

‘Savagery is not acceptable, the honour code must be followed’

MUKUL DEVA talks to SHANA MARIA VERGHIS about making uncanny predictions about war against terror in his *Lashkar* books, concluding with *Tanzeem*. His next series is on the *Seven Deadly Sins*

In *Tanzeem* (Harper-Collins), the last of Mukul Deva's *Lashkar* quartet books, the main protagonist Iqbal, an operative with a strike-action group called Indian Force-22, has lost his wife, Tanaz, a spy, and is fuelled by rage and the desire for blood retribution.

Meanwhile, in Waziristan, backed by Pakistan's ISI, the warlord Ameer-ul-Momineem appoints a band of six men called the Tanzeem, and positions them around the globe. His private army is provided with enough arms and ammunition to cry havoc, and let loose the dogs of war.

Iqbal is a man on a mission. His team and he set off down a road where return is a throw of dice.

As in previous books, Deva sets the pace for a racy read, infiltrating pages with his knowledge of defence, based on 15 army years and about ten in active combat. Previous books made uncanny predictions about real-time international terrorism and Pakistan's ISI. Will this one be the same? Following is the Q & A.

The Pakistan army recently sent forces to conduct ops in North Waziristan, where part of *Tanzeem* is located. Was that a coincidence? Most of the *Lashkar* series, appear to

be based on your familiarity with the geo-politics in that part of the world.

No coincidences. All four books of the *Lashkar* series, have been written based on tonnes of research, on the reality of terrorism as it exists. This should be evident from various things.

Like Osama being found and killed in a safe house in Pakistan. (I wrote about this in the earlier book, *Salim Must Die*, dating to 2009). Please also see the way the 'war on terror' is being allegedly waged by Pakistan. They have bred and nurtured this monster and I see no reason why they will stop doing so. If the world hasn't realised it, it will do so soon, hopefully before the cost is too high — the ISI is the biggest terror group in the world and needs to be reined in. Soon. I am neither a Pak-basher nor war-mongering. But facts are facts and time will prove this right.

What from your experience, do you expect will occur there?

The long answer is given in *Tanzeem*. The short answer is that not

too much good is likely to come in future, with Pakistan lapsing into *jihadi* hands — except that these *jihadis*, are their men in uniform, namely the ISI and the Pak Army. This is becoming increasingly obvious with every passing day — something I have written about in all the *Lashkar* series books. Can you even begin to imagine the implications for world peace, if the terror groups openly take over their nukes?

Comments you made elsewhere about actor Salman's visit to Pakistan, suggest you're not hot about cultural diplomacy. In *Tanzeem*, you write that Pakistan will maintain a, 'strategically hostile' relationship to India. Was this for fiction's sake or based on current realities?

I'm sorry, my problem is not with 'cultural diplomacy' or Salman Khan — it is with what he said about the Mumbai attacks, which I felt unacceptable. From where I see it, his words were treason and no half-baked apology can condone them. (Please see the videos yourself).



As for Pakistan, yes it will chose to maintain hostility with India, since that is what suits the vested interests in power there — namely the Pak Army and ISI — they have too much to lose if they allow peace with India. So it is certainly not fiction — look at the last 30 plus years... And watch the future.

From your combat experience, do you think one should justify savage behaviour during war?

War is never good. It always evokes strong reactions in those involved —

some of them never good. But savagery is not acceptable. The honour code must be followed... Most of this is listed in the Geneva Convention.

What about taking the position of being a victim of fate?

Aren't we all? Also, please do remember, that soldiering the the second oldest profession in the world. Whether I write about it or not, the fact is that the human race has been waging war, since time immemorial. And if history is any guide, will continue to do so. Sad, but true.

Is there no strength in choosing one's response to environment with a strong moral code, rather than Iqbal's primitive 'eye for an eye' system, which Americans recently applied too?

Sometimes the choice is about being hit, or hitting back first to prevent being hit. If given the choice I would always choose the latter, especially when an adversary has repeatedly conveyed, (through his actions), that he does not seek peace. Indians deserve to live in peace and with dignity — and anyone, (of our neighbours) who does not understand this, needs to be told through strong action. Please do under-

stand that defence, no matter how strong, does not win wars... And we are at war... We have been exposed to an insidious war by Pakistan for over three decades through these terror groups... Keeping quiet won't make them go away. Only strong action, that lets them know the cost will be high will make them back off. Our leadership needs to get real and understand this... And respond in a planned, strategic manner. This is not war mongering, but merely exercising the right to defend our self. We have to use every option available to keep India safe — diplomacy, economic sanctions, covert action, surgical strikes. And if pushed into the corner, the application of military force. No one wants war, but we are already at war and being bled systematically and daily.

Why write the *Seven Deadly Sins* series?

The reason is that I am thoroughly enjoying this excursion down the dark side of human nature... Hence stories based on crime... Each of these seven will be standalone books, with different characters, settings and treatment... Techno-thrillers, psy-thrillers etc... One, (*Death Came Calling*) is done and goes into edit shortly. The second, (*R.I.P.*) is almost complete... So... Watch this space!

