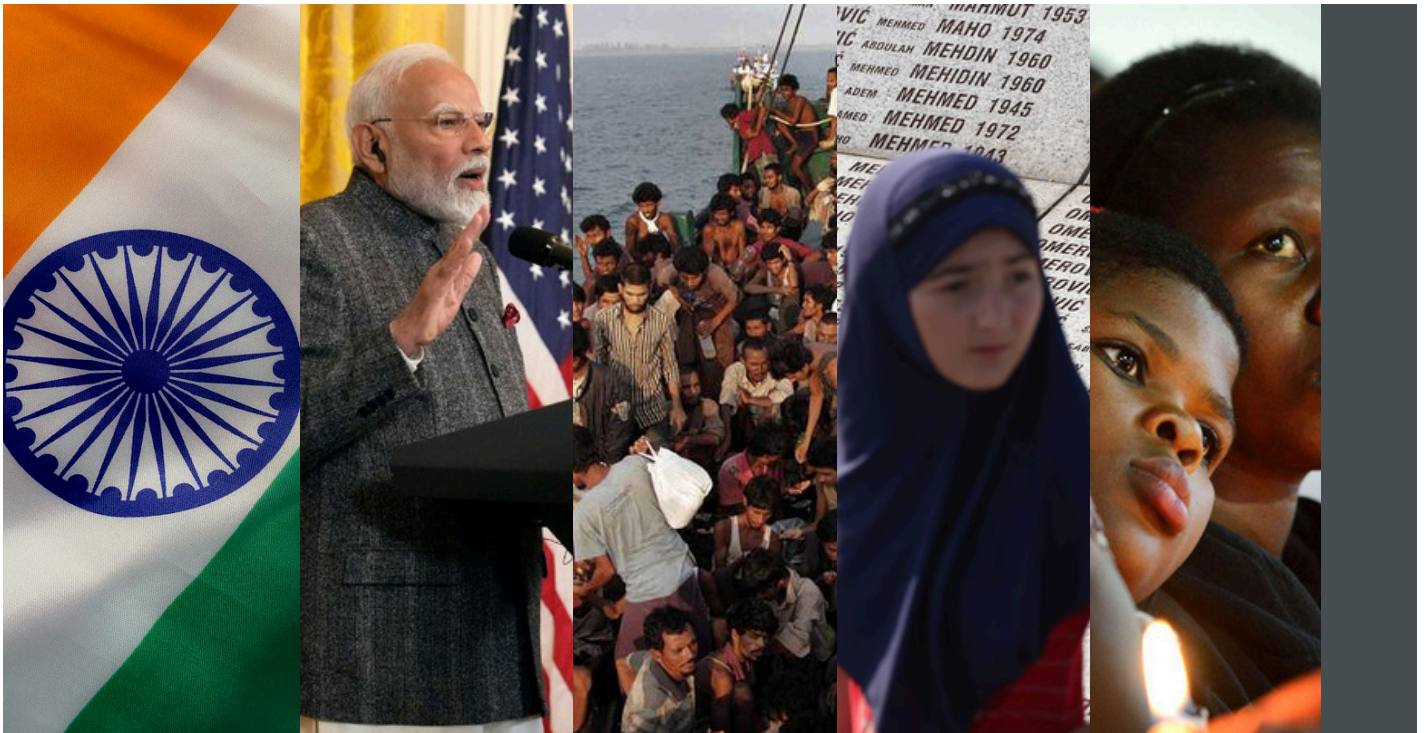


# VANTAGE POINT

*A Newsletter on Non-Traditional Security*



## Contents

Issue Commentary by **Pratyush Pran Sarma**  
Gender Equality and Security by **Aryaa Roy Choudhury**  
Looking/Acting East by **Anand KT Nambiar**  
Book Review by **Aishini Prasad**

## ISSUE COMMENTARY

### India and the New Trade and Tariff War

Written By **Pratyush Pran Sarma**

The contemporary global economy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is witnessing a new kind of warfare – this warfare is not fought with traditional weapons in wars, but by imposing tariffs and trade barriers. The current trade and tariff war has primarily been driven by the policy shifts in the United States and has far-reaching effects on developing economies in Asian and African nations. US President Donald Trump's recent tariff imposition of 25% on overseas auto imports has resulted in widespread concern across the world, especially its long-term trade partners like India which play a vital role in the international supply chains.

#### India's Economic Exposure

In the financial year 2024, India exported auto components worth \$21.2 billion, adding significantly to the global auto component market valued at \$1.2 trillion. Even though the US and the European markets make up a substantial part of these exports, Indian companies such as Tata Motors, Eicher and Sona BLW. These Indian companies have major linkages to the global auto industry, an example of which is Jaguar Land Rover (JLR)



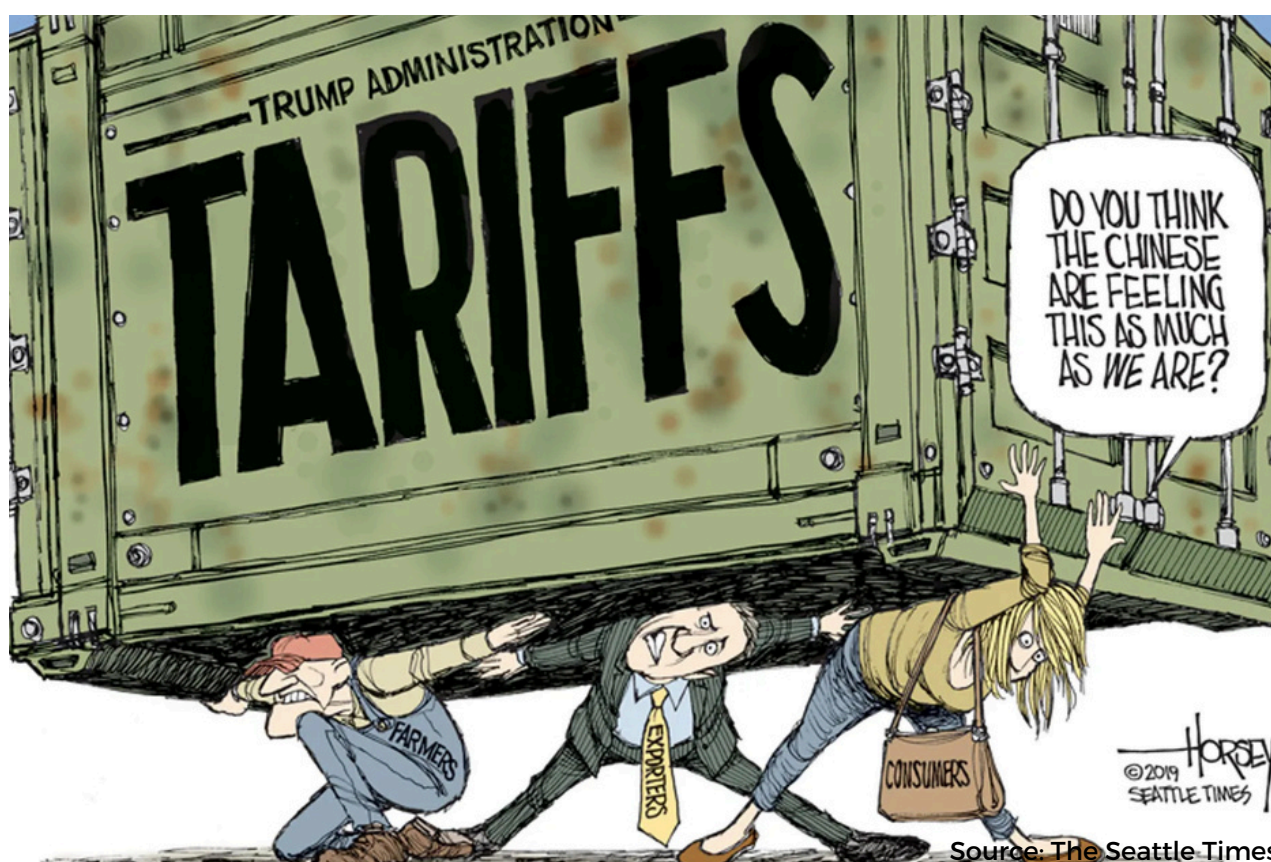
Source: The Week Magazine/AP

- a subsidiary of Tata Motors that derives 22% of its total sales from the US alone. The Royal Enfield motorcycles made by Eicher Motors, which have been a popular cultural icon in India, also face vulnerable situations amid the trade and tariff war. While companies like Samvardhana Motherson are somewhat insulated, others like Sona BLW have diversified to Japan, China and South Korea since 66% of its revenue is generated from its markets in the US and Europe.



## Response to the Trade War

The political response to the trade war is essential to control its economic impact on the country. Former Finance Minister of India, P. Chidambaram has recently talked about what such impacts could be – from reduced exports and lower foreign direct investment (FDI) to increased inflation and currency depreciation. Since India already faces challenges such as rising unemployment and stagnant wages, such a tariff face-off can further problematise the economic situation in India. Chidambaram also called for India to hold discussions with other nations such as Canada, Britain, France, Germany and Japan to prevent or prepare for a tariff war.



Source: The Seattle Times

In an attempt to counter such impacts, the Indian institutions are diversifying their export markets and increasing domestic production. For instance, Sona BLW has expanded its markets in Asia, and Samvardhana Motherson has localised manufacturing in the US and Europe. This also highlights the necessity of companies in India to develop alternate trade partnerships to decrease dependency on the West.

Today, India seems to be at a critical point in her economic relations with the developed nations of the West, where long-term economic resilience is the objective. While such tariffs from the US pose economic challenges, decision-making at the moment cannot be done adequately without considering political diplomacy and relations between the two nations.

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## GENDER EQUALITY AND SECURITY

### **Forsaken Half: Gender Security in Conflicts and Wars**

Written by **Aryaa Roy Choudhury**

The human cost of armed conflict is staggering, with women and children being the epicentre of bearing the burden. According to the United Nations Public Information Department, “as a rule of thumb, more than 75 percent of displaced people are women and children, and in some refugee populations they constitute 90 percent”. A 2023 UN Women report reveals that “in 2023, the proportion of women killed in armed conflicts doubled compared to 2022. Four out of every ten people who died because of conflict in 2023 were women”.

Traditional security, which focuses on state sovereignty, often through military and economic power, usually fails to understand the full extent of such gendered security issues. This article looks further from a state-centric focus and is more concerned with the issues of non-traditional security factors that affect economic stability and the protection of the vulnerable population. This study mainly focuses on Gender-Based Violence and tries to understand its effectiveness in a practical sense.



Courtesy: Simon Maina/AFP/Getty Images

### **Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in Conflict Zones**

Gender based violence refers to any violence often directed towards a specific gender. This rise has been seen as a rising trend in conflict zones throughout the world, with cases dominated in Bosnia, Rwanda, Syria, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. This violence is not bound to social, economic or any other factors and has been used systematically as a weapon of war. There has been an increase in the focus on crimes related to GBV, specifically through the Landmark resolution 1325 (on women, peace and security) with the UN’s clear efforts in encouraging countries to increase women’s participation as well as including their perspectives in decision-making.



GBV has been used as the weapons of war, with forced gender mutilation, sexual violence, rape, and forced marriages employed to weaken societies and instill fear. It is evident in the Bosnian war (1992-1995), an estimated 20,000-50,000 women were subjected to systematic rape and sexual enslavement, often used a tactic of ethnic cleansing and psychological warfare. Similarities have been seen in Rwanda (1994), where 100,000 - 250,000 women had been raped during this genocide with an intention to disrespect communities by defiling the women. Extremist groups such as ISIS in Syria and Boko Haram in Nigeria have also engaged in mass abduction and forced them into sexual slavery. Evident that these victims suffer from forced gender mutilation. These acts paint a clear picture of how survivors suffer from inflicted trauma but also dismantle their social structures, leaving lasting post-conflict scars.

### Challenges in the Implementation of GBV Law

Despite the rise in awareness of issues related to GBV, specifically after the increase in recognition of feminist theories of Catharine Mackinnon, Susan Brownmiller, etc. These issues persist in regards of the implementation of legal provisions in this case, as clear implementation of these provisions or their introduction addresses these issues in two major parts.

### Direct Causes

The weak enforcement of laws and judicial inefficiencies make legal protection ineffective. Survivors, even after surviving these exploitations, often face lengthy trials, corruption, which in turn makes justice inaccessible.



Courtesy: Sean Gallup/Getty Images

It must also be recognized that laws exist, but what stops them is nothing but poor implementation, delays and an underfunded legal system discouraging the victims from reporting these injustices. Without legal aid, safe housing or counseling, survivors are often trapped in an endless cycle of abuse, especially in conflict zones where rules and regulations often get warped due to dire situations.

### Indirect Causes

We also see various indirect causes like deep-rooted patriarchal norms and social stigma preventing survivors from speaking out. This fear often results in discouraging legal action, and in many societies, family honor takes precedence over justice, forcing victims into silence. As a result, many cases go unreported, allowing the continuance of this injustice, allowing perpetrators to escape accountability and reinforcing this cycle.



Courtesy: AP Photo/Michael Stravato

Addressing GBV in conflict zones requires more than just provisions; a shift in societal attitudes is crucial. Without this, survivors remain trapped in cycles of injustice and perpetrators go unpunished. A multifaceted approach integrating legal, social and institutional reforms is essential to break this repetitive cycle.



## LOOKING/ACTING EAST

### India-Myanmar Cooperation on Non-Traditional Security Issues: The Case of Human Trafficking

Written by **Anand KT Nambiar** (B.A., Second Year, St. Joseph's University)

Security challenges in the Indo-Myanmar region, especially non-traditional challenges, have been a continuing reality in the region. Internal challenges in the two nations have also facilitated cross-border crimes, such as increased coordination between insurgent groups in both nations and trafficking of humans, drugs and arms across the 1,642-km-long porous border. A particularly concerning trend involves traffickers luring young Indian IT professionals with fraudulent job offers, trapping them in exploitative conditions in Myanmar's Myawaddy region.

#### The Growing Threat of Trafficking and Employment Scams

One of the most alarming aspects of post-2021-coup human trafficking is the rise of employment scams targeting skilled Indian workers. Organised crime networks entice young professionals, particularly from Tamil Nadu, with lucrative IT job offers in Thailand. Victims enter Thailand legally but are then smuggled across the Moei River into Myanmar, where they are forced into cyber fraud operations under inhumane conditions. Reports from rescued victims highlight severe mistreatment, including lack of food, sleep deprivation, and punishments for failing to meet quotas.



Courtesy: S Yulinnas/AP

Recognizing the crisis, India has intensified diplomatic and operational efforts. Former Minister of State for External Affairs V. Muraleedharan revealed that over 400 Indian men had fallen victim to these scams. External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar also raised concerns during his meeting with Myanmar's Foreign Minister H.E. U Than Swe at the Mekong Ganga Cooperation (MGC) meeting in July 2023, emphasizing India's commitment to addressing the issue. To date, Indian authorities have rescued and repatriated 292 individuals, though many remain trapped.

### **Challenges in Combating Human Trafficking**

India faces significant challenges in tackling this crisis. Myanmar's internal conflict has weakened the central government's control in border regions, making cooperation difficult. The Myawaddy region, where trafficking is rampant, is controlled by armed militia groups rather than the military government, complicating rescue operations. Indian diplomatic missions in Bangkok and Yangon have played a crucial role in securing the release of trafficked individuals. However, bureaucratic hurdles persist, as rescued victims who cross into Thailand are detained for illegal entry, requiring diplomatic intervention to establish their status as trafficking victims.



Courtesy: AP

### **The Need for Stronger Bilateral Cooperation**

India and Myanmar signed a Memorandum of Understanding in 2019 to enhance cooperation on human trafficking prevention, rescue, and repatriation. However, the military takeover in Myanmar has cast a doubt



on the effectiveness of this agreement. Strengthening border security, improving intelligence-sharing, and conducting joint operations are essential steps in curbing trafficking networks. Additionally, awareness campaigns are crucial to educating potential victims about fraudulent job offers and the dangers of trafficking. The delayed advisory on fake IT jobs underscores the importance of timely information dissemination.

### **Conclusion**

The growing nexus between human trafficking and regional instability underscores the urgent need for deeper India-Myanmar cooperation. While India has made progress in rescuing trafficked victims, persistent trafficking networks highlight enforcement and collaboration gaps. Addressing this crisis requires a multi-pronged approach—diplomatic engagement, stricter border controls, intelligence-driven operations, and victim rehabilitation programs. Tackling human trafficking is not just a security imperative but a humanitarian one. Strengthening India-Myanmar cooperation will be instrumental in ensuring that non-traditional security challenges are met with resilience, efficiency, and a commitment to human dignity.

## BOOK REVIEW

### **India Against Itself: Assam and the Politics of Nationality** Written by: Dr Sanjib Baruah

Written by **Aishini Prasad**

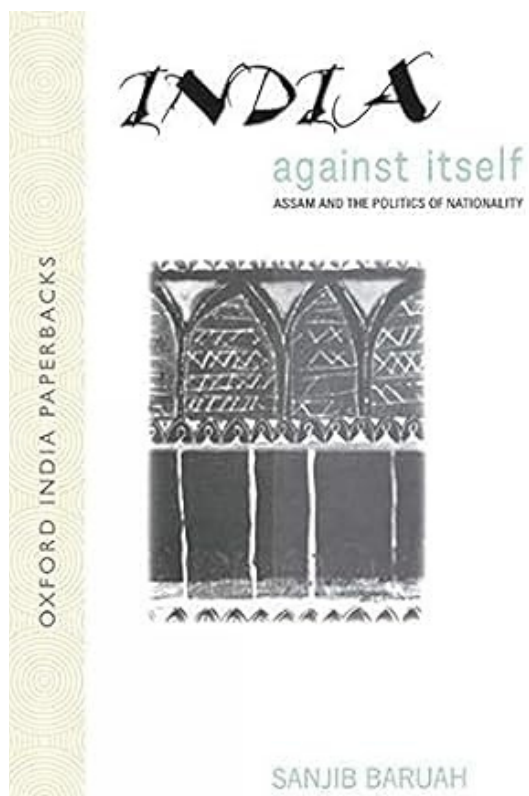
Sanjib Baruah's *India Against Itself: Assam and the Politics of Nationality* is an extreme exploration of the socio-political dynamics of Assam, a northeastern state in India. The book looks at the complications of Assamese cultural politics of language, subnationalism, ethnic tensions, and the challenges posed by India's federalised system network.

Baruah, a political science professor, combines scholarly research with an insider's perspective on Assamese culture. He traces Assam's history from its integration into British India, highlighting its transformation into a leading tea-producing region. The book

examines the tensions between pan-Indian nationalism and Assamese subnationalism, which have persisted since the early days of Indian independence.

One of the book's strengths is its methodological clarity. Baruah moves away from state-centric analyses, encompassing non-state, civic, and geographical factors in the discussion. He censured the colonial policies that shaped Assam's post-colonial politics, emphasising the region's struggle with resource extraction and administrative arrangements that conflict with its socio-cultural fabric.

The book also addresses the insurgencies, human rights abuses, and ethnic violence that have plagued Assam. Baruah argues that India's centralised governance aggravates these issues, suggesting that loose federations could better allow for the region's diversity. He provides a refined analysis of nation-building, highlighting the estate tensions in multiethnic polities.





Baruah's work is not just an academic critique but a call to rethink the Indian state's approach to federalism and ethnic diversity. By blending historical analysis with contemporary political developments, he offers valuable insights into the challenges of governance in a diverse society.

This book is essential for anyone interested in understanding the complexities of Assam's politics and the broader issues of nationality and federalism in India. It challenges conventional narratives and provides a fresh perspective on the region's socio-political history.

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