

INTERVIEW WITH J. COFER BLACK

'We are looking closely at Bangladesh'

The US state department's co-ordinator for counter-terrorism ducked tough questions on Pakistansaying these were political, and consequently beyond his brief...

For a person who worked for 28 long years in the shadowy world of the CIA's Directorate of Operations, Ambassador J. Cofer Black is cut out to handle the job he holds in the State Department: Co-ordinator for Counter-terrorism. In Delhi last week to attend the sixth meeting of the Indo-US Joint Working Group on Counter-terrorism, Black took time off to meet V. Sudarshan of Outlook. Guarded and circumspect, he ducked tough questions on Pakistansaying these were political, and consequently beyond his brief. Yet Black conveyed India's inability to supply adequate information on incidents of cross-border terrorism to the US. Once the interview was over, the ambassador promptly relaxed and posed for our lensman. Excerpts from the interview:

What's the American assessment of terrorism in Bangladesh?

Bangladesh's situation is of great interest to us. The United States is opposed to all terrorists. We approach terrorism as a global issue. On my last trip, I got some good insights from the Indian team on what is going on in Bangladesh.

We're very mindful that countries that have the will to resist terrorism are supportive. We are looking at Bangladesh more closely. I'm personally interested in having an accurate picture. We plan to look intoand if correctconfirm the Indian view. Ours is a very interested position. We need to determine exactly the threat of terrorists not only to Bangladesh but also the potential utilisation of Bangladesh as a platform to project terrorism internationally

India keeps saying that terrorists camps in Bangladesh are inimical to the stability of the region.

Right. Is this true? We are grateful for the assessments that we receive from the Indian government. We've certainly taken to heart information and the view the Indian government has of terrorist camps in Bangladesh. We are seeking to develop a position on it.

You have been quoted saying, "In my dealings with the Indian government I ask them and challenge them to do a better job of representing the issue (cross-border terrorism) as they see it and we look forward to working with them and try to get a better understanding. There is great scope for improvement in that area." Can you identify the areas specifically?

The quote has to be put in context. And the context is the criteria used by the US in its publication, *The Patterns of Global Terrorism*. It specifically identifies terrorist instances; it has specific criteria according to the US perspective. A group called Interagency Review Board adjudicates reviews and adjudicates terrorist instances. So for it to be an international terrorist incident, it must either involve international personnel in a country, or involve cross-border action or must involve a third country. It was on that point that there was not necessarily agreement.

You have been quoted elsewhere saying, "I look forward to their (India) effectively communicating the reality of the situation as they see it." Can you elaborate?

The reality of the situation is based on actual information, based on excruciating, detailed intelligence information. Now anecdotes, suspicions in all instances, whether it is the US or any country including India, needs to be fleshed out.

So it has not been adequately fleshed out by the Indians?

It's very difficult to flesh everything out. But for the purposes of information contained or reported



J. Cofer Black

in the *Patterns of Global Terrorism*, any information has to go through the adjudication process and the Interagency Review Board. They make a determination; so to qualify you have to meet all these criteria.

Do you think Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf has done enough to prevent cross-border terrorism in India?

The Pakistan government under President Musharraf has made significant progress in the identification and engagement of terrorist targets.

Over 550 Al Qaeda personnel have been arrested, detained or killed. Not too many other countries can rival that accomplishment. The fact is that we all can do more. And the President of the United States is urging everyone to do as much as possible. I'm talking about an absolute we-can-all-do-more.

Is there anything Musharraf can do specifically more to assuage Indian concerns?

That is essentially a political issue. It's removed from the area of counter-terrorism.

India's army chief says infiltration is up, almost double since May. Do you have a view on this?

I have not met with the army chief so I can't comment.

Last week Musharraf declared that jihadi groups operating in PoK would've to pack up if the government finds a solution. It seems to imply that they are free to operate till there is a solution. How do you view this?

I do counter-terrorism: identify terrorists, resolve, arrest, detain them. I don't have a personal view on this.

People here feel the US is soft on terrorism in Kashmir but isn't so soft on terrorism related to Al Qaeda.

I don't know, I'm in the business of doing counter-terrorism.

You hand out certificates saying how well

Musharraf has handled Al Qaeda, but we don't get to hear the same on the Taliban. Why is that?

I don't know what you've heard. So, it'll be awkward for me to comment.

To what extent is the US sharing intelligence with India regarding Kashmiri jihadis?

I am not going to comment on intelligence matters.

But Indians are sharing a lot of information on the Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT), and what its founder Prof Hafiz Saeed is doing...

I don't know what your belief is based upon. That's why I believe intelligence services should interact behind closed doors. We've productive meetings with Indian intelligence agencies.

Have you looked at possible linkages between the Kahuta Research Laboratory and Al Qaeda?

I would have to research that one. What has been the achievement of bilateral cooperation on terrorism between the US and India?

We've what we call a joint working group. We take great pleasure in being able to say that it is the oldest and most long-standing joint working group on counter-terrorism we have with any country.

It was set up in 2000. But you didn't meet for almost a year.

Well, that was the year when the United States was under attack. The United States was under assault by terrorists. There was an aviation threat. As a result, I was unable to travel. The relationship between us and the Indians is very good and close. It has been validated by both sides. Things can always improve. Both sides are working on that. We have proposed various programmes to support our Indian friends. And they have proposed areas in which they can offer cooperation to the United States, the different ways of enhancing exchange of information and cooperation. I have had some very good meetings here. I go home well pleased. The important thing is that this relationship is on solid footing.

But there's a view that the joint working group on terrorism will not be really productive unless you discuss Pakistan?

I think the utility of the joint working group is that it is not conducted under the eyes of the press. I think it has done a good job. We are making good progress and this has a bright future.

There are reports that mainstream political groups in Pakistan like the Jamaat-e-Islami have been extending support and shelter to terrorists. How does the US government view this?

Again, I'll have to go back to the basics: our business is to counter terrorism.

Courtesy: The Outlook

Lord Krishna and Hindu heritage

PREM RANJAN DEV

THE Hindu festivals are more than what they appear to be. They are essentially a way of living and thinking in the course of existence, and as such an integrated bearing on the individual and society.

Like the deities of the Hindu pantheon, the festivals are numerous and frequent, but basically religious, and psychologically and intimately connected with the change of seasons, though many of them have lost the history of their origin in the mists of hoary past. With the passage of time they have undergone a process of transformation and evolution and many new festivals have been grafted upon the old ones.

The Hindu festivals, fasts, rituals, holy baths and the observance of sacred days are part and parcel of the great cultural heritage of Indian civilisation. They are religious and social and a great source of spiritual and moral enrichment. They also lend zest, variety, colour and grandeur to an otherwise insipid, routine and care-worn day-to-day human existence. A Hindu festival is generally characterised by rituals like fasting, ablu-tion, prayer, worship, austerity, vigil, vows, offerings and such other activities of piety and devotion. A Hindu festival is, in fact, something more than a 'festival'. It is cathartic in nature, and as a means of purification strengthens the spirit within. The goal is to find enjoyment through renunciation and self-denial. It is more an exploration of the colourful things of life, without being bound to or obsessed by them.

The Hindu culture and tradition does not derive from any one founder. It has neither a uniform creed nor any organised church. Its history and prehistory seem ageless. There is a single 'reality', but it has many forms and names in relation to its multifarious functions, attributes, aspects and the fulfilment sought from it by the seeker. The same 'reality' becomes' Brahma in its creative aspect, Vishnu in preservation, Shiva in dissolution, Laxmi or Sri in benignity, Kali or Durga in fierce female energy and so on. What Lord Krishna says through the Gita is the very same thing -- 'I am the ritual, I am the sacrifice, the oblation, and the herb. I am the prayer and melted butter, the fire and its offering-- even those who are devotees of other gods if they worship with faith, are sacrificing to me alone, though not adhering to the rule.'



Hinduism encompasses an entire civilisation and way of life that has evolved since the dawn of human civilisation. The Vedas, the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita and the epics of Ramayana and Mahabharata play an important role in the development and practice of Hinduism. These, the ancient holy scriptures of the world, uphold the eternal truth of the eternal existence of the supreme Lord. 'Owing to the eternal will to communicate God descends on earth to reunite His joyful self with His created beings.' Essentially God manifests Himself in human form to crush and annihilate worldly vices and revive eternal values. Lord Krishna has bound Himself to man and in that consists the greatest glory of human existence. He came down with His full divine manifestations and raised human civilisation to a celestial plane.

Thus came Sri Gauranga and brought a heavenly unification of mankind irrespective of caste creed and races. The Bhakti movement of that time, espousing whole hearted devotion to God in one aspect or another, opened up what was previously esoteric knowledge and practice for large numbers of people. Means were made available for everyone to realise God, with no

conflict between knowledge and practice.

There are a number of ways to achieve salvation and spiritual evolution. The Upanishads advocate the path of knowledge and wisdom. Bhakti or devotion is another path, which is far more easy, smooth and open to the masses. In Bhakti the worldly life is not considered an obstacle. Bhakti is based on and inspired by both love and reverence towards the object of devotion -- God. A devotee craves for the divine grace and in order to attain it, indulges in worship, prayer, chanting His names, praising His glory, fasting, and many such ritual observances. The Bhakta maintains a passionate relation with the godhead, whom he considers the sole immanent reality. For him he is father, mother, brother, friend, beloved, family, refuge, teacher, master, -- an omnipotent confidant.

Sri Krishna focused on the unity of religions. His Gita is a deep reservoir of knowledge.

There is also a wide range of spiritual disciplines and practice, such as: Karma-yoga, Bhakti-yoga, Raja-yoga and Tantra. These disciplines are significant to Hindus as well as beneficial to all of humanity. The meanings and intention of the Gita have historically found elaboration and

explication in the smritis, the two great epics and various major and minor Puranas. Sri Krishna attracts all beings towards Himself so that they may realise the depth of His infinite mercy and love. He maintains an existence of concrete bliss: The entity of the creatures of the cosmos is part and percel of the Lord. There is a chronological order in the manifestation of the supreme being.

We know that festivals, ceremonies and rituals are integrating and uniting force in the Hindu tradition. Pilgrimages and temples play the same role. There is a huge literature of stories, mythologies and legends that affect the imaginative man. There is also integration at the conceptual level. At this level, many systems of philosophy are developed. The classical philosophies like Nyaya, Vaisesika, Samkhya, Yoga, Mimamsa and Vedanta come under this category. Again, there is no conflict over holding the single, universal truth, rather each system is recognised and respected by the other.

All gods and goddesses are translations of Brahma. Krishna is the most perfect as such of pure Brahma in the human experience. We can talk about Krishna, meditate on Krishna, love Krishna and dedicate our lives to Him. In this universe nothing parallels Krishna. We living beings possess a mortal body and immortal soul, but His body and soul are both immortal. His Gita attempts to bring about a synthesis of existence. This book has attracted the interest of the philosopher as much as have the aphorisms of the Vedanta. Almost all of the great Vedantists have some commentary on this little book of seven hundred stanzas. Apart from the Vedanta philosophy, there exists other systems of thought as said earlier. These systems of thought are not in any sense in serious disagreement with the Vedanta. An attempt has been made to bring about a synthesis of all systems of thought by the Puranas. They are semi-philosophical works, eighteen of them, attributed by tradition to one person, Vyasa. The most outstanding of these Puranas is the Srimad Bhagavada which itself is considered as commentary of the Vedanta. In this book have been fused all the great system of Hindu philosophic thought with wonderful genius and skill.

Prem Ranjan Dev is President of Bangladesh National Hindu Council

The venom of terror

Islamic fundamentalism is fast spreading its tentacles across the subcontinent

PREM SHANKAR JHA

WHEN 13 grenades were thrown at an Awami League rally in Dhaka on August 21, killing 20 persons, injuring up to 300 and coming within a whisker of wiping out the entire top leadership of the Awami League, our first reaction was to breathe a sigh of relief that it happened somewhere else.

Eight months earlier, when Gen Musharraf escaped two successive attempts on his life within a week, we experienced the same secret relief. Such things didn't happen in India, we said to ourselves. They were fruits of the ambivalence the two governments had displayed towards terrorism in the past. Some even went so far as to say that having made their bed, it would serve Pakistan and Bangladesh right if they had to sleep in it.

Political leaders can't decide whether to ride the tiger of religious intolerance or confront it. This indecision has fuelled terrorism.

Such complacency is utterly unwarranted. What nearly happened in Bangladesh and Pakistan has already happened here: thirteen years ago we lost a much loved former prime minister to a suicide bomber. And lest public memory be short, only last year a terrorist cell in Maharashtra committed no fewer than five major acts of terror that took more than a hundred lives before it was finally broken.

The truth is that South Asia is not immune from the special brand of terrorism spreading across a large part of the globe. A new breed of intolerance feeds it. And it is thriving on the abundant supply of the most lethal small arms that the world has ever known. Its epicentrean austere religious establishment in Saudi Arabia which feeds large sums of money

into madrassas that propagate its form of Islam. A handful of these have become breeding grounds for terrorism.

But in the final analysis, this new brand of terrorism has been able to make inroads into all three countries mainly because of indecision among political leaders over whether to ride the tiger of religious intolerance or confront it. Pakistan is the most obvious example. During the Afghan war it played host to the Arab mujahideen who later became the backbone of Al Qaeda. After the war, it inducted some of them into terrorist operations in Kashmir. This served as a green signal to other Islamic fundamentalist organisations, notably the LeT, to recruit and collect funds at will so long as they send some cadres to do the government's bidding in Kashmir.

The Faustian pact turned Pakistan into an epicentre of global terrorism in the '90s. Worse still, by serving a national purpose in Kashmir and Afghanistan, the Afghan mujahideen built solid bases within Pakistan's security establishment. It is this connection that enabled LeT, Jaish and other terrorist groups belonging to the notorious Brigade 313 to make a bid on Musharraf's life.

The attack on the Awami League shows that a combination of political expediency and religious ambivalence may be taking Bangladesh down the same road. The ruling Bangladesh National Party (BNP) made what would otherwise have been a sagacious political move when it decided to fight the 2001 elections in tandem with the Jamaat-e-Islami. This was because the Jamaat was stronger in the western fringes of the country where the BNP was the weakest. But the Jamaat is no ordinary party. It had for years been trying to propagate an intolerant arabicised

brand of Islam that was alien to Bangladesh's secular culture. This alliance therefore forced the BNP to give ground on crucial issues like banning Ahmadiya texts and introducing a law against blasphemyPakistan style.

These compromises made by its leaders (a large number of whom fought against precisely the kind of cultural colonialism that the Jamaat espouses, 33 years ago) have inflamed a violent fringe both outside and at the edges of the Jamaat itself. The BNP too is learning, thereforeas the Pakistani establishment has donethat there is no half-way house in accommodating fanaticism.Its leaders may well be right when they claim that by bringing the Jamaat into the government they have brought it into civil society.But the compromise has empowered a violent intolerant fringe that now threatens the very existence of democracy and civil society in Bangladesh. What is worse, it has given this fringe just enough legitimacy in the eyes of the security forces to paralyse them and abort the rule of law. That may be one reason why although twelve days have passed since the bombing, the police and intelligence agencies have not arrested a single person in connection with it.

India has no record of ambivalence towards Islamicor to be precise self-proclaimed Islamicterrorism. But over the past six years, the bjp too established a not-too-credible record of running with the hares and hunting with the hounds. Throughout that period, A.B. Vajpayee left no one in doubt that he sternly disapproved of any manifestation of Hindu exclusivism and prejudice. Advani frequently gave him valuable supportso much so that the Vishwa Hindu Parishad labelled both of them as pseudo-secular. But when the party had to choose between defending the secularism of the

Constitution by cracking down on the lunatic fringe of the Sangh parivar and looking the other way, it chose the latter. Gujarat was of course the most blatant example and fittingly cost the NDA its hold on power.

The near-catastrophe in Bangladesh should serve as a salutary warning to all three countries. There can be no compromise with absolutism in any form. We therefore need to work together to prevent it from taking root in the South Asian soil. This requires profound changes in all countries both on domestic issues and towards each other.

Courtesy: The Outlook