Telegram from Sir Terence Allen Shone on communal disturbances (New Delhi, 22 September 1947)

Caption: On 22 September 1947, Sir Terence Allen Shone, High Commissioner of the United Kingdom to India, sends a telegram to the Commonwealth Relations Office in which he reports on the recent events in India and Pakistan after the partition of the British Indian Empire. He particularly mentions the communal disturbances, providing information about the number of victims and outlining the problems associated with refugees and population movements.

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Last updated: 01/03/2017

470/47/1/28

OUTWARD TELEGRAM

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Action Cop
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From High Commissioner for the United Kingdom

To COMMONWEALTH RELATIONS OFFICE

Cypher

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Name in type A.C.B. SYMON

Time

Sent 221845 September.

No. 813

Priority IMMEDIATE SECRET

MY TELEGRAM NO. 806 DATED 21ST SEPTEMBER. COMMUNAL DISTURBANCES.

1. PUNJAB.

MILITARY SPOKESMAN AT PRESS CONFERENCE ON SEPTEMBER 21ST STATED THAT COMMUNAL SITUATION IN PUNJAB CONTINUES TO MAKE STEADY IMPROVEMENT. MOVEMENT OF REFUGEES ON BOTH SIDES OF INDO-PAKISTAN BORDER WAS, HOWEVER, STILL HAMPERED BY ACTIVITIES OF ARMED BANDS. FOLLOWING IS ADDITIONAL INFORMATION GIVEN BY SPOKESMAN:

(1) WEST PUNJAB. NON MUSLIM REFUGEE CONVOY WAS ATTACKED NEAR SIALKOT BY A GANG. ESCORT FIRED FEW ROUNDS AT GANG. NON MUSLIM REFUGEE SPECIAL TRAIN WAS FIRED AT AT LAHORE RAILWAY STATION. 21 REFUGEES KILLED AND 13 INJURED. IN MULTAN DISTRICT NON MUSLIM REFUGEES WERE ATTACKED. STRAY LOOTING IS REPORTED FROM RURAL AREAS OF THIS DISTRICT.

(2) MUSLIM REFUGEE CONVOY MOVING THROUGH AMRITSAR CITY, CF. PARA. 1(i) OF MY NO. 806. MOVEMENT WAS GOING WELL. CURFEW IN AFFECTED SECTORS OF AMRITSAR CITY, TANKS AT VARIOUS POINTS, PICKETS ON ROOF-TOPS AND MOVING PATROLS WERE SOME OF PRECAUTIONS TAKEN BY ARMY TO ENSURE SAFE PASSAGE. NEVERTHELESS A FEW SHOOTING INCIDENTS OCCURRED. 6 WERE KILLED AND 37 WOUNDED BY INDIAN DOMINION TROOPS. 12 REFUGEES KILLED.

(3) LUDHIANA. SPOKESMAN STATED THAT TROOPS WERE NOW GETTING INVOLVED WITH ATTACKERS TO A GREATER EXTENT THAN BEFORE. FORMERLY THEY WERE ABLE TO BEAT OFF ATTACKERS FROM

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DISTANCE BUT CASE OF HAND TO HAND FIGHTING HAS BEEN REPORTED NEAR LUDHIANA. TRAIN WAS STOPPED BY ROAD BLOCK AND GANG, ARMED WITH AUTOMATIC WEAPONS AND SPEARS, SURROUNDED MUSLIM TRAIN AND SET FIRE TO TWO BOGEYS. TRAIN ESCORT FOUGHT GANG FOR 45 MINUTES AND FIRED NEARLY 1,000 ROUNDS FROM BREN GUNS, STEN GUNS, RIFLES AND PISTOLS. O.C. DETACHMENT AND THREE OTHER RANKS INJURED. AMONG MUSLIM PASSENGERS TWELVE WERE KILLED, 37 WOUNDED AND 40 MISSING.

(4) AMRITSAR AND GURDASPUR DISTRICTS. NON MUSLIM GANG WAS DISPERSED BY PATROL IN KHERA NORTH EAST OF AMRITSAR. CARAVAN OF 45,000 MUSLIM REFUGEES PASSED THROUGH GURDASPUR TOWN ON SATURDAY, 20TH. IN QADIAN RECONNAISSANCE AIRCRAFT DROPPED WHAT LOOKED LIKE MAIL BUT ON INVESTIGATION NO MAIL WAS DISCOVERED. (CF. PARA. 1(2) OF MY 790).

(5) ROHTAK DISCTICT. MANY NON MUSLIMS ARRESTED FOR LOITERING WITH ARMS IN THEIR POSSESSION.

(6) HOSHIARPUR. EAST PUNJAB GOVERNMENT PRESS NOTE REPORTS THREE STRAY INCIDENTS FROM RURAL AREAS OF THIS DISTRICT.

(7) ASSOCIATED PRESS MESSAGE FROM LAHORE DATED SEPTEMBER 21ST MENTIONS REFUGEE TRAIN WHICH HAD BEEN ATTACKED AT BEAS STATION SOUTH OF AMRITSAR. 166 BODIES ARE SAID TO HAVE BEEN TAKEN OUT OF TRAIN BESIDES 106 WOUNDED. MOB ALSO ATTEMPTED TO HOLD UP REFUGEE TRAIN NEAR MOGHULPURA (SUBURB OF LAHORE) BUT ATTACK WAS BEATEN OFF WITH CASUALTIES ON BOTH SIDES.

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(8) SIALA. AFTER FOUR DAYS' PEACE BOMB EXPLOSIONS AND SHOOTING INCIDENTS OCCURRED ON NIGHT 19TH - 20TH SEPTEMBER 13 WERE KILLED AND 13 INJURED. BANDS OF ARMED HOOLIGANS ATTACKED SOME HOUSES IN CERTAIN LOCALITIES. 24- HOUR CURFEW WAS IMPOSED IN AFFECTED AREAS.

2. SIND

MILITARY SPOKESMAN MENTIONED IN PRECEDING PARA. STATED FEW MINOR INCIDENTS ARE REPORTED FROM KARACHI, BUT SITUATION IS GENERALLY QUIET. HINDU PASSENGERS WERE ROBBED IN RUNNING TRAIN BETWEEN SUKKUR AND JACOBABAD.

3. PATIALA - cf. para. 2 of my 771.

STATESMAN CORRESPONDENT FROM PATIALA IN MESSAGE DATED SEPTEMBER 19TH MENTIONS QUOTE IT IS UNDERSTOOD THAT MORE THAN 25,000 MUSLIMS FROM NEIGHBOURING AREAS OF CITY ARE TAKING SHELTER AT FAMOUS MUSLIM SHRINE OF ROZA SHARIF AT SIRHIND WHERE PATIALA GOVERNMENT HAS PROVIDED STRONG MILITARY GUARD UNQUOTE.

4. DELHI.

(1) MILITARY SPOKESMAN REFERRED TO ABOVE ESTIMATED NUMBER OF TROOPS IN DELHI AREA AT BETWEEN 5,000 AND 6,000.

(2) IN OLD DELHI FIVE REFUGEES INCLUDING FOUR WOMEN WERE KILLED AND ABOUT 25 INJURED IN BOMB EXPLOSION IN CHOWRI BAZAAR ON 21ST. BOMB IS REPORTED TO HAVE BEEN THROWN FROM NEARY BUILDING A FEW STABBING INCIDENTS AND ONE CASE OF ARSON AND ANOTHER OF LOOTING WERE ALSO REPORTED IN OLD DELHI AREA.

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5. DELHI REFUGEES.

(1) DELHI EMERGENCY COMMITTEE ON 22ND DECIDED ON FURTHER STEPS TO RESTORE CONFIDENCE AMONG MUSLIMS IN CITY. CHIEF COMMISSIONER AND MILITARY AUTHORITIES WERE DIRECTED TO DEVISE SCHEME FOR ADDITIONAL PROTECTION AND MORE INTENSIVE PATROLLING BEGINNING WITH SELECTED MUSLIM AREAS. MUSLIMS IN HOMES AND IN REFUGEE CAMPS SHOULD BE REASSURED THAT GOVERNMENT WERE MAKING INCREASED EFFORTS TO SAFEGUARD THEIR LIVES AND PROPERTY AND WOULD LEAVE NO STONE UNTURNED IN SPEEDY RESTORATION OF NORMAL LIFE. COMMITTEE AGREED THAT PEACE EFFORTS OF GANDHI AND MAULANA AZAD SHOULD BE FOLLOWED UP VIGOROUSLY. ALREADY MUSLIM OPINION WAS CONVINCED THAT CAUSE OF RECENT TROUBLE IN CAPITAL WAS NOT LOCAL AND MUSLIMS HAD THEMSELVES ADMITTED ON NUMEROUS OCCASIONS THAT LOCAL HINDUS HAD GIVEN THEM PROTECTION. COMMITTEE ALSO AGREED THAT WHILE THOSE WHO WERE ANXIOUS TO GO TO PAKISTAN SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO DO SO, REFUGEES WHO WANTED TO RETURN TO THEIR HOMES SHOULD, WHEN CONDITIONS WERE NORMAL, BE GIVEN EVERY FACILITY AND PROTECTION.

(2) STATESMAN COMMENTING ON THIS PROBLEM IN EDITORIAL SAYS QUOTE SO LONG AS SILENCE OF DEATH OVERHANGS ITS DESERTED MOHALLAS AND THEIR WRETCHED FORMER OCCUPANTS REMAIN TOO TERRIFIED TO RETURN TO OLD FAMILIAR PLACES CITY'S SPIRITUAL SICKNESS WILL REMAIN UNCURED. OVERTAKEN BY RAPIDITY OF SURROUNDING VIOLENT HAPPENINGS AND CONCENTRATING ITS EFFORTS

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ON GENERAL RESTORATION OF ORDER GOVERNMENT MADE TARDY BEGINNING WITH GIGANTIC REFUGEE PROBLEM IN ITS MIDST. RELIEF MEASURES AND WELL-MEANT ADVICE TO UNFORTUNATE VICTIMS TENDED INITIALLY TO OVERLAP AND CONFLICT. NOW FIRMER FOUNDATIONS HAVE BEEN LAID AND REFUGEES' MISERY, HINDU AND SIKH AS WELL AS MUSLIM IS BEING ALLEVIATED. BUT GOVERNMENT STILL EVIDENTLY LACKS CLEAR-CUT UNDEVIATING POLICY. THIS WAS UNDERSTANDABLE DURING CONFUSION IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING CATACLYSM. A WAVERING EVEN DEFEATIST ATTITUDE WAS THEN DISCERNIBLE AMONG MEN OF ALL COMMUNITIES WHO WERE PERSUADED THAT MASS MIGRATION WAS PERHAPS THE ONLY REMEDY. THAT PHASE IS SLOWLY PASSING AND MORE PEOPLE ARE COMING TO BELIEVE, LIKE GANDHI, THAT MASS MIGRATION OFFERS NO PERMANENT CURE AND IS UNWORTHY EVEN AS PALLIATIVE BECAUSE IT BETRAYS MENTALITY THAT SHOULD BE FOUGHT AND CONQUERED. EVEN IN DISTRAUGHT DELHI A MIRACLE COMPARABLE TO GANDHI'S CALCUTTA, ACHIEVEMENT, MAY EVENTUALLY BE WON UNQUOTE.

6. ASSISTANCE FROM DELHI TO NON-MUSLIM REFUGEES IN WEST PUNJAB.

TWO R.I.A.F. AIRCRAFT CARRYING 280 MAUNDS OF CHAPPATIS AND OTHER FOODSTUFFS TO TWO CONVOYS OF NON-MUSLIMS IN WEST PUNJAB AND N.W.F.P. ONE OF 30,000 AND ANOTHER OF 60,000 WHO WERE STRANDED AND DESPERATELY IN NEED OF FOOD, SAYS A PRESS NOTE ISSUED BY INDIAN GOVERNMENT ON SEPTEMBER 21ST.

7. GANDHI'S ACTIVITIES IN DELHI.

GANDHI CONTINUES TO VISIT MUSLIM AREAS OF THE CITY URGING MUSLIMS NOT TO ABANDON THEIR HOMES AND EXHORTING ALL COMMUNITIES

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8. UNITED PROVINCES.

MILITARY SPOKESMAN REFERRED TO IN PARA. 1 ABOVE STATED THAT REPORTS FROM WESTERN PARTS OF UNITED PROVINCES INDICATE THAT INCIDENTS DURING LAST 24 HOURS UP TO 21ST MORNING WERE MUCH FEWER THAN REPORTED EARLIER. TANK PATROLS, REINFORCEMENT AND FLAG MARCHES ARE CONTINUING. SITUATION IN DEHRA DUN WAS UNDER CONTROL. CITY WAS REPORTED QUIET BUT THERE WERE REPORTS OF REFUGEES ATTACKING NEIGHBOURING VILLAGES. IN MEERUT MUSLIMS WHO HAD LEFT THEIR VILLAGES ARE RETURNING. SOME ATTACKS ON A RUNNING TRAIN WERE REPORTED FROM GHAZIABAD. OVER 100 NON MUSLIM LOOTERS HAD BEEN ARRESTED AT JAWALAPUR AND 3,000 MUSLIM REFUGEES ARE IN TOWN. POLICE FIRED ON LOOTERS OF GOODS TRAIN AT MUTTRA. THERE WAS PANIC THROUGHOUT ROHILKHAND. SITUATION IN AGRA AND MEERUT DIVISIONS WAS SLIGHTLY BETTER OWING TO POLICE AND MILITARY PATROLLING.

9. UNITED PROVINCES (CONTN.) - CONFIDENTIAL.

REPORTS RECEIVED FROM SECRET MILITARY SOURCES DATED 19TH GIVE FOLLOWING INFORMATION:

100 BODIES FOUND JAWALAPUR. 80 DEAD IN DEHRA DUN CITY. SURROUNDING MUSLIM HAMLETS BEING EVACUATED AND BEEN BURNT ATTACKS ON TRAINS TOOK PLACE IN AREA GANGAPUR AND AGRA BY SIKH ARMED GANGS./ BHARATPUR STATE CAUSE OF THIS TROUBLE. SITUATION BECOMING SERIOUS IN MUTTRA OWING TO LAWLESSNESS OF BHARATPUR AND INFLUX OF REFUGEES.

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10. DEATH OF BRITISH OFFICER.

MAJOR A.V.OUSBY OF FIRST BATTALION SIKH REGIMENT WAS SHOT DEAD IN REWARI ABOUT 40 MILES SOUTH WEST DELHI ON NIGHT SEPTEMBER 9 - 10TH. MILITARY SPOKESMAN STATED ON 21ST SEPTEMBER THAT MAJOR OUSBY CHALLENGED NUMBER OF CURFEW BREAKERS BEFORE HE ENTERED CITY, AND WHEN HE WENT TO MUSLIM LOCALITY FIVE SHOTS WERE FIRED AT HIM KILLING HIM INSTANTANEOUSLY.

11. COPY TO U.K. HIGH COMMISSIONER KARACHI BY AIR MAIL.

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