



WTO MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE 14 27th March 2026 - DAY 2

INTRODUCTION

The second day of fourteenth Ministerial Conference (MC14) convened on 27 March 2026.

Day 2 of the MC 14 began with breakout sessions on WTO reform, where each minister of the WTO Member States (“Members”) participated in one of six breakout groups, with up to 28 delegations in each, across three sessions. The discussions focused on decision-making and past mandates at the WTO, development, and level playing field issues. These were followed by a plenary session on WTO reform and transparency, alongside various bilateral and small group consultations among Members on the sidelines.

Key updates from Day 2 are summarized below:

DECISION-MAKING AND PAST MANDATES

- India urged Members to resolve “past mandates,” referring to long-pending issues that WTO members had collectively agreed to address in earlier negotiations, particularly under the Doha Development Agenda.
- India stated that Members need to rebuild trust and return to consensus-based decision-making, describing it as the “non-negotiable bedrock” of the multilateral trading system, and emphasized that it is important for the WTO not to ignore the sovereign right of each Member to not bind itself to rules which they do not agree to.¹
- India further stressed that decision-making at the WTO must remain consensus-driven, and cautioned against approaches that sideline members through plurilateral arrangements. India stressed that any reform process must be inclusive and reflect the interests of all Members, not just a subset.²

¹ Press Information Bureau, Government of India, ‘Consensus-based decision-making is the bedrock of WTO’s legitimacy: Commerce and Industries Minister Shri Piyush Goyal in WTO MC-14’ (Ministry of Commerce and Industry, 28 March 2026), available at - [Press Release: Press Information Bureau](https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=2246391®=3&lang=2).

² Adrija Chatterjee, ‘India calls for trust, consensus at WTO’s MC14, pushes action on “past mandates”’, Moneycontrol (27 March 2026), available at - <https://www.moneycontrol.com/news/india/india-calls-for-trust-consensus-at-wto-s-mc14-pushes-action-on-past-mandates-13872841.html>

LEVEL PLAYING FIELD ISSUES

- India highlighted the need to address structural asymmetries from the Uruguay Round. India prioritized issues such as food security, public stockholding, and special safeguard mechanism on cotton.
- India highlighted the continued dysfunction of the dispute settlement system, and emphasised that without effective adjudication, rules lose their enforceability, thereby disproportionately disadvantaging smaller economies.
- India also cautioned against the misuse of transparency measures, while emphasising the need for capacity-building support and equitable opportunities for all Members to participate in global trade.³

PLENARY SESSION ON WTO REFORM AND TRANSPARENCY

- India expressed its support for a time-bound reform process backed by evidence-based analysis and meaningful engagement among Members.
- India cautioned against cherry-picking issues and emphasised the importance of WTO committees in driving a bottom-up reform approach within the WTO. It also warned against plurilateral approaches fragmenting the system, stressing that consensus must remain open, transparent, inclusive, and member driven.⁴

INDIA’S SHIFT ON E-COMMERCE MORATORIUM

- India has indicated a possible shift in its position on the WTO e-commerce moratorium, signalling late on Day 2 of MC14 that it may be willing to agree to a two-year extension of the current prohibition on customs duties

³ ‘Consensus-based decision-making is the bedrock of WTO’s legitimacy: Commerce and Industries Minister, Shri. Piyush Goyal in WTO MC-14’, Press Information Bureau of India, available at - <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=2246391®=3&lang=2>

⁴ ‘Consensus-based decision-making is the bedrock of WTO’s legitimacy: Commerce and Industries Minister, Shri. Piyush Goyal in WTO MC-14’, Press Information Bureau of India, available at - <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=2246391®=3&lang=2>

on electronic transmissions. This marks the first sign of flexibility after earlier statements by India on Day 1 calling for a “careful reconsideration” of proposals to make the moratorium permanent.

- However, significant differences remain among Members. The United States has made clear that it is not interested in a temporary extension and continues to push for a permanent moratorium, while some members are exploring a potential middle-ground solution involving a longer extension, possibly ranging from five to ten years.
- Norway highlighted that “for some countries it’s actually quite existential to prolong the moratorium for a significant time”.⁵

SIDE LINE DISCUSSIONS

- On the sidelines of the conference, the European Union and members of the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership stated that the WTO is at a “critical juncture” amid heightened tensions in the global trading system. They emphasised the need for urgent, deep, comprehensive, and inclusive reform of the WTO.
- The two groups also highlighted their intention to enhance cooperation among like-minded WTO members to drive improvements in the global trading system, while working together on areas of mutual interest to advance coordinated progress on key trade issues.⁶
- India and United States also held discussions on the next steps in the proposed India-United States bilateral trade agreement, while also exchanging views on the MC14 agenda. The meeting focused on advancing negotiations and exploring ways to deepen economic cooperation and bilateral trade ties between the two countries.⁷
- In addition to this India also held bilateral meetings with its counterparts from China, Korea, Switzerland, New Zealand, Canada, Morocco and Oman. Discussions were focused on the MC14 agenda as well as on matters related to deepening bilateral trade ties.⁸

⁵ Reuters, ‘India signals openness to extending tariff-free deal on e-commerce, two diplomats say’, *The Economic Times* (28 March 2026), available at - <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/tech/technology/india-signals-openness-to-extending-tariff-free-deal-on-e-commerce-two-diplomats-say/articleshow/129857308.cms>.

⁶ ‘WTO at ‘critical juncture’ and needs deep reform, EU and CPTPP say’, Reuters, available at - <http://reuters.com/business/autos-transportation/wto-critical-juncture-needs-deep-reform-eu-cptpp-say-2026-03-27/>

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⁷ ‘India-US BTA: Goyal, USTR Discuss Next Steps’, Rediff, available at - <https://www.rediff.com/news/commentary/2026/mar/28/india-us-bta-goyal-ustr-discuss-next-steps/9a98b94ffa09e5de615a776de59790da>

⁸ ‘Consensus-based decision-making is the bedrock of WTO’s legitimacy: Commerce and Industries Minister, Shri. Piyush Goyal in WTO MC-14’, Press Information Bureau of India, available at - <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=2246391®=3&lang=2>



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