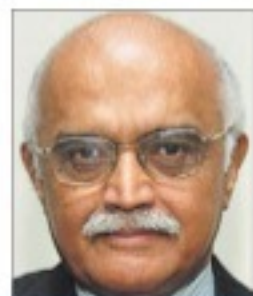


Don't make mistake of underrating IS



VAPPALA BALACHANDRAN

EX-SPECIAL SECRETARY, CABINET SECRETARIAT

BY unearthing 'terror mastermind' Mufti Suhail's conspiracy, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) has disproved Home Minister Rajnath Singh's assertion, made on May 23, 2016, that there was "no threat to India from the Islamic State (IS) as people of the Muslim community are against the IS". Rajnath Singh had repeated this argument on March 15, 2018, saying that the IS would have no impact on India. He should have known that the IS is not supported even in Sunni-majority Arab areas, not to speak of Muslims globally.

The Home Minister is not alone in going wrong on the shadowy terror group. Mathew Olsen, Director of the US National Counter-Terrorism Centre (NCTC), had told the Brookings Institution on September 3, 2014, that he had "no credible information that the ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) is planning to attack the US". A year later, ISIL (IS) organised one of the worst mass killings in the US at San Bernardino on December 2, 2015, through a Pakistani-origin couple.

Thus, even knowledgeable people go wrong in assessing the danger from the IS. Some say that the IS would not be able to march into India like the way it captured Syrian-Iraqi territories. Others think that it would stealthily infiltrate foreign cadres into target coun-

tries on the lines of al-Qaeda, Lashkar-e-Taiba or Jaish-e-Mohammad.

The first scholar to describe how they operate was US journalist James Kitfield. When the IS had not even made its appearance, he wrote in the National Journal Weekly in September 2006: "Global insurgency reacts to Osama bin Laden's radical ideology almost like distant and seemingly disconnected light particles respond in unison to an unseen wave". This is also called 'Do it yourself terrorism'.

No doubt the IS had raised a spectacular army and captured 60,400 sq km during 2014-17 with 31,000 foreign fighters from 81 countries. By January 2018, this area had shrunk to 6,500 sq km through allied bombing and online propaganda was reduced by over 60 per cent. Still they are able to sneak into the minds of their adherents remotely and make them zombies to obey commands. The UN Security Council's Counter-Terrorism Committee acknowledged this in November 2018. The IS' covert propaganda is able to bypass the internet and shift to "anonymous sharing portals like Sendvid.com, Justpast.it, and Dump.to and maintain its networking structure in the face of coordinated disruption". The UN report of December 31, 2018, estimated that 20,000 fighters might still be present in IS-controlled areas.

The IS also motivates its returning cadres to unleash terrorism in countries of their origin. Algerian Islamists who had taken part in the Afghan Mujahideen wars (1980-89) had started it on their return to Algeria, killing thousands in the 10-year civil war from 1991. I had envisaged a scenario like this in India through my column, 'When the Boys Come Home', in a prominent weekly on September 21, 2014.



BREAKTHROUGH: The National Investigation Agency busted an Islamic State-linked terror module recently.

In the US, several official and non-official agencies are involved in countering online radicalisation. We don't seem to have paid focused attention to this issue. Our security agencies, Home Ministry, police forces and the National Security Council might assure us that they are taking steps, but there is no transparency regarding their specific contribution.

A tragic example of this type of terrorism happened in Surabaya (Indonesia). The families of Dita Oeprianto, Anton Febryanto and Tri Murtano, including their minor children, blew themselves up on May 13, 2018, when they attacked three Christian churches. Oeprianto, a childhood education programmer belonging to IS affiliate Jamaah Ansharud Daulah (JAD), had spent time in IS-controlled areas.

Other countries are spending thousands of man hours decoding how such remote propaganda affects the minds of people beyond national borders and how to counter them. The European Union has a staff of 550 in its Radicalisation Awareness Network on cross-border issues such as asylum, migration, border control and terrorism. The Organisation for Security & Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the world's largest security-oriented inter-governmental organisation, has

programmes to prevent online radicalisation, not all very successful. An article in *New York Times* in 2017 says that people tend to look up to online propaganda, being dissatisfied with the mainstream media.

In the US, several official and non-official agencies are involved in countering online radicalisation following the theme paper of December 2012 by Thomas Keen and Lee Hamilton, co-Chairs of the bipartisan 9/11 Commission. We do not seem to have paid focused attention to it. Our security agencies, Home Ministry, police forces and the National Security Council might assure us that they are taking necessary steps, but there is no transparency regarding their specific contribution. We have no tradition of academic institutions being involved in such serious studies, except by think tanks that might produce occasional papers.

One of the basic requirements to

prevent radicalisation is to maintain an inclusive society where justice is assured to all sections irrespective of their religions or castes. The UN General Assembly's 'Four Pillars' of 'Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy', adopted on September 8, 2006, and renewed every two years speak of "addressing conditions to the spread of terrorism", including violation of human rights. Mufti Suhail had spoken about "the persecution of Muslims in India" as one of the reasons for his joining the IS network. We should introspect whether the 'beef lynchings' in some states on mere suspicion had created such 'conditions', especially when DNA tests by the National Research Centre on Meat had certified that only 7 per cent of the suspected samples were cow meat (between 2014 and 2017).

We should also introspect how far the NDA government's misguided policy on Kashmir has contributed to this trend even after the May 24, 2018, recommendation by the National Security Strategies Conference to Rajnath Singh on holding talks with the Hurriyat and Pakistan to stop the slide. This introspection should include policy deviations such as considering 'separatists' as untouchables, policy excesses like treating stone throwers as terrorists and using pellet shots on demonstrators.

On December 29, 2018, masked youths entered the 14th-century Jama Masjid in Srinagar and hoisted Islamic State flags on the pulpit, akin to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's action of proclaiming the IS from the podium of the 12th-century grand mosque of al-Nouri in Mosul on July 4, 2014. It is hoped that the present J&K administration would fully support the Hurriyat-led joint resistance in countering this sacrilege.

India in crosshairs of imminent missile race



SANDEEP DIKHIT

DEPUTY EDITOR

New Delhi needs to adopt dual-track policy to stand up to the challenge of more potent Chinese missiles in the neighbourhood as a result of the collapse of the US-Russia treaty on land-based ballistic missiles. While India's military-industrial complex recalibrates its strategy and response, there is a need to dampen machismo in the global air by examining the possibility of a fresh missile limitation initiative.

THE Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, scrapped recently by US President Donald Trump, doesn't ring a bell in India. Neither should it. The painfully-achieved Cold War-era pact was between Russia and the US and it required both to destroy their stockpiles of ground-launched ballistic and cruise missiles with ranges between 500 km and 5,500 km.

By all accounts, the treaty was a success. It led to the dismantling and destruction of over 2,500 missiles of both countries, quarter-backed by a rigorous verification regime that lasted till 2001 and followed by 30 meetings of their Special Verification Commission.

The treaty was stuttering till Trump dealt a death blow against the shadow of a wide-ranging decline in bilateral ties after Russia entered Crimea and allegedly interfered in the 2016 US presidential election. But the actual reason for scrapping the treaty was China. And once the US begins a missile race with China, India will soon feel the heat. Its only possible response, given the mindset of narrow regionalism in South Block, would be to deploy more missiles of its own.

Why does China become a factor and why should India get dragged in when it was a US-Russia bilateral treaty that was scrapped? The logic is in the past. During the Cold War, China had no rocket force to boast of and so the focus of the risk de-escalators among diplomats was to shut out the



COSTLY BUSINESS: There is no missile development project that has not spiralled away from the initial cost estimates. The coming missile race will be no exception.

possibility of US-Soviet rivalry side-swiping the world with nuclear weapon-loaded missiles. Since then, China developed a nuclear and conventional missile inventory, 95 per cent of which is in the INF Treaty-banned ranges of 500 to 5,500 km.

Trump feels the treaty cramps the US from setting up all sorts of missiles on the ground in its bases in Japan and Korea: a loophole prohibits missiles on earth, but allows sea and space-based missiles. Trump has left no scope for doubt by stating that his abandonment of the treaty was a 'threat' to "China and whoever else wants to play that game." The hardliners in the US had been circling the wagons for months. Xi Jinping's exhortation to the Peo-

ple's Liberation Army to be prepared for war and his gauntlet to independence seekers in Taiwan need to be seen in this backdrop.

Once the US installs land-based missiles around China, Xi's hard line abroad will compel him to respond in the language of confrontation, putting immense pressure on India to step up research in hypersonic missiles and also respond with more missile systems. Pakistan will then respond similarly. Trump's strategy of countering China will drag India into stepping up the potency and quantity of its rocket forces.

The INF Treaty has positioned India at the interstices of a Cold War 2.0. As the recent G-20 summit showed, India

was the only country that held separate trilaterals with Japan and the US and the other pairing of Russia and China. It can capitalise on its position to exploit both binaries emerging from the collapse of the treaty. The military-industrial complex can reorient to the opening up of new security threats while South Block attempts to play the extra-regional peacemaker by attempting an enlargement of the treaty to reduce nuclear missile stocks worldwide.

This need not entail a change in regional policy behaviour of being largely a subcontinental security seeker. Thirty years after the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's attempt at a security system-reforming moment with a global disarmament plan, there is another opportunity to seek a reversal of the ballistic missile race that is blighting our part of the world more than any other: of the nine states known to possess both nuclear weapons and over 1,000-km-range ballistic missiles, six are Eurasian (not counting the US). Another 22 possess non-nuclear-tipped missiles with a range that does not fall within the INF Treaty limits.

All three postulates of the India-presented 'Action Plan for a Nuclear Weapon-Free and Non-Violent World Order' remain valid: (i) ballistic missiles do not distinguish between combatants and civilians, (ii) they hold others to inhuman threats and, the most relevant (iii) India will have to divert more of its limited resources away from other pressing needs to

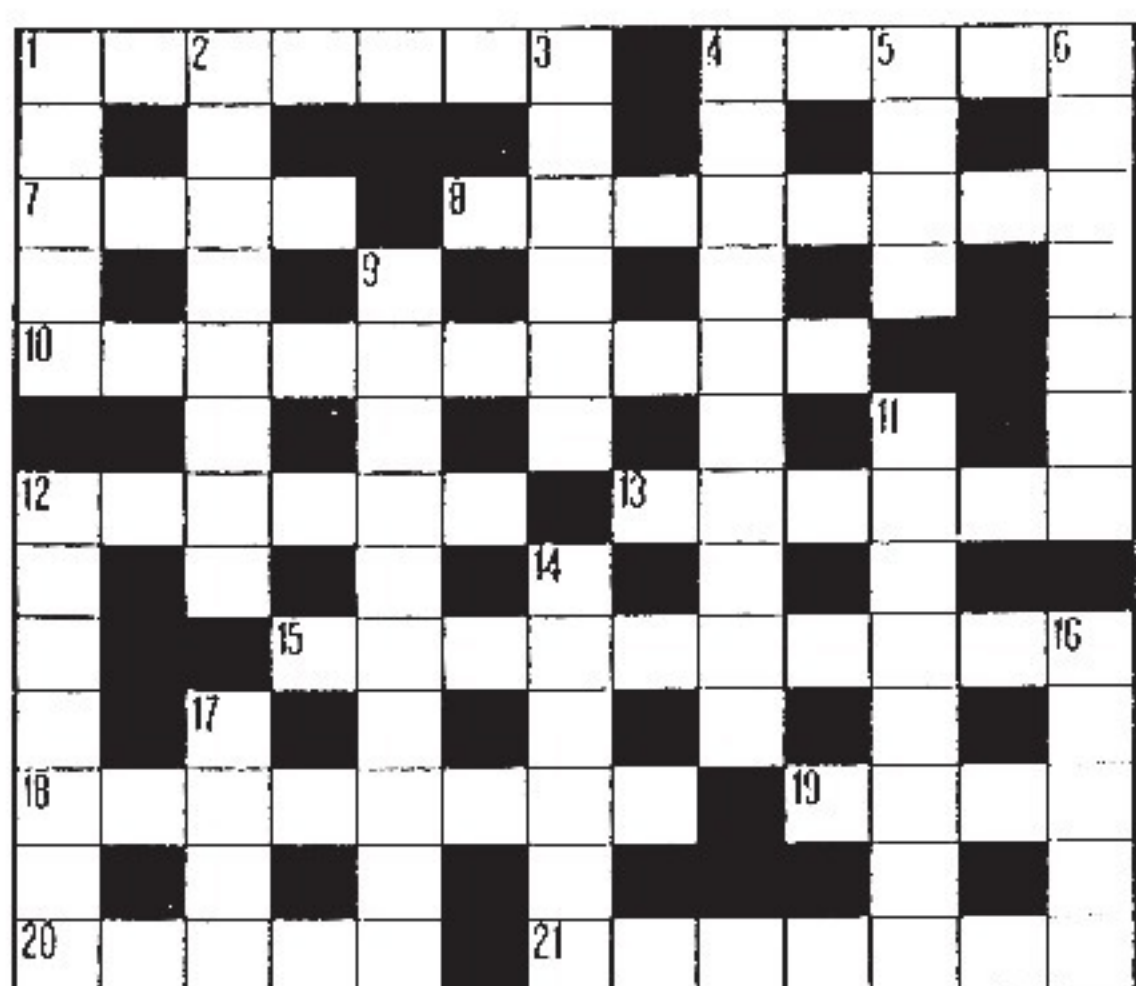
match improved Chinese (and later, Pakistani) weapons and delivery systems. This approach will ensure India's complete involvement with the Asian system which is being attempted piecemeal.

The world at this stage needs to give a rest to the balance of power concept in which security geopolitics has been marked by escalation. A persuasion-based model of politics has become inevitable and India is bound to find allies in Europe that has been uncharacteristically taken to insular continentalism. Barring England and France, whose missile arsenals will come under scrutiny, other old powers like Germany, Spain and Italy, despairing of US-induced tensions on Russia's periphery, may welcome an attempt at checking the enthusiasm of an externally-induced missile race on their territory that has the potential to consume its citizens. The proposal to globally extend the INF will also find takers in Africa and Latin America that have no missile-dependent security calculations.

International politics can't be left to its devices and the whims of strongmen. The contradictory US reaction to the missile proliferation issue — walking out of the treaty with Russia, rewarding Pyongyang with talks and throwing the book at Tehran — needs an overdue correction. India needs to keep its flanks guarded, but the world needs a fresh breath of ethical ethos to keep its moral compass in place.

sandeepdixit@tribunemail.com

QUICK CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- To mirror (7)
- Surround hostilely (5)
- Number of paying spectators (4)
- Religious choral work (8)
- Dawdle (5-5)
- Absurd behaviour (6)
- Without a like (6)
- John Ford's classic western (10)
- In the sky (8)
- Prejudice (4)
- Male singing voice (5)
- General pardon (7)

DOWN

- Unbending (5)
- Uselessness (8)
- Filament (6)
- Traffic hold-up (10)
- Nimble (4)
- Difficulty (7)
- Something visually arresting (3-7)
- 11th sign of zodiac (8)
- Insult (7)
- Large tropical lizard (6)
- Done in a hurry (5)
- With little or no fat (4)

SATURDAY'S SOLUTION

Across: 1 Tin Pan Alley, 9 Insular, 10 Patio, 11 Vine, 12 Davis Cup, 14 Rancid, 16 Tender, 18 Explicit, 19 Fail, 22 Azure, 23 Purport, 24 Leading lady.
Down: 2 Ibsen, 3 Pale, 4 Normal, 5 Lopsided, 6 Enticed, 7 Silver medal, 8 Copperplate, 13 Dividend, 15 Neptune, 17 Pippin, 20 Aloud, 21 Oral.

SU DO KU

8		5		6			9
	3						4
1		9		3			2
		9	4	5	8		
7		6			3		5
		8	3	7	9		
6			2	4			7
	5						9
4		7		9			1

EASY

CALENDAR

JANUARY 7, 2019 MONDAY

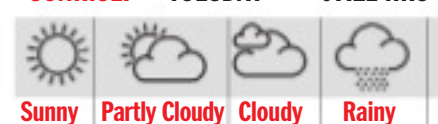
- Vikrami Samvat 2075
- Shaka Samvat 1940
- Posh Shaka 17
- Posh Parvishite 23
- Hijari 1440
- Shukla Paksh Tithi 1, up to 9.19 am
- Harsh Yoga up to 3:48 am
- Ultrashadha Nakshatra up to 8:36 pm
- Moon in Capricorn sign

SATURDAY'S SOLUTION

5	9	7	2	6	4	8	3	1
4	8	1	7	9	3	2	6	5
3	2	6	8	5	1	4	7	9
1	6	4	5	2	7	3	9	8
7	3	9	6	4	8	5	1	2
8	5	2	1	3	9	6	4	7
9	7	3	4	8	2	1	5	6
6	4	8	9	1	5	7	2	3
2	1	5	3	7	6	9	8	4

FORECAST

SUNSET: MONDAY 17:36 HRS
SUNRISE: TUESDAY 07:21 HRS



CITY	MAX	MIN
Chandigarh	18	07
New Delhi	15	07

PUNJAB

Amritsar	17	04
Bathinda	17	04
Jalandhar	17	04
Ludhiana	17	06

HARYANA

Bhiwani	19	07
Hisar	19	04
Sirsa	18	05

HIMACHAL PRADESH

Dharamsala	11	01
Manali	05	-02
Shimla	08	0

JAMMU & KASHMIR

Jammu	17	05
Leh	01	-11
Srinagar	07	-03

UTTARAKHAND

Dehradun	19	06
Mussoorie	09	0

TEMPERATURE IN °C

The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

SP-BSP pact in Uttar Pradesh

Potential game-changer ahead of Lok Sabha polls

MONTHS before the Lok Sabha elections, the Samajwadi Party (SP) and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) have agreed 'in principle' to an alliance in Uttar Pradesh. The crucial development has thrown the electoral battle wide open not only in UP, but also in other states of the Hindi belt, including Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. Both the SP and the BSP had been decimated in the 2017 UP Assembly elections, winning just 47 and 19 seats, respectively, even as the BJP had recorded a thumping victory with 312 seats in the 403-member House. However, the two opposition parties' combined vote share was a sizeable 44 per cent, higher than the saffron party's nearly 40 per cent. These numbers, coupled with anti-incumbency and the BJP's defeat in three Lok Sabha bypolls in the state last year, give Akhilesh Yadav and Mayawati considerable confidence to turn the tables in the parliamentary face-off.

The *gathbandhan* apparently has no place for the Congress, which is again set to be confined to the Gandhis' pocket boroughs of Amethi and Rae Bareilly. The BSP has even gone to the extent of calling the grand old party an 'insignificant' force in UP. Punching above its weight, the Dalit-centric party has been keeping the Congress on tenterhooks in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. Despite having just two BSP MLAs in the MP Assembly, Mayawati recently managed to push the Kamal Nath government to make a decisive commitment on dropping 'frame-up' cases registered by the previous dispensation under the SC/ST Act.

With 80 Lok Sabha seats (the maximum for any state), the Uttar Pradesh battleground can make or mar fortunes on the national stage. In 2014, the BJP had won a whopping 71 seats, while the SP had finished a distant second and the BSP had drawn a blank. The Congress obviously needs the twosome to upstage Modi and Co. As of now, both parties are playing hard to get. Their clout is likely to grow further once the nation pronounces its mandate.

Nepal's initiative for parents

India, too, must come up with cash component for elderly

NEPAL is attempting an interesting initiative to extend the social cover to its elderly population by introducing a law that makes it incumbent on employed children to deposit 5 to 10 per cent of their income into their parents' accounts to ensure their security. The trend of neglecting one's ageing parents by children with income streams has spurred the government into action. This trend is not specific to Nepal. It is, unfortunately, fast becoming a 'done thing' even in a traditional, family-oriented society like ours as work-related intra- and inter-country migration takes children away from their parents.

India's Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007, does have provisions for the welfare of its elderly citizens, projected to make up 12.40 per cent of the population by 2026. It is legally binding on children to provide maintenance to parents. But there is no mechanism to ensure its compliance, making it merely a redress mechanism, albeit a powerful one, for parents who wish to take a legal recourse. Senior citizens do get several concessions, but forced to live alone, without any emotional comfort, they do need some kind of income support.

There was a time when social norms and the advantages of the joint family system obviated the ill-treatment of parents. The times changed, and with it, the hearts of children, who no longer believe that they owe it all to their parents. Somewhere along the way, the glamour of a fast life extracted a price, cutting coldly through the resilient filial bonds. Those who were an umbrella of safety once, a source of unending blessings, became a burden. Along with symbols of advancement that sprung up in every city, old-age homes jostled for space in a consumerist space; unwanted parents struggled for dignity — their suffering is for the entire society to see. Like the joint family system, the parent-child bond has come undone. Alas, moral, bounden duty is a relic of the past, as are the Shraavan Kumars.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Sometimes you make the right decision, sometimes you make the decision right. — Phil McGraw

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

LAHORE, TUESDAY, JANUARY 7, 1919

Restriction of Council Business.

THE announcement by the Government of India regarding the restriction of the business of the winter session of the Imperial Legislative Council has been received with disappointment. The restriction affects the privilege of non-official members to move resolutions, which is the only way of bringing popular opinion to bear on official policy and measures and without which the Council would be shorn of most of its value to the people. The Government base their proposal on the ground that there would be a rush of business connected with post-war problems. This, however, is just the reason why there should be no restriction. The Government of India cannot mean that there is no need to consult popular opinion in regard to post-war schemes. Even in the most critical periods of the war, when any curtailment would have been plausible, no such drastic remedy was thought of. Now that we are out of the woods, can the restriction be justified?

Mahomedan Education.

AN incident which happened when the resolution for the establishment of Mahomedan hostels was moved at the annual meeting of the Mahomedan Educational Conference deserves a passing notice. As per a *Times of India* correspondent, "A man approached the platform with a rupee in his hand, and the stream began. Man after man rushed to the platform with his mite, and within 15 minutes a large amount was collected. Even Hindus' contributions were accepted. The enthusiasm reached its pitch when a boy came with a rupee, and another came with two annas." When it is remembered that similar scenes have been witnessed at the Sikh Educational Conference and at the anniversary of Arya Samaj, it becomes clear that the yearning for education is universal.

A new phase in US pivot to Asia?

Trump's revisit of the region heralds India's inclusion and a sharper US-China confrontation



SHYAM SARAN

FORMER FOREIGN SECRETARY AND SENIOR FELLOW, CENTRE FOR POLICY RESEARCH

ON December 31, 2018, US President Donald Trump signed into law the Asia Reassurance Initiative Act (ARIA), initiated by the Congress. It spells out a long-term strategy for the Indo-Pacific. It conveys willingness of the Congress to support financial appropriations for initiatives the US Administration may bring before it in realising various components of the strategy.

The amount indicated is modest, a mere \$1.5 billion per year for the next five years, hardly commensurate with the scale of ambition ARIA manifests. When compared to the vast sums that China is deploying for its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in Asia and beyond, the US effort would appear anaemic. But it represents a relatively greater level of commitment to the region than the earlier 'Pivot to Asia' declared by President Obama in 2013 that turned out to be mainly a rhetorical flourish. It coincided with China's militarisation of offshore islands in South China Sea and the declaration of an Air Defence Identification Zone in the East China Sea which went unchallenged. Will ARIA make a difference? Will it reassure US military allies and partners in the region?

ARIA is important because it manifests a change in US perception of China from it being a competitor to now an adversary. The Act expresses 'grave concerns with Chinese actions that seek (i) to further constrain space for civil society and religion within China; and (ii) to undermine a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific region'. The fact that in a highly polarised political environment, the Act was passed by consensus in the Senate, and by a very large majority in the House of Representatives, is significant. It demon-



INDIA'S ZONE: The Asia Reassurance Initiative Act colourfully defines the Indo-Pacific as stretching from Hollywood to Bollywood.

The overture puts India in the quandary of choosing between ASEAN and the Quad as the central institution to address Asia Pacific's security challenges.

strates a broad consensus in the US that China is a threat not only to its security interests, but also an economic and even ideological rival. This is also reflected in the explicit commitment to helping Taiwan maintain 'asymmetric' military capabilities vis-a-vis China. The Act could be a warning to Trump that in dealing with the China threat, his alienation of allies and partners is inimical to US interests. It may constrain his transactional approach to China, relieving pressure on that country if he is able to get a favourable trade deal, for example. Trump may still go his own way, the trade war may subside, but ARIA signals that the underlying trend is unmistakably towards sharper US-China confrontation.

ARIA embraces the concept of Indo-Pacific in place of the earlier focus on Asia-Pacific. The difference between the two concepts is the inclusion of India as an integral part of the geostrategic space that the US sees as the main theatre of contestation with China. The Act defines Indo-Pacific as stretching from the western shores of the Pacific to the western shores of India, or more colourfully as stretching from Hollywood to Bollywood.

India occupies a prominent place in the text which recognises 'the vital role of the strategic partnership between the US and India in promoting peace and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region' and welcomes India being designated as a 'major defence partner' enjoying cooperation at a level 'commensurate with the closest allies and partners of the US'.

Despite India's hesitancy, the Act regards the Quad as being 'vital to address the pressing security challenges in the Indo-Pacific region. India has not linked its embrace of Indo-Pacific with the Quad and has been cautious in projecting its role and future evolution. However, the US sees the Quad as integral to its Indo-Pacific strategy and this may pose a challenge to India's intent of not being seen as a participant in an overt containment of China.

In his speech at the Shangri-la Dialogue in Singapore in June, PM Modi had defined Indo-Pacific as encompassing the entire oceanic space, from the western Pacific all across the Indian Ocean to the eastern shores of Africa. However, in a joint statement with the Indonesian President, reference is made to peace and security in the Indo-

Pacific being realised through ASEAN-led institutions and processes, recognising ASEAN centrality. It would appear that India has tacitly accepted that in operational terms the more restricted definition applies. There is also the obvious contradiction between the Quad and ASEAN centrality as key mechanisms for a new security architecture in the Indo-Pacific. Reconciling the two will be a diplomatic challenge.

ARIA expresses strong commitment to US military alliance partnerships in the region, but it also underscores the importance of expanding US economic and trade ties with countries in the region, in particular with ASEAN countries. The importance of engaging with ASEAN, the East Asia Summit process and Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) is emphasised. How much of this will be followed through by a Trump administration allergic to trade pacts and multilateral arrangements remains to be seen.

Predictably, the legislation has a prominent focus on North Korea and the continuing threat from its pursuit of a nuclear arsenal and the goal of 'complete, verifiable and irreversible dismantlement' of its N-programme is reiterated, linking the lifting of any sanctions to concrete measures undertaken by the North Korean regime. The Congress has, through the Act, sought to keep itself abreast of the progress of negotiations, thereby seeking to prevent Trump from any impulsive giveaways. There is no mention of the Trump-Kim summit or the agreement reached between them and this reflects the concern over his unorthodox initiatives.

There is an entire section of the Act which seeks to 'promote US values in the Indo-Pacific region'. There is a reiteration of US commitment to upholding rights and promoting democratic values. China is mentioned specifically, as is Myanmar and the Philippines. We should therefore expect greater activism on the ideological front from the US or at least in its Congress.

For India, US pressure on China is helpful, but a confrontation, which forces countries to take sides, may not be welcome. Some serious diplomatic tight-rope walking lies ahead.

There is humour at hospitals too

LOKESH RANA

NOBODY wants to land up in a hospital. The reasons are several: the smell of medicines and antiseptics; the groans and moans of patients; some OPD examination procedures that may be unpleasant. We doctors are regarded as next to God, but sometimes, we can be next only to a comedian! A doctor may have weird expressions and make strange sounds while concentrating on a procedure.

When we enter a medical college as students, we are encountered with many medical terms that we struggle to memorise initially, but these can be funny: 'artery' seems to be some

kind of a drawing art, 'terminal illness' sounds like an airport terminal, 'vegetative state' has nothing to do with vegetables, 'coma' is not a punctuation mark, and many more.

Taking down family history can be amusing, when the doctor is more 'honest' compared to the patient or there can be an awkward situation due to a misinformed patient or his/her attendant. Once an intern in the past history sheet column wrote that the patient was in 'a good state of health until he banged his car against a tree on the side of the road'. Another budding doctor wrote in the psychiatric illness column that there is 'no past history of suicides'.

Sometimes, we encounter patients with an extraordinary sense of humour. I recall an incident during my internship days, when a senior consultant surgeon was examining a gentleman who had complained of 'prostatism'. The doctor had to examine the patient's rear. For this, he had to relax it and deliberately asked some random questions to divert the attention of the patient. This is how the conversation went: 'Babaji, kitne bachche hain?'

'Do ladke, teen ladkiyan,' replied the elderly man.

'Bidi-cigarette peete ho?'

enquired the doctor.

'Dhuan aa raha he kya?' the man retorted!

There was pin-drop silence for a while as the consultant stared at the patient for a few seconds. The team of juniors in the hierarchy was turned at once out of the room... they were laughing so hard!

Another funny incident was encountered during my internship days at the ENT OPD. A middle-aged woman came to the doctor for a follow-up. She showed the vial of ear drops to the consultant, saying that she was relieved of her earache, but the drops tasted bitter. Looking at the satisfaction and feeling of contentment on her face, nobody could gather the courage to tell her that she had taken the medicine via the wrong route.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Genuine farm reforms

Apropos 'Let it be year of farm reforms' (Jan 4), it is true that strong and honest initiatives are needed to create a favourable atmosphere for ease of doing agriculture. However, when we look at the attitude of political parties, it looks impossible because poverty and unethical agricultural policies suit them for vote-bank politics. A majority of parties do not want to lose their vote bank by formulating permanent and rewarding farm policies. They only believe in temporary appeasement policies like loan waiver. Time has come for parties to rise above petty politics and stop fooling poor and illiterate people.

AJAY LAKHANPAL, DHARAMSALA

Caring for the elderly

Apropos 'New Nepal law requires kids to deposit 5-10% of income in parents' bank account' (Jan 5), it is a remarkable step. It is an example for other countries. India should also think of something on these lines. It is unfortunate that the youth today is more concerned about their looks and social media status than the loving parents who helped them grow and always pray for their well-being. They are

either sent to old-age homes or deserted on roads. Can we ever repay their love? It is sad that a law is needed to make them realise their duties.

HARKAWALJEET KAUR, MOHALI

Khaps should take lead

Refer to the editorial 'Child trafficking in Haryana' (Jan 5); the problem of 'Paros' exists mainly because people are still crazy for a son. The day a girl starts being viewed as a pride of her parents, the sex ratio will balance out and child trafficking will minimise. Village elders and khaps should focus on this critical issue rather than bothering about inter-caste marriages etc. They must encompass SC/ST in their spectrum. More emphasis needs to be given to girls' education and their empowerment in the real sense. Haryana is a strong and progressive state, but needs to improve its social indicators.

COL RD SINGH (RETD), AMBALA CANTT

Regressive practice

It was shocking and startling to learn that as per the report of the 2016 National Crime records Bureau, out of 33,855 abducted for

'marriage', half were under the age of 18, which is illegal anyway ('Child trafficking in Haryana'; Jan 4). Women who resist this move are badly beaten. This is a shameful practice. Everyone has a right to lead a happy life, with the partner of their choice.

SUBHASH C TANEJA, BY MAIL

Bridge course chaos

It is an irony that policy-makers, while drafting policies, are not aware of ground realities. Every government is continuously experimenting with the education system. The recent one being a bridge course, made mandatory for in-service BEd teachers, if they want to teach primary classes. It is an irrational decision and wastage of scarce resources like time and money. Teachers having an experience of nearly a decade or less are compelled to attend classes, make assignments, lesson plans, etc., through copy-paste. Millions of pages are wasted, which will be dumped. This is nothing more than generating business for stationery vendors and publishers. When will we abandon these age-old conventional practices? Developed countries like China and Japan are going paperless and we are still stuck

with it. Had these candidates been instructed to deliver lectures, make presentations, discuss classroom challenges and its remedies, workshops by experts on unique teaching pedagogy, sensitised with upcoming technology, the move would definitely have been appreciable. After quizzing several dozen such candidates, we have numerous unanswered questions. What is the logic? Where is innovation?

NEERAJ MOHAN PURI, PATHANKOT

Icons in their own right

In response to the article 'Parallel universes of Mrinal Sen, Kader Khan' (Jan 4); both were icons in their respective fields, though the core of both remained the same — providing entertainment. One made films and documentaries while the other provided dialogues. Mrinal da put forward the sufferings of the common man. Kader Khan proved his mettle in satirical lines to ease the burden of being the common man. Films should showcase the truth of society instead of presenting nudity and vulgarity. Both of them gave a new mindset and direction to the film industry and also to society.

JASVINDER S HUMSAFAR, MALOUDH