

Public Works (1897) Department.

G.O., No. 664 W.

DATED 6. March 1897

[Despatch Abstract.]

Famine Relief Administration. Pros:
Revenue Dept. receiving Circular from the
Govt. of India forwarding a despatch from
the Secretary of State regarding — in India
Recorded. //

P.W. 26.
[5,000-90-11-96.]

Indexed.

FURTHER PAPERS.							
G.O.	No.	Department.	Date.	G.O.	No.	Department.	Date.

Recording circular from the Government of India forwarding for information a despatch from the Secretary of State regarding — in India.

GOVERNMENT OF MADRAS.

REVENUE DEPARTMENT.

READ—the following letter from T. W. HOLDERNESS, Esq., C.S., Deputy Secretary to the Government of India, Department of Revenue and Agriculture (Famine), to the Secretary to the Government of Madras, dated Calcutta, the 5th February 1897, Circular No. 10-F.—85-2.

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ENCLOSURE.

Government of India, Department of Revenue and Agriculture (Famine).

Agricultural Prospects in India.

The following papers are published for general information :—

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On learning from your Excellency that the probable extent of the famine could now be defined and that public subscriptions were being invited in India, I informed the Lord Mayor of London that your Government greatly accept his offer to open a Mansion House Fund for subscriptions in aid of the relief of sufferers from famine in India; and on the receipt of your letter No. 64 (Famine), dated the 23rd December 1896, I have communicated to His Lordship your views regarding the objects to which private charity can best be devoted and regarding the way in which charitable funds can best be administered. Since the month of October your weekly telegrams have kept me informed regarding the condition of affairs, while your present despatch, and your detailed telegram of the 10th January 1897, give the latest information concerning the extent of the calamity and the measures that have been taken for the relief and mitigation of suffering.

2. The famine has been caused by the absence of the usual rainfall during part of the autumn of 1896. Over a great part of India, no rain fell from the middle of August to the middle of November, during which period more than one-third of the year's rainfall is usually expected. The failure of the rains stunted or destroyed the growing autumn food crops, such as millets, rice and pulse, the yield of which on unirrigated lands is estimated to range from nothing to nearly half an average crop. The irrigated autumn crop lands, about 14 per cent. of the whole, are expected to yield about three-quarters of an ordinary harvest. The drought also prevented or impeded ploughing and sowing for the spring crops such as wheat, barley, gram and pulse. The effect of the failure upon the people was aggravated, especially in the North-West Provinces and the Central Provinces, by the circumstance that food-stocks had been reduced and the resisting power of the people had been impaired by previous short harvests.

3. In the month of October all the Local Governments considered the situation and made preparations for meeting the calamity in the several ways prescribed by the Famine Codes. The great extension of railways and the increase in the irrigated area made the country and the people better able to resist famine, while the existence of the Famine Codes and the preparations made under those Codes placed your Government and your officers in a better position for administering timely relief than they had been on any previous occasion. During October the commoner food-grains became dearer over a great part of India than had ever been known before at that time of the year and over so great an area. In 74 districts the cheaper kinds of grain were dearer than ten seers per rupee. The detailed reports which have reached me from the several provinces show that in the North-West Provinces, Oudh, and Bengal timely and complete preparations had been made; while in the Punjab, where pressure was less severe, in Bombay, where the need arose later, and in Madras, where subsequent rainfall removed cause for anxiety, adequate precautions appear to have been taken.

4. At the beginning of November it was apparent that, if the cold weather rainfall should be wanting, there must be serious famine over a large area of India, inhabited perhaps by 80 to 90 millions of people, and that it would be most severely felt in the North-West Provinces, in four districts of which the famine organization had been fully tried and had achieved a very satisfactory success during the previous season of 1895-96. But the situation was much relieved by the rainfall of November, which secured a full winter harvest over the greater part of Madras and Mysore; and which spread in an unusual way to the Deccan, the Central Provinces and Northern India. In December and January also, cold weather showers have fallen over Central and Northern India, over Bengal and over parts of Bombay. The sowings for the spring crops have everywhere been extended, though the breadth of these crops is reported to be still considerably short of the normal area. The spring crops, however, where they have been sown and have germinated, are said to be practically safe; and it is certain that by April next a large addition will have been made to the food-supply of the people over the greater part of the affected area. In some tracts, however, such as North Behar, and some of the districts in the Central Provinces and Oudh, where the people depend mainly upon the autumn harvests for their food, the relief given by the spring crops will be less considerable.

5. According to your latest information on the 10th January, the position was that famine was felt or expected over districts inhabited by about 37 millions of people, while more or less distress was feared over other tracts containing 44 millions. In British India the expected famine areas and the distressed areas appear to be distributed somewhat thus :—

	Famine.		Distress.	
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In the famine areas full relief organization under the Famine Codes either has been or is being established as need arises; and in the distressed areas, relief works have been or are being opened in order to test the extent of the pressure. If hereafter in parts of the distressed area famine should appear, the relief organization will be at once extended.

6. The number of people in receipt of relief during the first week of January was 1,200,000, of whom about 248,000 were receiving gratuitous relief. It is expected that these numbers will increase until April; during March and April pressure will, it is hoped, abate in tracts where the spring harvests on large areas prove good; but in some parts the numbers on relief may go on increasing until the end of May; and in no case will anxiety be over until favourable rains have fallen in July and August next.

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8. You believe that the stocks of food are practically sufficient for the needs of the people, Burma and perhaps South India having a large surplus of food. You are relying on private trade to carry food to places where it is wanted, and you have made public your decision to abstain from any Government interference with the operations of the grain trade. But you have given Local Governments authority to arrange through local dealers for sending food to any relief work or relief centre, where the supply of food is apparently running short. I do not gather that supplies of food are yet coming into the distressed districts from Burma, Madras or Siam; and I question if Indian prices are, as yet, high enough to attract wheat or even maize from the west. I observe that the Famine Codes provide that the relief wage, or the gratuitous dole, shall be fixed at the value of a certain ration of food on the spot, so that if food becomes still dearer, the relief wage will be proportionately increased. I agree in your view, which was that expressed by the Famine Commission, that the trade, as a whole, can supply the food demand better and more effectively than Government could; and if reliance is placed on the trade, its operations, so long as they are effective, must not be subjected to competition by Government agency. No doubt careful watch will be kept by your Government.

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Miscellaneous.

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(True Extract.)

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To the Board of Revenue (Revenue Settlement,
Land Records and Agriculture).
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Exd. Shaik Karim.

70 Copies.

Public Works Department.

Government {1897} of Madras.

REVENUE.

Recd.

gd.

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Enclosures

Spare copies

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*Order thereon N^o 664 D
of 6 March 1897
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FEBRUARY.

(True extract)

H. D. C.

*To The Chief Engr for Irrigation
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Government (1897) of Madras.
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Recd.

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Enclosures

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G.O., No. 114, 23rd February 1897.

*Order thereon No 66400
6 March 1897*
Recorded

FEBRUARY.

(True extract)
fdd Dm-c

To
The Chief Engineer for Irrigation
a Consulting Engineer for Railways

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No. 114, REVENUE, 23RD FEBRUARY 1897.

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Miscellaneous.

Recorded.

(True Extract.)

(Signed) G. STOKES,
Ag. Secretary to Government.

To the Board of Revenue (Revenue Settlement,
Land Records and Agriculture).

„ the Public Works Department.
„ the Local and Municipal Department.
„ the Financial Department.

Exd. Shaik Karim.

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1897.

Enclosures

Spare copies

G.O., No. 114, 23rd February 1897.

FEBRUARY.

Famine Relief Administration.

Recording circular from the Government of India forwarding for information a despatch from the Secretary of State regarding — in India.

GOVERNMENT OF MADRAS.

REVENUE DEPARTMENT.

READ—the following letter from T. W. HOLDERNESS, Esq., C.S., Deputy Secretary to the Government of India, Department of Revenue and Agriculture (Famine), to the Secretary to the Government of Madras, dated Calcutta, the 5th February 1897, Circular No. 10-F.—85-2.

In continuation of Mr. Ibbetson's Circular No. I-F.—66-2, dated 22nd December 1896, I am directed to forward, for the information of the Governor in Council, a copy of a despatch from Her Majesty's Secretary of State for India No. 10, dated 15th January 1897, regarding famine relief administration in India, and the measures undertaken for the relief of the prevailing distress.

ENCLOSURE.

Government of India, Department of Revenue and Agriculture (Famine).
Agricultural Prospects in India.

The following papers are published for general information :—

Despatch from Her Majesty's Secretary of State for India, to the Government of India, No. 10, Revenue, dated 15th January 1897.

On learning from your Excellency that the probable extent of the famine could now be defined and that public subscriptions were being invited in India, I informed the Lord Mayor subscriptions in aid of the relief of sufferers from famine in India; and on the receipt of your letter No. 64 (Famine), dated the 23rd December 1896, I have communicated to His Lordship the way in which charitable funds can best be administered. Since the month of October your weekly telegrams have kept me informed regarding the condition of affairs, while your present despatch, and your detailed telegram of the 10th January 1897, give the latest information concerning the extent of the calamity and the measures that have been taken for the relief and mitigation of suffering.

2. The famine has been caused by the absence of the usual rainfall during part of the autumn of 1896. Over a great part of India, no rain fell from the middle of August to the middle of November, during which period more than one-third of the year's rainfall is usually expected. The failure of the rains stunted or destroyed the growing autumn food crops, such as millets, rice and pulse, the yield of which on unirrigated lands is estimated to range from nothing to nearly half an average crop. The irrigated autumn crop lands, about 14 per cent. of the whole, are expected to yield about three-quarters of an ordinary harvest. The drought also prevented or impeded ploughing and sowing for the spring crops such as wheat, barley, gram and pulse. The effect of the failure upon the people was aggravated, especially in the North-West Provinces and the Central Provinces, by the circumstance that food-stocks had been reduced and the resisting power of the people had been impaired by previous short harvests.

3. In the month of October all the Local Governments considered the situation and made preparations for meeting the calamity in the several ways prescribed by the Famine Codes. The great extension of railways and the increase in the irrigated area made the country and the people better able to resist famine, while the existence of the Famine Codes and the preparations made under those Codes placed your Government and your officers in a better position for administering timely relief than they had been on any previous occasion. During October the commoner food-grains became dearer over a great part of India than had ever been known before at that time of the year and over so great an area. In 74 districts the cheaper kinds of grain were dearer than ten seers per rupee. The detailed reports which have reached me from the several provinces show that in the North-West Provinces, Oudh, and Bengal timely and complete preparations had been made; while in the Punjab, where pressure was less severe, and in Bombay, where the need arose later, and in Madras, where subsequent rainfall removed cause for anxiety, adequate precautions appear to have been taken.

4. At the beginning of November it was apparent that, if the cold weather rainfall should be wanting, there must be serious famine over a large area of India, inhabited perhaps by 80 to 90 millions of people, and that it would be most severely felt in the North-West Provinces, in four districts of which the famine organization had been fully tried and had achieved a very satisfactory success during the previous season of 1895-96. But the situation was much relieved by the rainfall of November, which secured a full winter harvest over the greater part of Madras and Mysore; and which spread in an unusual way to the Deccan, the Central Provinces and Northern India. In December and January also, cold weather showers have fallen over Central and Northern India, over Bengal and over parts of Bombay. The sowings for the spring crops have everywhere been extended, though the breadth of these crops is reported to be still considerably short of the normal area. The spring crops, however, where they have been sown and have germinated, are said to be practically safe; and it is certain that by April next a large addition will have been made to the food-supply of the people over the greater part of the affected area. In some tracts, however, such as North Behar, and some of the districts in the Central Provinces and Oudh, where the people depend mainly upon the autumn harvests for their food, the relief given by the spring crops will be less considerable.

5. According to your latest information on the 10th January, the position was that famine was felt or expected over districts inhabited by about 37 millions of people, while more or less distress was feared over other tracts containing 44 millions. In British India the expected famine areas and the distressed areas appear to be distributed somewhat thus :—

	Famine.		Distress.	
	Sq. Miles.	Population.	Sq. Miles.	Population.
Punjab	16,800	4,139,000	30,100	6,559,000
North-West Provinces	26,200	11,273,000	50,600	26,013,000
Bengal	6,700	5,281,000	9,900	8,265,000
Burma	2,600	212,000	8,600	555,000
Madras	8,500	1,206,000		
Bombay	43,000	7,009,000	9,300	2,064,000
Central Provinces	60,200	7,824,000	13,200	1,019,000
Total	164,000	36,944,000	121,700	44,475,000

In the famine areas full relief organization under the Famine Codes either has been or is being established as need arises; and in the distressed areas, relief works have been or are being opened in order to test the extent of the pressure. If hereafter in parts of the distressed area famine should appear, the relief organization will be at once extended.

6. The number of people in receipt of relief during the first week of January was 1,200,000, of whom about 248,000 were receiving gratuitous relief. It is expected that these numbers will increase until April; during March and April pressure will, it is hoped, abate in tracts where the spring harvests on large areas prove good; but in some parts the numbers on relief may go on increasing until the end of May; and in no case will anxiety be over until favourable rains have fallen in July and August next.

7. Besides organizing relief works and the distribution of gratuitous relief, you have sanctioned suspensions of revenue where pressure is greatest; you have made available for irrigation as much water as possible; you have sanctioned large advances or loans to landholders who are ready to give work on their estates, and to ryots who are ready to dig wells; you have opened the Government forests to grazing in places where fodder is scanty, and you have reduced the railway rates for carriage of food.

8. You believe that the stocks of food are practically sufficient for the needs of the people, Burma and perhaps South India having a large surplus of food. You are relying on private trade to carry food to places where it is wanted, and you have made public your decision to abstain from any Government interference with the operations of the grain trade. But you have given Local Governments authority to arrange through local dealers for sending food to any relief work or relief centre, where the supply of food is apparently running short. I do not gather that supplies of food are yet coming into the distressed districts from Burma, Madras or Siam; and I question if Indian prices are, as yet, high enough to attract wheat or even maize from the west. I observe that the Famine Codes provide that the relief wage, or the gratuitous dole, shall be fixed at the value of a certain ration of food on the spot, so that if food becomes still dearer, the relief wage will be proportionately increased. I agree in your view, which was that expressed by the Famine Commission, that the trade, as a whole, can supply the food demand better and more effectively than Government could; and if reliance is placed on the trade, its operations, so long as they are effective, must not be subjected to competition by Government agency. No doubt careful watch will be kept by your Government.

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