

# LICENCE TO THRILL

“ Making sense of terror was one of my primary aims of writing this series. I needed to dispel the illusions that most people have about terrorism.”

“IF YOU can imagine it, you can achieve it.” That’s the title of Delhi-based author-cum-motivational speaker-cum-entrepreneur Mukul Deva’s *Mag. Mukul* — an alumnus of La Martiniere College, Lucknow, the National Defence Academy, Pune, and the Indian Military Academy, Dehra Dun — has imagined and achieved quite a lot at 48. Commissioned in the 50th Light Infantry of the Indian Army in 1981, he took premature retirement from the Army in 1996 as a major after 15 years of service, including a decade of combat/operational duties in India and overseas.

The managing director of MSD Security Pvt. Ltd. and founding director of CANexus — which is “dedicated to developing technology, programmes and services that improve the quality of life of those with special needs” — Mukul has earlier authored *Time After Time*, a collection of short stories, *Striptease*, a study of military strategies, *Mafek*, which lays the “roadmap to hegemony and success”, *Women in Indian Cinema*, and *Lashkar*, the first of a four-book series on terrorism and counter-terrorism.

The second thriller in the *Lashkar* series, *Salim Must Die*, published by HarperCollins, will be released at the India International Centre in New Delhi on April 2.



Mukul Deva with his dogs in New Delhi

Excerpts from an interview

**Q. Like *Lashkar*, *Salim Must Die* stands out for its meticulous detailing. Did it entail a lot of research?**  
A. Yes, both books needed a lot of hardcore research. *Lashkar* took about eight months to research and *Salim*, I took that plus another eight months. Since October 2005, I have been putting in about two hours per day on just research. This will continue till the last book of this series is written.

**Q. Did your own experiences in the Army come handy while writing about operations?**  
A. Yes, of course, they did. Having been in action was a

huge plus and ensured I could deliver a large dose of reality to the military action parts. Plus the fact that my Army background has given me a deeper insight into the proxy war that has been inflicted on India for over three decades now.

**Q. With the four books in the series, did you want to make some sense of the cause of terrorism?**  
A. Making sense of terror was one of my primary aims of writing this series. I needed to dispel the illusions that most people have about terrorism.

**Q. In the book, while Salim meets his nemesis, Iqbal sort of redeems himself. Is**

**there any message that you wanted to drive home through Iqbal's story?**  
A. Yes, of course. Not many of us have the courage to acknowledge we were wrong. Even fewer have the courage to seek the salvation that redemption offers.

**Q. “Every time a Salim dies, a hundred more will rise to take his place. No matter what you do, the jihad will go on,” says Salim before his death. And his is a sentiment which, I am sure, finds echo in many real-life Salims. What do we need to do to strike at the roots of terrorism?**

A. There is no easy solution to terrorism. The political

and economic grievances can be resolved through diplomacy, political initiatives and economic actions. However, what solution do you offer to a terrorist who seeks one world-one religion and even tells you how to practice that religion. Not fighting terror calls for a concerted police-military-economic and diplomatic measures that need to be applied in tandem.

**Q. Are you satisfied with the anti-terror laws and mechanisms that the Government of India has put in place to deal with terrorism?**

A. No. There is a lot more than New Delhi needs to do and do it fast — the wolf is

already at the door and will break through if we do not do something really smart/bold and really soon.

**Q. Does one of its characters Rao's analysis of global terrorism and the war against it reflect your own personal views?**

A. Smart question. There is a bit of the author in the views expressed by every character in the book. No? What is more important is do you feel the views are accurate/relevant? And also understand that it is just one viewpoint — there will always be many more ways to look at it.

**Q. How do you see the geopolitical realities**

**MUKUL DEVA**  
Author of *Striptease*, *Mafek*, *Women in Indian Cinema*, *Lashkar*, *Salim Must Die*

**SALIM MUST DIE**

SALIM MUST DIE

By Mukul Deva  
HarperCollins,  
pp. 417, Rs 225

affecting India and Pakistan when it comes to their fight against terror?

A. There is no comparison. Pakistan has always viewed terror groups as “strategic assets” and thus has always been reluctant to act against them. What India suffers is what has been inflicted on us by Pakistan’s Operation Topac (which is detailed in *Lashkar*). In any case please understand that Pakistan is a failed nation — the handover of the Swat Valley to terrorists is just the beginning of the end for them. Whereas India is a strong and vibrant democracy. Despite whatever ails us today, India is on the way up. We just need to handle this war on terror differently.

**Q. What expectations do you have from the Obama government? How do you foresee the shape of War on Terror in the years to come?**

A. Historically, the Americans have never completed what they have set out to do — they have the habit of pulling out when the going gets tough. I think instead of my trying to guess the outcome I will allow history to speak for itself — it does have the habit of repeating itself. In any case this answer requires a lot more time and space than we have here. Suffice it to say read Books Three and Four of this series. (Smiles) I have dealt with it in detail here.

It is best that India learns to deal with her own problems and not rely too much on others.

**Q. They compare you to Robert Ludlum, Tom Clancy, et al. Is that flattering? Do you think we have a long way to go when it comes to the genre of crime thriller?**

A. It is very nice to be compared to such globally established Masters of Thrill & Shock. However, (hopefully) the day will come when they compare me with me. After all, I am just Mukul Deva trying to be Mukul Deva. (Smiles).

Yes, of course, Indian writing has yet to explore this genre fully. Hopefully this series will start the trend. We have so much to offer after all.

**Q. Your writings have been quite eclectic in their range. Do you plan to explore any other genre?**

A. My writings are reflective of my growth as an individual and of course the times we live in. In many ways, I just consider myself a profiler of the times. For the time being, I shall remain with terrorism, military action and crime — basically the shades of black that surround our lives.

**Q. What identity of yours do you feel most strongly about — a writer, an entrepreneur or an entrepreneur?**

A. At least I will remain an Armyman, in my head an entrepreneur (after all we poor writers also need to make a living. Smiles) As for writing, I write therefore I am. For me, writing is the ultimate catharsis.

**Q. Could you share something about your forthcoming work — the last of two novels of the *Lashkar* series as well as *And Death Came Calling*, *The Shades of Black* and *Through the Fog*?**

A. All I can say is Watch This Space — it will certainly promise you a wild ride ahead and a book every year for at least the next five years. My remaining constant of course. Whenever I can and wish to divulge about the forthcoming books at this stage will always be available on my site [www.mukuldeva.com](http://www.mukuldeva.com).