

Action-packed thriller

Lashkar

by Mukul Deva. HarperCollins.
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THERE is a new kind of warfare—without rules, without apparent battlefields, without any clear-cut boundaries. It's the war of terror, which has the whole world as its arena, with its epicentre somewhere in the Afghanistan-Pakistan belt. Mukul Deva's *Lashkar* talks about just such a war, enacted between India and Pakistan, neighbours carved out of hatred and disillusionment, and with religion as the sole reason for their sep-

arate identities.

Set in the months around the October 2005 bomb blasts in Delhi, the book moves at a brisk pace, jumping with ease between various scenarios—you have Iqbal, the young engineer from Lucknow, lured across the Indian border to train as a "jihadi"; there is the training camp itself, and there are the actions and the reactions of the Indian Government and the armed forces.

It's a refreshing change to see India out of the "poor cousin" mould, and represented as a power that the world needs to reckon with. Strength, tempered by sense, is the impression one gets. Gone is the Gandhian philosophy of offering the other cheek, here is a country that believes in action. Had this

been a movie, the Indian Prime Minister's words, "For a world that has become so used to taking India for granted and has always mistaken our non-alignment and love for peace as a sign for weakness, the Indian response must come as a powerful and assertive warning" would have had the crowds cheering in the gallery. In contrast, we have a barely disguised Pakistani General at the helm whose fanatic speeches leave no one in doubt about his crazy ideas and ideologies.

Then, there is the misguided youth lured into a world that they don't believe in, into actions they don't want to be a part of and into a life there is no escape from—the story, unfortunately, of just too many of our

children. The act of insurgency has a very basic purpose, of inflicting a wound on the Indian psyche and economy that is not allowed to heal but festers into a sore that permits no rest. It uses these hapless young converts as battle-fodder, dispensables to feed the endless, aimless jihad on India.

Deva's training with the National Defence Academy and service in the Sikh Light Infantry comes in handy as his descriptions of Army life and tactics, of encounters and the suspicion and hatred that the border forces live with certainly ring true. There are descriptions of the elusive Force-22, reminiscent of the US Navy Seals, which add a very Ludlumesque touch to the action.



A thriller that will touch all of us as its action is set so close to home, *Lashkar* is well written, with no uncomfortable pauses

to break the spell. It carries you with it till the end and when you put it down, it's like saying goodbye to a friend.