

Fissile Material



SALIM MUST DIE

by Mukul Deva

HarperCollins | 432 pages | Rs 225

by Raja Menon

IT has finally happened—an Indian thriller of quality. Like the discovery of Ishant Sharma who can hit the deck consistently at 140 kilometres an hour, Mukul Deva has written a 400-plus-page thriller where neither the tautness nor the pace collapses. The villain understandably is a retired Pakistani ISI brigadier, with streaks of megalomania and an apocalyptic, fundamentalist worldview. The book is indeed ‘prescient’ as one blurb describes it, for the entire plot is outsourced by the ISI chief to a retired crony with access to

much of the ISI’s infrastructure, as indeed happened in preparing for the Mumbai attack. Deva is more optimistic than prescient when it comes to the good guys. Intelligence agencies are brought under control, the executive arm and signal intelligence wing actually coordinate in a modern computerised control room, and Force 22, India’s secret strike force, is given an all-India role.

Most joyously optimistic of all, India’s national security apparatchiks suddenly develop a part of the anatomy long gone missing, and sanction the ‘lifting’ or elimination of a major ISI planner across the border. Imagine the hoots of glee in the multiplexes of India when the book is converted into an equally taut film and Indian commandoes confront the jihadi planner in his supposedly safe eyrie in Murree. Ishant needed a Kirsten, and Deva needs a little help with the female interest. After all, most book buyers are women. With just that little push, here comes India’s Clancy or Ludlum or Forsyth. ■