

TERRORE

and counter terror

Mukul Deva's *Lashkar* is a journey into the heart of terrorism, how it grows and how it can be dealt with, says Amit Bhan

For the first time, we have an Indian thriller set in contemporary times with characters taken right out of our surroundings. *Lashkar* is a gripping tale about terrorism and counter terrorism by Mukul Deva, an ex-Major of the Indian Army who had served in active combat operations in India and abroad. Though a work of fiction, *Lashkar* is quite close to reality, telling the story of a small town boy Iqbal who is lured across the border, trained to become a *jihad* and carry out acts of terror on Indian soil. The action covers a vast area from Lucknow to Delhi, Rajasthan, Gujarat, LoC in Kashmir, Lahore and Karachi. And as the terror modules spread death and destruction through bomb blasts, the Government orders for counter measures (assassination of those responsible for having carrying out these blasts), the young Iqbal discovers the futility of such acts, realising there was

nothing holy about the "war" (of terror) that he is supposed to fight.

"The book is all about those acts of terror we have witnessed so far. But then people, especially the current generation, are not quite well-versed with history. The best way to put across the lessons of history is to put

them in a fictional form. It is a better way to acquaint with the past," says Deva. The narrative is fast-paced and attracts one's attention right from the word go. The action starts around three years back when the bomb exploded in the Capital's Sarojini Nagar market, killing scores of people. "Though the book was in my mind for quite some time, I started writing it the same evening after the bombs went off in Sarojini Nagar," puts in the author.

As the terror act evoke widespread anger across the country, the Government decided to go on the offensive and called for secret counter terror strikes. Deva, drawing from his experience of being an infantry officer, has given an elaborate graphic description of the counter terror strikes from the planning to the execution stage, taking care of even minutest



The middle-aged man who answered the door was shaking off sleep as he opened the door, cursing whoever it was disturbing him at this unearthly hour. The sharp edge of the knife cut open his jugular with surgical precision. He was already dying as Deopa caught his falling body and moved him away from the doorway quickly, just in case someone was watching from the street. Dhankar moved swiftly out of the shadows. Skirting the car parked right outside he raced up the stairs as Deopa swept through the ground floor. The knife was put away and now silenced pistols in their hands were poised ready to cough out their lethal cargo. The magazine of each weapon housed nine death-dealing rounds. The tent was already in the chambers of both pistols

details — from the terrain to the logistics, weapons and the tactics used — the feeling as if it had had actually taken place.

"The idea to give a counter-terror measure was to show that we have the capability to strike out and execute such plans," he adds. The action also carries out

simultaneously in the terrorist training camps across the border where religious

leaders and ISI officials are shown motivating the "young recruits" for *jihad*.

For Iqbal, who holds a diploma in engineering, the lure of fighting a holy war is great in the beginning and lands up in one of the training camps in POK. And as his training goes on, he realises the futility of this so-called *jihad*. "Iqbal is literate enough to see the

loopholes," says Deva, talking about the "humane" side of his character. Nevertheless, *Lashkar* makes an interesting read.

