

Paper Trails and Peculations

Dissecting an 1895 Colonial Prison Memo

A forensic breakdown of logistics, hierarchy, and institutional paranoia in the North-Western Provinces and Oudh.

CRIMINOLOGICAL INSIGHTS
BY DR. MRIDUL SRIVASTAVA

MEMO

DEPT.

PRISONS,

Provinces and Oudh.

REPORTS on PRISONS or JAILS.

Provinces and Oudh.

6

Reports on the arrangements for the supply of food and clothing to prisoners.

Please report what steps are taken to improve the health of the prisoners and to provide them with their necessary comforts and amusements, and also what steps are taken to provide them with their necessary food and clothing, and how the same are distributed.

REY C. HALL.

F. R. C. S.

Lt- Col:

*General of Prisons,
Provinces and Oudh.*

1895 Prison Circular: Managing Prisoner Rations



FROM GODOWN TO COOKHOUSE

Superintendents must report the specific methods used to transport supplies from storage to kitchens.

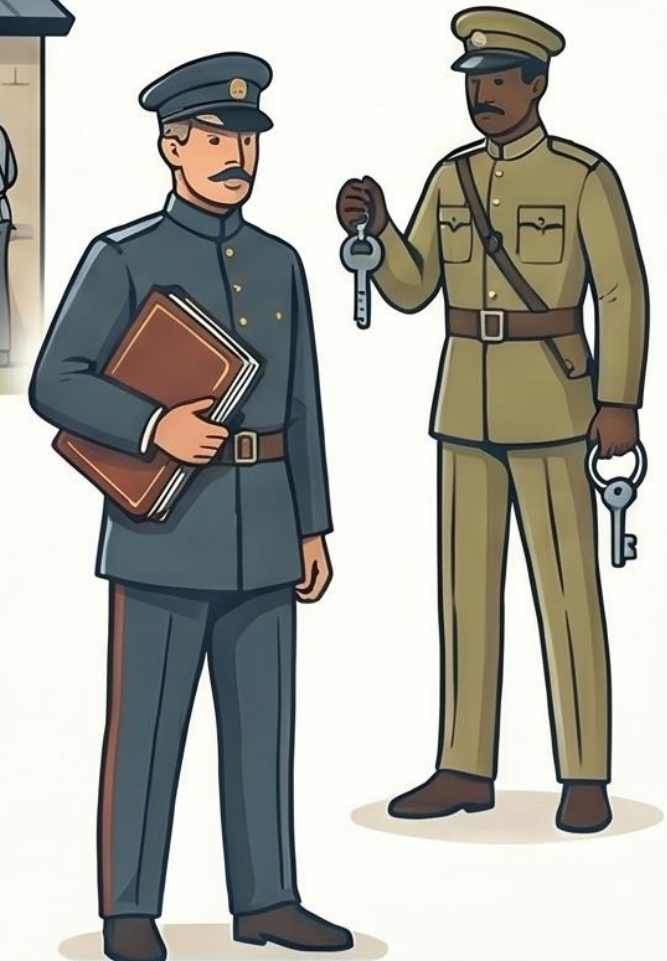


OVERSIGHT AND SECURITY



DEFINING RESPONSIBILITY

Reports must specify which personnel are in charge of supplies during each stage of distribution.



ENSURING FULL ENTITLEMENT

Official confirmation is required that prisoners receive their complete allocated supply of oil and condiments.



PREVENTION OF "PECULATIONS"

Strict measures must be implemented to prevent theft or embezzlement of rations by cooks.

The Primary Source

Circular Memo No. 6, issued by the Jail Department in 1895.

Before exploring its administrative context, read the 54-word directive at its centre. It appears to be a routine logistical inquiry regarding food supplies. As we zoom in, the document reveals a complex web of colonial hierarchy and systemic anxiety.

CIRCULAR MEMO

JAIL (1895.) DKPT.

FROM THE INSPR-GENL. of PRISONS,
North-Western Provinces and Oudh.

TO ALL SUPERINTENDENTS of JAILS,
North-Western Provinces and Oudh.

Dated Lucknow,
The 17th May 1895. } No. 6
Received

SUBJECT,

Supply of oil and condiments to prisoners.

Superintendents will please report what steps are taken in their jails to ensure the prisoners getting their full supply of oil and condiments with their food. Please state how and under whose care these are sent from the godown to the cook house and how peculations by the cooks are prevented.

GEOFFREY C. HALL
P. R. O. S.
Surgeon Lt- Col:

*Offg: Inspector General of Prisons,
North-Western Provinces and Oudh.*

*North-Western Provinces
and Oudh.*

*Dated Lucknow,
The 17th May 1895.*

Received



1895: Late Victorian Colonial Era

Location: Lucknow served as the administrative headquarters for the region's penal system.

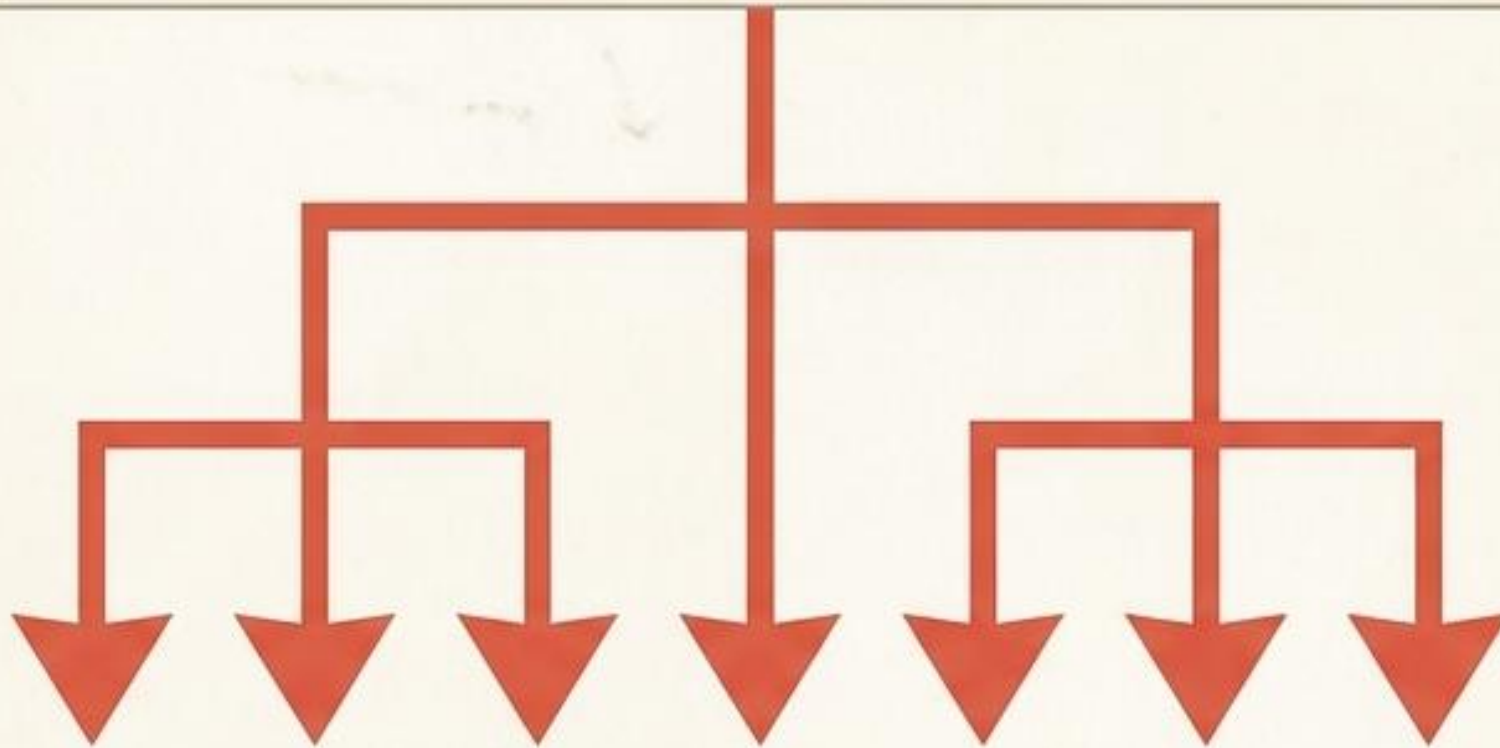
Era: 1895 represents a period of heavily entrenched British bureaucratic control, obsessed with standardisation and paper-based reporting across vast colonial territories.

ORGANIZATIONAL HIERARCHY

THE INSPR-GENL. OF PRISONS,

The Command Node (Top):

Centralized authority operating out of Lucknow. The Inspector-General dictates policy and demands accountability.



TO ALL SUPERINTENDENTS OF JAILS,

The Execution Node (Bottom):

The Superintendents operate isolated jail facilities across the province. They are the target of the memo, tasked with enforcing central directives locally.

GEOFFREY C. HALL,
F. R. C. S.
Surgeon Lt- Col:
Offg: Inspector-General of Prisons

Column 1
(Medical)

F.R.C.S. (Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons).
Medical expertise over prisoner health and nutrition.

Column 2
(Military)

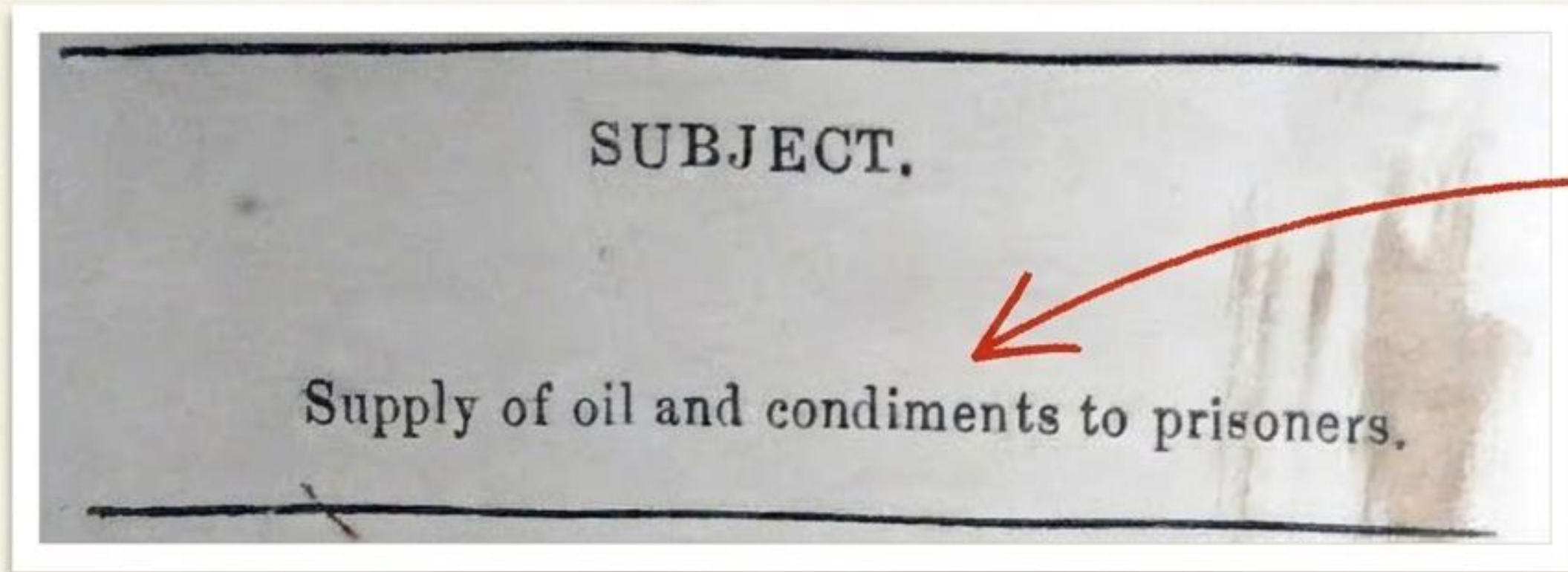
Surgeon Lt-Col.
Military rank ensuring rigid discipline and colonial authority.

Column 3
(Administrative)

Offg: Inspector-General.
'Officiating' (acting) supreme bureaucratic head of the provincial penal system.

Hall's combined titles represent the trinity of colonial prison administration: medical oversight enforced through military discipline and managed via bureaucratic paperwork.

THE ECONOMY OF PROVISIONS



High-value, easily transportable, and easily concealable commodities in a 19th-century penal economy.

The Stated Intent

On the surface, Memo No. 6 is concerned with dietetics. The Jail Department is inquiring whether prisoners are receiving their designated caloric and nutritional allotments.

Godown

noun. An East Asian and Indian term for a warehouse or storage facility. Here, the secure repository for bulk prison rations.

Cook house

noun. The preparation area. A distinct, separate physical space from the storage area, requiring goods to be moved across the prison compound.

Superintendents will please report what steps are taken in their jails to ensure the prisoners getting their full supply of oil and condiments with their food. Please state how and under whose care these are sent from the **godown** to the **cook house** and how **peculations** by the cooks are prevented.

Peculations

noun. Embezzlement or theft of entrusted funds or goods. The central anxiety of this memo.



The Godown (Storage)

Bulk rations secured
under official lock
and key.



The Transit Phase

The physical movement
of daily allotments
across the compound.



The Cook House (Preparation)

Raw ingredients
transformed into
prisoner meals.

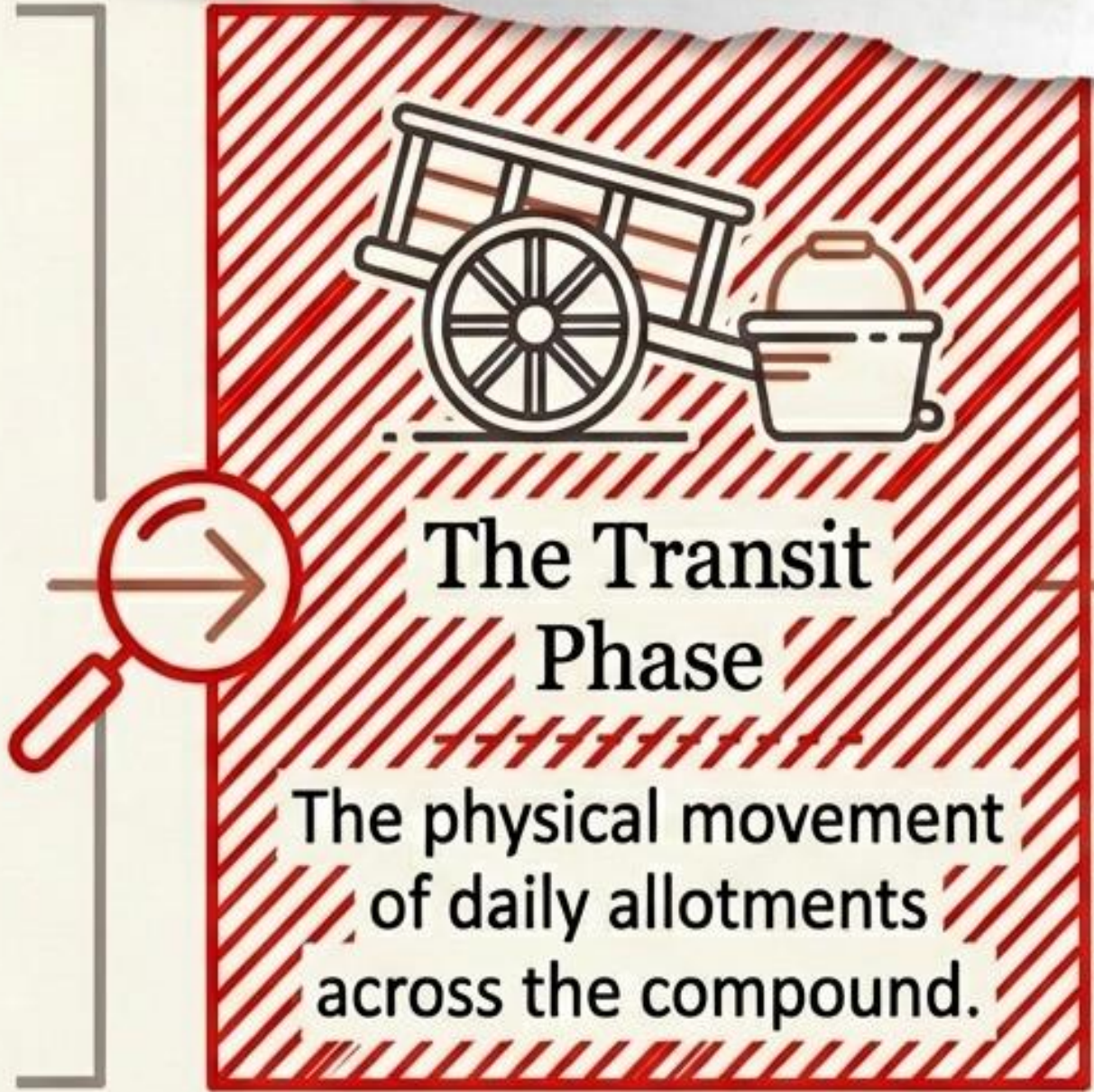
The Inspector-General's directive demands to know 'how and under whose care these are sent' along this exact pathway.

... godown ... and how peculations by the cooks are prevented.



The Godown (Storage)

Bulk rations secured under official lock and key.



The Transit Phase

The physical movement of daily allotments across the compound.



The Cook House (Preparation)

The Chain of Custody Breaks

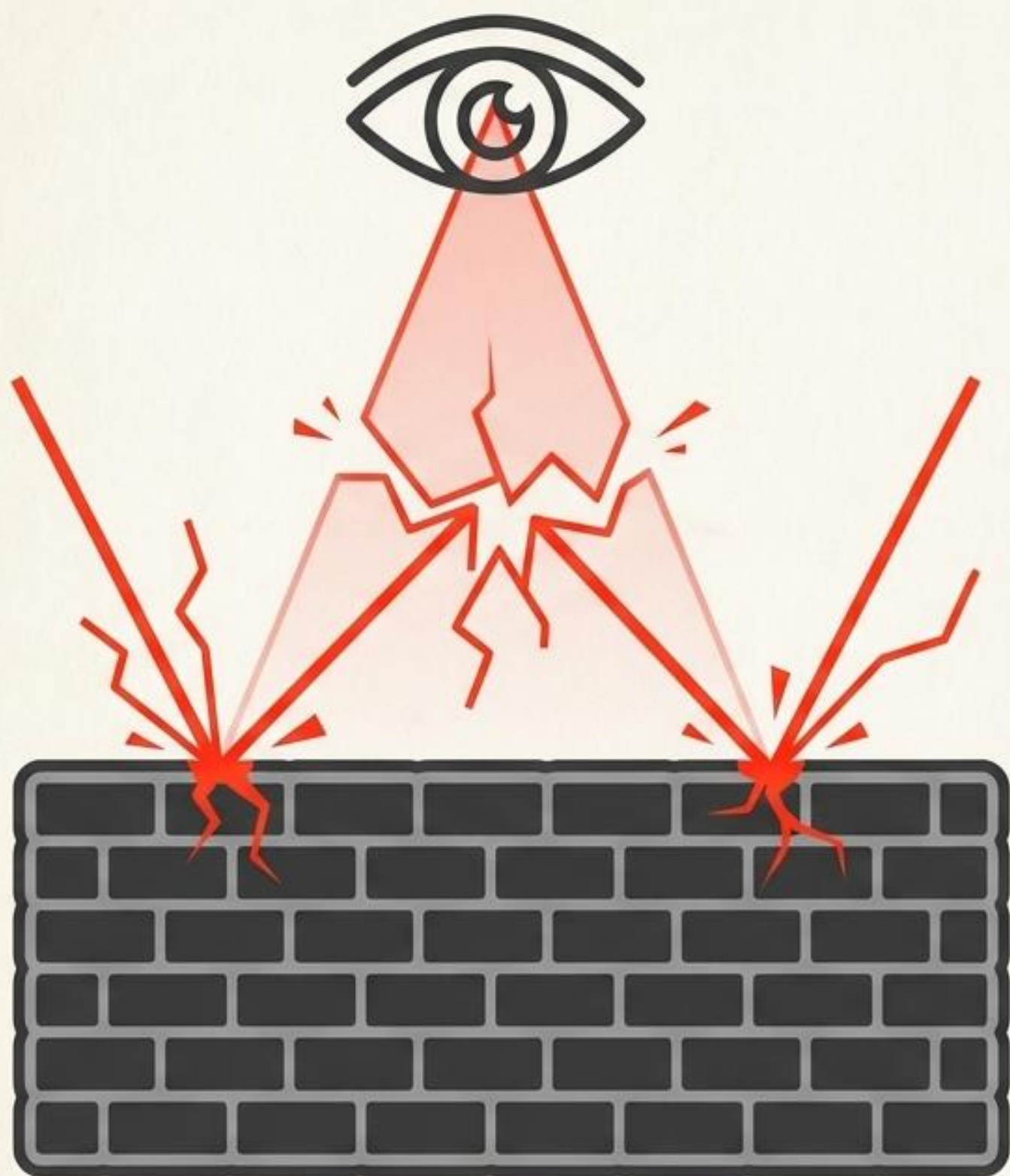
The memo identifies a structural weakness. While bulk storage is easily secured, transit and preparation rely on low-level staff and prisoner-cooks.

The administration cannot physically oversee this daily movement, creating a blind spot ripe for theft.

The Chain of Custody Breaks: A Diagnostic Matrix

	Bureaucratic Goal	Operational Risk	Proposed Solution
Storage (Godown)	Secure inventory	Pilferage via false accounting	Centralised locks
Transit	Documented chain of custody	Unmonitored handlers	Require strict reporting on 'whose care' goods are under
Preparation (Cook House)	"Prisoners getting their full supply"	"Peculations by the cooks"	Demand local superintendents outline prevention steps

The matrix reveals that the system's primary defence against theft was not better physical security, but a demand for more paperwork.



The Paranoia of Administration

Memo No. 6 is not a nutritional guideline; it is an instrument of institutional mistrust. Geoffrey C. Hall and the central bureaucracy know they cannot stop local corruption from Lucknow. Instead, they use the only weapon they have: the mandate to report.

- By forcing Superintendents to document "what steps are taken," the Inspector-General shifts the liability of theft downward.
- The memo attempts to substitute physical surveillance with bureaucratic reporting.

*Offg: Inspector-General of Prisons,
North-Western Provinces and Oudh.*

The Weight of the Archive

A single, 54-word memo concerning 'oil and condiments' contains the complete DNA of the 19th-century colonial state. It exposes a system obsessed with control, reliant on rigid hierarchies, yet profoundly vulnerable to the daily realities of the people it sought to manage.

The history of empire is not just written in treaties and battles, but in the anxious margins of everyday administrative ledgers.