

decypher.

Deciphering News in

south east asia.

July 2025



MANASHJYOTI KARJEE



ADVANCED STUDY INSTITUTE OF ASIA

What Malaysia Is Reading:

India, Pakistan, and the New Trade Tensions

In July 2025, Malaysian news outlets examined India, Pakistan, and the global trade war through the lens of domestic anxiety and strategic caution. Coverage of India focused sharply on Assam's mass evictions of Muslims, interpreted as communal politics ahead of elections. This aligns with Malaysia's sensitivity to religious and ethnic tensions, shaped by its own multi-ethnic identity. Pakistan-related reporting centred on immigration enforcement and the vulnerabilities of undocumented populations—both within Malaysia and in Karachi—projecting a growing Southeast Asian trend of securitising migration. Meanwhile, Pakistan's internal shift towards solar energy also drew notice, revealing economic strain and grid failures.

Trade war developments dominated the economic news cycle. Malaysia's media tracked Trump's tariff rhetoric and spotlighted ASEAN's fragility amid US-EU and US-India deals. Commentary reflected growing concern over the region's exposure to bilateralism as global institutions like the WTO lose clout. Analysts warned that the US's tariff-first approach could unravel regional supply chains, especially in textiles and electronics. In this sense, Malaysia's reportage—though national in focus—echoed broader concerns about power asymmetries, selective diplomacy, and regional instability. Whether through coverage of trade, migration, or majoritarian politics, Malaysian media portrayed a world where Southeast Asia must navigate external shocks while grappling with its own internal contradictions.

News Headlines:

Pakistani eatery raided for employing foreign workers without permits

Berita Harian reports that Malaysian immigration authorities raided a Pakistani-run eatery in Kuala Lumpur for employing foreign workers without valid permits. The operation led to several arrests, reinforcing enforcement actions against undocumented labour and businesses flouting immigration laws.

Source: Berita Harian

Dozens of foreign nationals detained in Karachi

Berita Harian reports that Pakistani authorities detained dozens of undocumented foreigners in Karachi during a targeted immigration crackdown. The arrests are part of Islamabad's broader campaign against illegal migration and overstaying foreign nationals.

Source: Berita Harian

Major developments in Trump's trade war

The Star reports that Donald Trump's renewed trade war rhetoric is shaking global markets. New tariffs against India and China are under consideration, while allies await clarity. The escalating rhetoric risks undermining WTO norms and further fragmenting global trade systems.

Source: The Star

EU reaches tariff deal with US to avert rift

The Star reports that the European Union has finalised a tariff agreement with the United States, averting a major trade rift. The deal eases tensions over steel, agriculture, and digital taxation, with both sides pledging further cooperation on WTO reforms.

Source: The Star

US, China set to meet with extension of tariff pause on the cards

The Star reports that Washington and Beijing will soon hold talks likely to extend the existing tariff pause. The meeting follows mutual economic concerns and pressure from businesses to avoid a new round of duties.

Source: The Star

Prabowo and Trump have struck tariff deal — but at what cost to Indonesia?

The Star reports that President Prabowo's deal with Donald Trump to reduce US tariffs on Indonesian goods has drawn criticism over strategic concessions. Analysts fear it may compromise sovereignty and domestic industry protections.

Source: The Star

US, India in talks on deal that may cut tariff below 20%

The Star reports that Washington and New Delhi are negotiating a trade deal to reduce tariffs below 20% on key imports. The potential agreement could rebalance trade after previous spats and ease tensions before the US elections.

Source: The Star

US tariffs pose danger to ASEAN countries

The Star reports that Southeast Asian economies face rising risks from renewed US tariffs, especially in electronics and textiles. Economists warn that the fallout could disrupt regional supply chains and stall post-pandemic recoveries.

Source: The Star

Vietnam state bank readies measures to counter tariff impact

The Star reports that Vietnam's central bank is preparing a stimulus package to counter the adverse effects of US tariffs. The move includes interest rate adjustments and foreign exchange stabilisation to shield exporters.

Source: The Star

India's Assam targets Muslims in mass evictions as BJP eyes re-election

Malay Mail reports that mass evictions in Assam have disproportionately affected Muslims as BJP leaders sharpen their rhetoric before elections. Human rights groups warn the moves are part of a broader campaign to marginalise minorities.

Source: Malay Mail

Without papers: Ghost lives of millions of Pakistanis

Malay Mail reports on the plight of millions of undocumented Pakistanis lacking national ID cards. Denied public services and voting rights, they live in legal limbo, vulnerable to exploitation and state neglect.

Source: Malay Mail

Pakistan's great solar escape: Households flee the grid, spooking debt-laden government

Malay Mail reports that middle-class households in Pakistan are rapidly switching to solar power to escape blackouts and rising tariffs. The shift is undermining state revenues and stressing an already indebted power sector.

Source: Malay Mail

What Singapore is Reading:

India's Rise, Pakistan's Balancing Act, and Trade War Jitters

In July 2025, Singapore's leading outlets—The Straits Times and Channel News Asia—paint a layered picture of India, Pakistan, and global trade currents. India emerges as a diplomatic chameleon: rekindling ties with China through visa liberalisation, deepening trade with the UK and EU, and asserting border stances with Pakistan. ASEAN commentary advises India to forge an identity beyond China's shadow, aligning with Singapore's strategy of geopolitical hedging. Pakistan, meanwhile, appears as a state straddling diplomacy and domestic volatility—taking up the UN Security Council presidency, engaging the US in trade talks, yet cracking down on PTI supporters at home.

The bigger picture in Singapore's reporting reflects ASEAN's quiet but strategic anxiety over intensifying global fragmentation. India is increasingly seen as a counterweight—not just to China, but to the bipolarity of US-China rivalry. Singaporean media subtly endorse this diversification, seeing in India a partner for multilateral connectivity. On Pakistan, coverage reflects caution: noting efforts to normalise diplomatically, but also instability that may undermine credibility. Trade war fears, fuelled by Trump's tariff rhetoric and US-China negotiations, dominate economic commentary. Singapore's framing is clear—tariff brinkmanship threatens supply chains and trade norms. In all, Singapore's coverage reveals a region navigating great power competition through cautious optimism and rules-based realism.

News Headlines:

Trump says India may pay 20-25% tariff, but nothing finalised

The Straits Times reports that former US President Donald Trump stated India could face a 20-25% tariff, though no final decision has been made. The comment, made in an interview, suggests potential tariff impositions as part of his broader trade policy approach if re-elected.

Source: The Straits Times

China opposes Czech President's visit to Dalai Lama

The Straits Times reports that China strongly objected to the Czech President's planned meeting with the Dalai Lama, reiterating that such contact undermines Chinese sovereignty and violates the one-China principle.

Source: The Straits Times

India-UK trade deal signals Modi's priorities as NewSOUTH EAST Delhi eyes EU, US pacts

The Straits Times reports that the India-UK trade deal underlines Prime Minister Modi's pivot towards securing stronger trade ties with the West. The move reflects a strategic effort to deepen economic relations with the EU and US amid shifting global alliances.

Source: The Straits Times

India to resume issuing tourist visas to Chinese citizens

The Straits Times reports that India will restart issuing tourist visas to Chinese nationals, signalling a thaw in strained diplomatic relations after a long pause following border clashes in 2020.

Source: The Straits Times

China's shadow falls between India and Asean – it shouldn't

The Straits Times reports that India-Asean ties should be shaped independently of Chinese influence. Strategic cooperation must focus on regional connectivity, maritime security, and diversified supply chains instead of being framed against Beijing.

Source: The Straits Times

Defence Minister denies India bowed to pressure to end fighting with Pakistan

The Straits Times reports that India's Defence Minister rejected claims that New Delhi ended border skirmishes with Pakistan under foreign pressure, asserting the decision was taken in India's strategic interest.

Source: The Straits Times

Pakistan says it held productive trade talks in Washington

The Straits Times reports that Pakistani officials described recent trade discussions with the United States as productive, covering economic reforms and bilateral cooperation under the Trade and Investment Framework Agreement.

Source: The Straits Times

China's foreign minister meets Pakistan army chief, urges protection for nationals

The Straits Times reports that China's Foreign Minister met Pakistan's army chief to stress the need for greater protection of Chinese nationals amid growing security concerns surrounding the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

Source: The Straits Times

Pakistan jails eight from former PM Imran Khan's party over 2023 riots

The Straits Times reports that eight members of Imran Khan's PTI were sentenced to jail for their involvement in the May 2023 riots. The crackdown reflects Pakistan's ongoing political tensions and judicial actions against Khan's allies.

Source: The Straits Times

Pakistani TV channels withdraw reports on Trump visit

The Straits Times reports that several Pakistani news outlets retracted stories about an alleged upcoming visit by Donald Trump, citing verification issues and media responsibility amid rising misinformation concerns.

Source: The Straits Times

US, China seek extension of tariff truce, Trump to have final say

Channel News Asia reports that the US and China are negotiating to extend their tariff truce, but the final decision lies with Donald Trump, who remains sceptical of trade deals without firm structural reforms from Beijing.

Source: Channel News Asia

Chinese vice-president says trade wars will have no winners

Channel News Asia reports that China's Vice-President warned against trade and tariff wars at the World Peace Forum, saying such conflicts yield no winners and called for multilateral dialogue and cooperation instead.

Source: Channel News Asia

Pakistan ketua Majlis Keselamatan PBB bagi Julai

Media Permata reports that Pakistan has assumed the presidency of the UN Security Council for July, focusing on conflict prevention, multilateral diplomacy, and global peace and security during its tenure.

Source: Media Permata

What Brunei Is Reading:

India's Assertive Diplomacy, Pakistan's Global Moves, and Trade War Undercurrents

In July 2025, Bruneian media painted a nuanced picture of South Asia. India was showcased as a self-assured, tech-forward power—pushing back against Donald Trump's ceasefire claims on Kashmir while deepening diplomatic ties with the Maldives and ASEAN. Its leadership in digital payments and optimism in trade received positive coverage. Pakistan, meanwhile, earned attention for its seafood export surge, its presidency at the UN Security Council, and a major online scam involving Chinese nationals. The Myanmar conflict spilling into India brought regional instability into focus. Trade tensions loomed large, with China's resilience highlighted and ASEAN's tourism diplomacy tilting toward India.

Together, these stories reflect how Bruneian media sees South Asia's evolving role in a fragmented world order. India's dual posture—rejecting Western mediation while expanding its regional soft power—signals its growing comfort in acting as a key Indo-Pacific player. Its emphasis on digital solutions aligns with a broader South-South tech narrative. Pakistan's seafood success and UN leadership suggest attempts to craft a constructive international image, despite domestic governance flaws. The coverage of trade war ripples—especially China's pivot and ASEAN's India-friendly tourism push—suggests Southeast Asia is recalibrating ties. Brunei's reporting positions India and Pakistan not as rivals in isolation, but as adaptive players in a shifting global system where diplomacy, tech, and trade realignments matter more than ever.

News Headlines:

Modi denies Trump's claim of brokering India-Pakistan ceasefire

Borneo Bulletin reports that Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has denied former US President Donald Trump's claim of mediating a ceasefire between India and Pakistan. Modi's government reaffirmed that no third-party intervention was sought or acknowledged, maintaining its long-standing stance that bilateral issues must be resolved directly between the two nations.

Source: Borneo Bulletin

Myanmar clashes force thousands to flee to India

Borneo Bulletin reports that renewed armed conflict in Myanmar has driven thousands to seek refuge in northeastern India. Clashes between military forces and ethnic insurgents have escalated, worsening the humanitarian situation. Indian border states are witnessing a surge in arrivals amid limited capacity to provide shelter and aid.

Source: Borneo Bulletin

India exporters optimistic as tariff deadline looms

Borneo Bulletin reports that Indian exporters remain hopeful ahead of looming tariff deadlines, expecting favourable terms in upcoming trade talks. With shifting global alliances and demand for diversification away from China, Indian firms see new market openings despite uncertainty over final tariff structures.

Source: Borneo Bulletin

Pakistan's seafood exports increase 13% to USD 465 million

Borneo Bulletin reports that Pakistan's seafood exports rose by 13 per cent, reaching USD 465 million, driven by strong demand from China and Middle Eastern markets. Improved quality standards and expanded fishing capacity have contributed to the sector's growth, bolstering Pakistan's foreign exchange earnings.

Source: Borneo Bulletin

Pakistan police arrest 149, including 48 Chinese, in scam centre raid

Borneo Bulletin reports that Pakistani authorities have arrested 149 individuals, including 48 Chinese nationals, during a raid on an online scam operation in Islamabad. The crackdown targeted illegal digital fraud networks exploiting citizens through loan apps and phishing scams.

Source: Borneo Bulletin

Chinese economy grows at 5.2% annual pace in April-June quarter despite trade war

Borneo Bulletin reports that China's economy expanded 5.2 per cent year-on-year in the April-June quarter despite ongoing trade tensions with the United States and EU. Government stimulus and infrastructure spending helped offset weakened exports, although economists caution about structural vulnerabilities.

Source: Borneo Bulletin

Indian PM Attends Maldives Independence Day Celebrations

Media Permata reports that Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi attended the Maldives' Independence Day celebrations in Malé, underscoring India's commitment to regional diplomacy. His presence was seen as a gesture of goodwill and an effort to balance China's growing influence in the Indian Ocean.

Source: Media Permata

ASEAN Secretary-General Urges Stronger Tourism Cooperation with India

Media Permata reports that ASEAN Secretary-General Kao Kim Hourn has called for deeper tourism cooperation with India. Highlighting India's growing outbound market, he urged member states to tap into cultural and spiritual tourism to boost recovery in Southeast Asia's travel sector.

Source: Media Permata

India Leads the World in Fast Payments – IMF

Media Permata reports that the IMF has lauded India's leadership in real-time digital payments. With nearly half of all global instant transactions in 2023 attributed to India, the country's Unified Payments Interface (UPI) has become a model for developing economies looking to modernise financial infrastructure.

Source: Media Permata

20 Indian Travel Agents Explore Brunei's Tourism Opportunities

Media Permata reports that twenty Indian travel agents have visited Brunei as part of a familiarisation tour organised to boost inbound tourism. The initiative aims to promote Brunei's cultural and ecological attractions among Indian travellers and expand bilateral tourism ties.

Source: Media Permata

Pakistan Assumes UN Security Council Presidency for July

Media Permata reports that Pakistan assumed the presidency of the United Nations Security Council for July 2025. The country pledged to prioritise conflict prevention, multilateralism, and support for Palestine, while seeking to project diplomatic leadership on global security issues.

Source: Media Permata

What Cambodia Is Reading:

India's Rise, Pakistan's Shadows, and the Trade War Tremors

In July 2025, Cambodian media portrayed India as an assertive yet collaborative power. India's rejection of NATO's critique on Russia trade was framed as a strong defence of sovereign economic choices, reflecting broader Global South pushback against Western pressure. Coverage highlighted India's expanding footprint in Cambodia—through pharma exports, agri-finance pacts, and education scholarships—while also recognising New Delhi's growing competition in textiles. India's simultaneous outreach to both China and the West (QUAD, UK trade deal) presented it as a strategic balancer. In contrast, Pakistan surfaced minimally, with focus on its controversial move to issue passports—but not citizenship—to Rohingya refugees. On trade wars, Cambodia's media tone was cautious, tracking tariff tensions (US-EU, China, Asia) while welcoming multilateral efforts like QUAD's mineral pact.

The broader takeaway is that Cambodian news coverage reflects Southeast Asia's growing awareness of India's evolving regional role. India is seen as a rising partner blending soft power (scholarships, MoUs) with strategic assertiveness. Cambodia's economic and diplomatic reporting subtly signals an ASEAN-wide preference for multipolar engagement—resisting bloc alignment in favour of flexibility. Meanwhile, the trade war coverage captures regional unease with economic fragmentation, underscoring ASEAN's vulnerability to global supply shocks. Pakistan's brief presence in coverage signals regional human rights concerns rather than political weight. India, however, is front and centre—economically entangled, diplomatically agile, and geopolitically rising.

News Headlines:

India pushes back against NATO's warning over Russia trade sanctions

Asia News Network writes in Phnom Penh Post that India has firmly rejected NATO's concerns about its continued trade with Russia, asserting its right to pursue sovereign economic decisions. India maintains that its dealings are legal under international frameworks and vital for energy security amid ongoing Western sanctions on Moscow.

Source: Phnom Penh Post

Pharma products top Cambodia's commodity import list from India

Khmer Times reports that pharmaceutical products have become Cambodia's largest import category from India. Trade between the two nations is expanding, with medical supplies, machinery, and vehicles forming a significant portion of the bilateral exchange, reflecting deeper economic ties.

Source: Khmer Times

India's Modi and UK PM Starmer ink trade deal

Khmer Times reports that Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer have signed a new trade agreement aimed at boosting bilateral commerce and investment. The deal includes provisions on services, tariffs, and supply chain cooperation, marking a key milestone in UK-India economic relations.

Source: Khmer Times

India to restart tourist visas for Chinese citizens

Khmer Times reports that India will resume issuing tourist visas to Chinese citizens after a long suspension. The move comes amid gradual diplomatic thawing and aims to promote cultural exchange and tourism recovery between the two Asian powers.

Source: Khmer Times

India's VP Dhankhar resigns

Khmer Times reports that Indian Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar has unexpectedly resigned from office, citing personal reasons. His resignation has triggered political speculation and constitutional consultations over his successor amid an increasingly active political season.

Source: Khmer Times

ARDB, India's NABARD ink MoU to boost agri-finance ties

Khmer Times reports that Cambodia's ARDB and India's NABARD have signed a memorandum of understanding to strengthen agricultural finance cooperation. The agreement aims to improve rural credit systems, promote inclusive farming, and enhance financial technology sharing.

Source: Khmer Times

India likely to be a competitor to Cambodia in garment exports

Khmer Times reports that India's rising capacity and new textile policies could pose stiff competition to Cambodia's garment export sector. As India streamlines logistics and subsidises production, regional textile dynamics may shift, impacting Cambodia's labour-intensive industry.

Source: Khmer Times

India's Jaishankar meets China's Zheng to boost bilateral ties

Khmer Times reports that Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar met Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Zheng Xiyan to reset strained ties. Both sides agreed to intensify diplomatic engagement and resolve border issues, stressing peaceful coexistence and economic collaboration.

Source: Khmer Times

PM discusses trade collaboration with India, Czech Republic

Khmer Times reports that Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet discussed boosting trade partnerships with India and the Czech Republic, focusing on digital economy, infrastructure, and vocational education cooperation during separate bilateral meetings.

Source: Khmer Times

QUAD agree on maritime security, strike mineral deal

Khmer Times reports that QUAD nations (India, Japan, Australia, and the US) have reached an agreement on enhancing maritime security and establishing a strategic minerals initiative. The move aims to counter China's influence and secure vital supply chains across the Indo-Pacific.

Source: Khmer Times

India to speed up launch of military satellites

Khmer Times reports that India plans to accelerate deployment of military satellites to enhance space-based surveillance and national security. The initiative is part of India's broader efforts to modernise its armed forces and integrate satellite data into battlefield planning.

Source: Khmer Times

Indian government awards full scholarships to 41 Cambodians

Phnom Penh Post reports that the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) has granted full scholarships to 41 Cambodian students. The scholarships cover tuition, accommodation, and living expenses, furthering India's soft diplomacy and educational outreach in Southeast Asia.

Source: Phnom Penh Post

Pakistan issues passports but not citizenship to Rohingya

Khmer Times reports that Pakistan has issued passports to Rohingya Muslims living in Karachi but denied them citizenship. The move has sparked human rights concerns as the stateless community remains marginalised despite decades of residency in the country.

Source: Khmer Times

US and EU agree on 15% tariffs, averting transatlantic trade war

Khmer Times reports that the United States and European Union have reached a compromise on imposing 15% tariffs on selected goods, avoiding a broader trade war. The agreement reflects ongoing negotiations to balance protectionism with economic cooperation.

Source: Khmer Times

Asian stocks struggle as traders eye trade war

Khmer Times reports that Asian stock markets have shown signs of weakness amid growing fears of a new trade war between major economies. Investors are closely monitoring geopolitical tensions and shifts in US-EU and China trade dynamics.

Source: Khmer Times

India quietly lifts social media ban on select Pakistani celebrity accounts, to the dismay of some

Phnom Penh Post reports that India has discreetly restored social media access for several Pakistani celebrities. The move has drawn mixed reactions domestically, with critics arguing it signals inconsistency in India's policy towards digital diplomacy and cross-border influence.

Source: Phnom Penh Post

decypher.

