

■ **BLOWBACK** (*Harper-Collins, Rs 199*) by **Mukul Deva** is the third in the series of thrillers set in tumultuous South-Central Asia. Having struck gold with *Lashkar* and *Salim Must Die*, Deva returns to the tribal areas of Pakistan, where American soldiers are locked in the struggle to oust the Taliban. A warlord is led to believe by the ISI that it is one of his allies — which may be a bait to trap him in the net. As the marines, the Taliban and the Pakistani army get entangled in the tussle for supremacy, layers of intrigue are revealed. The prose is taut but fluid. The influence of Cold War spy thrillers, especially of



John le Carré, is evident, although Deva's achievement falls short of the literary excellence of le Carré.