably at Djakarta.'

The final decision to convene the Asian-African Conference was taken at Bogor in Indonesia on 28 and 29 December 1954. The Bogor *communiqué* clarified the purposes of the Conference, membership and allied issues as follows:

1. The Conference was to be convened under the sponsorship of the Colombo Powers;
2. The purposes of the Conference were to be:
 - (a) to promote goodwill and co-operation between the nations of Asia and Africa, to explore and advance their mutual as well as common interests and to establish and further friendliness and neighbourly relations;
 - (b) to consider social, economic and cultural problems and the relations of the countries represented;
 - (c) to consider problems of special interest to Asian and African peoples—for example, problems affecting national sovereignty, racialism and colonialism; and
 - (d) to view the position of Asia and Africa and their peoples in the world of today and the contribution they can make to the promotion of world peace and co-operation;
3. On the basis that all countries in Asia and Africa which had independent Governments should be invited, invitations were to be sent to the following countries: Afghanistan, Cambodia, the Central African Federation, China, Egypt, Ethiopia, the Gold Coast, Iran, Iraq, Japan, Jordan, Laos, Lebanon, Liberia, Libya, Nepal, the Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Thailand, Turkey, Viet Nam (North), Viet Nam (South) and Yemen;
4. The representation at the Conference was to be at ministerial level and it was hoped that each country invited

- would be represented by her Prime Minister or/and Foreign Minister ;
5. The Conference would determine its own procedure and agenda, the general scope of which was set out in the purposes of the Conference ;
 6. Acceptance of the invitation to participate in the Conference implied only that the country invited was in general agreement with the purposes of the Conference ; it would not involve or imply any change in the view of the Conference of the status of any other country. The basic purpose of the Conference was that the countries concerned should become better acquainted with one another's points of view ;
 7. It was made clear that in seeking to convene the Asian-African Conference there was no desire for exclusiveness in respect of membership or for the building up of a regional bloc among the participating countries.

The student of Asian history must also note in passing that the influence which the decisions of the Colombo Powers had on the Geneva Conference (1954) and the realization by the world that the Colombo decisions had a real influence in shaping the Geneva Agreement probably helped in the ultimate decision that an Asian-African Conference, on the lines indicated, be convened. In his remarkable speech to the delegates assembled at the Bandung Conference on 18 April, President Sukarno said : 'I think it is generally recognized that the activity of the Prime Ministers of the sponsoring countries which invited you here had a not unimportant role to play in ending the fighting in Indo-China. Look, the people of Asia raised their voices and the world listened. It was no small victory and *no negligible precedent.*'*

The response to the invitation was most encouraging : all the countries invited excepting the Central African Federation found it possible to accept the invitation and even the Prime Minister of the Central African Federation, in his reply, only regretted his inability to accept the invitation on account of pressing work at home.

PREPARATIONS FOR THE CONFERENCE

A word has to be said here about the preparations for the Conference, not only because this article on the Conference would thus be more complete than otherwise, but also because it is relevant in considering whether the Conference was a success, for the success of

* Italics mine.