



WTO MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE 14

26th March 2026 - DAY 1

INTRODUCTION

The fourteenth WTO Ministerial Conference (**MC14**) is being held in Yaoundé, Cameroon, from 26-29 March 2026, with the first day of the Conference convened on 26 March 2026. The Ministerial Conference, normally held every two years, is the WTO's highest decision-making body.

Day 1 began with the WTO Director-General emphasizing increasing disruptions to global trade and the importance of institutional adaptation. The session also marked the enforcement of the Fisheries Subsidies Agreement, adopted at MC12 in June 2022, which will take effect from 15 September 2025.

This was followed by ministerial breakout discussions on WTO foundational issues, including dispute settlement reform, the incorporation of the Investment Facilitation for Development Agreement, the e-commerce work programme, agriculture, and development, including issues relating to least developed countries. Additionally, a Dialogue on Plastics Pollution and Environmentally Sustainable Plastics Trade was convened ahead of the Conference.

Key updates from Day 1 are summarized below:

CALLS FOR RESTORATION OF A FULLY FUNCTIONAL DISPUTE SETTLEMENT SYSTEM

¹ 'WTO reform push: India flags dysfunctional dispute system at MC14, seeks review of e-commerce duty moratorium', *The Times of India* (26 March 2026), available at - <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/business/india-business/wto-reform-push-india-flags-dysfunctional-dispute-system-at-mc14-seeks-review-of-e-commerce-duty-moratorium/articleshow/129830402.cms>.

² Press Information Bureau, Government of India, 'India calls for reform of WTO dispute settlement system at MC14' (Ministry of Commerce and Industry, 26 March 2026), available at - [Press Release: Press Information Bureau](https://pib.gov.in/Press-Release-Press-Information-Bureau).

³ 'WTO reform push: India flags dysfunctional dispute system at MC14, seeks review of e-commerce duty moratorium', *The Times of India* (26

- India urged WTO Members States (**Members**) to restore a fully functional dispute settlement system. India emphasized that the current mechanism is a 'dysfunctional Dispute Settlement System' that has deprived countries of effective redress, and that there is a need to restore an automatic and binding dispute settlement mechanism.¹
- India emphasized that reforms of WTO should be carried out through a transparent, inclusive and Member-driven process, keeping development at its core, upholding the foundational principles and objectives of the WTO, mainly non-discrimination, consensus-based decision making and equity.² The principle of special and differential treatment should be made precise, effective and operational.³
- China also called for the restoration of a fully functioning dispute settlement mechanism as soon as possible to enhance the WTO's role in global economic governance.⁴
- The United Kingdom also stated that it wanted to "improve accountability by reinstating a functioning dispute settlement system".⁵
- The European Union warned that inaction to the dispute settlement could weaken the rules-based trading system, emphasizing that maintaining the

March 2026), available at -

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/business/india-business/wto-reform-push-india-flags-dysfunctional-dispute-system-at-mc14-seeks-review-of-e-commerce-duty-moratorium/articleshow/129830402.cms>.

⁴ 'WTO reform push: India flags dysfunctional dispute system at MC14, seeks review of e-commerce duty moratorium', *The Times of India* (26 March 2026), available at - <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/business/india-business/wto-reform-push-india-flags-dysfunctional-dispute-system-at-mc14-seeks-review-of-e-commerce-duty-moratorium/articleshow/129830402.cms>.

⁵ 'WTO reform push: India flags dysfunctional dispute system at MC14, seeks review of e-commerce duty moratorium', *The Times of India* (26 March 2026), available at - <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/business/india-business/wto-reform-push-india-flags-dysfunctional-dispute-system-at-mc14-seeks-review-of-e-commerce-duty-moratorium/articleshow/129830402.cms>.

status quo was not a viable option and could lead to the WTO sliding into irrelevance. Accordingly, the European Union underscored the need for urgent action to advance reforms to the WTO.⁶

INVESTMENT FACILITATION FOR DEVELOPMENT AGREEMENT

- Korea pushed for the adoption of the Investment Facilitation for Development Agreement (IFDA), with Korea urging Members to reconsider opposition to the IFDA. In its opening remarks, Korea emphasized that IFDA could enhance transparency in investment processes and boost foreign direct investment flows.⁷
- Turkey lifted its objections to the incorporation of the IFDA into the WTO after previously opposing the agreement for a variety of reasons.⁸
- India, through a press release, stated that it supports initiatives facilitating investment flows into developing countries, including Least Developed Countries (LDC).⁹ However, there remains a lack of clarity on whether India will ultimately support or continue to oppose the IFDA, given its past concerns that plurilateral approaches could dilute its negotiating leverage compared to multilateral frameworks.
- India also stated that incorporating plurilateral outcomes into the WTO framework should be based on consensus and should not undermine the rights of non-participants or impose additional obligations on them.¹⁰
- China and the WTO signed a Memorandum of Understanding for the new phase of the “China Programme”.¹¹ Under the said programme, China

⁶ ‘WTO reform push: India flags dysfunctional dispute system at MC14, seeks review of e-commerce duty moratorium’, *The Times of India* (26 March 2026), available at - <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/business/india-business/wto-reform-push-india-flags-dysfunctional-dispute-system-at-mc14-seeks-review-of-e-commerce-duty-moratorium/articleshow/129830402.cms>.

⁷ ‘Trade minister leads WTO reform talks, discusses trade issues with member states at MC-14’, *The Korea Times* (27 March 2026), available at - <https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/foreignaffairs/20260327/trade-minister-leads-wto-reform-talks-discusses-trade-issues-with-member-states-at-mc-14>

⁸ Reuters, ‘Turkey lifts opposition to WTO adopting developing country investment agreement’ (26 March 2026), available - <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/turkey-lifts-opposition-wto-adopting-developing-country-investment-agreement-2026-03-26/>.

⁹ Press Information Bureau, Government of India, ‘14th Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization to be held in Yaoundé from 26–29 March 2026 under Cameroon’s chairmanship’ (Ministry of Commerce and Industry, 25 March 2026), available at - <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2245162®=3&lang=1>.

contributed an additional USD 600,000 under the Aid for Trade initiative, aimed at enhancing LDC participation in WTO activities, capacity building, and integration into the global trading system.¹²

INDIA AND UNITED STATES AT ODDS OVER EXTENSION OF E-COMMERCE MORATORIUM

- India called for a reassessment of the moratorium on customs duties on electronic transmissions.
- India emphasized that, due to the lack of a shared understanding among Members regarding the scope of the moratorium on electronic transmissions and considering its potential implications, the continued extension requires careful reconsideration.¹³
- India’s stance differs from that of the United States, which has urged Members to make the moratorium permanent. The USTR representative stated that the United States is not interested in another temporary extension of the moratorium, as it would not provide businesses with the certainty needed for their operations and would also further weaken the WTO’s standing.¹⁴

AGRICULTURE NEGOTIATIONS

- The Members discussed the causes for the current impasse in the agriculture negotiations and how they can be addressed. Agriculture remains a central and unresolved area in WTO negotiations, with differences among Members on issues such as domestic support, public stockholding for food security, the special safeguard mechanism, market access, and cotton, which have contributed to the current impasse.

¹⁰ ‘WTO reform push: India flags dysfunctional dispute system at MC14, seeks review of e-commerce duty moratorium’, *The Times of India* (26 March 2026), available at - <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/business/india-business/wto-reform-push-india-flags-dysfunctional-dispute-system-at-mc14-seeks-review-of-e-commerce-duty-moratorium/articleshow/129830402.cms>.

¹¹ Chinese Mission to UN, Twitter

¹² ‘China commits USD 1.1 million to support WTO accession, LDCs and technical assistance’, WTO News, available at - https://www.wto.org/english/news_e/pres26_e/pr993_340_e.htm

¹³ ‘WTO reform push: India flags dysfunctional dispute system at MC14, seeks review of e-commerce duty moratorium’, *The Times of India* (26 March 2026), available at - <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/business/india-business/wto-reform-push-india-flags-dysfunctional-dispute-system-at-mc14-seeks-review-of-e-commerce-duty-moratorium/articleshow/129830402.cms>.

¹⁴ Shreya Nandi, ‘WTO MC14: US pushes ecommerce duty moratorium permanent; India resists’, *Business Standard* (26 March 2026), available at - https://www.business-standard.com/industry/news/wto-mc14-us-pushes-e-commerce-duty-moratorium-permanent-india-resists-126032601094_1.html.

- India highlighted that a permanent solution on public stockholding for food security purposes, the special safeguard mechanism, and cotton are long-pending mandated issues that the Members “must deliver on them on priority”, highlighting that agriculture is critical to the livelihoods of millions.¹⁵
- A ministerial statement by the G-33 grouping of developing countries reiterated that public stockholding for food security remains a crucial policy tool for developing and least developed countries. They urge all Members to work together in reaching a permanent solution as per Ministerial mandate.¹⁶
- Ahead of MC14, Members also discussed a draft declaration on agriculture, trade, and food security issued in the agriculture negotiations shared by the chair of the agriculture negotiating body. The United States rejected the draft text and questioned the need for an agriculture document, expressing a fundamental problem with conducting negotiations based on past mandates where significant divergences among Members persisted. In contrast, several Members, including India and the African Group, did not reject the draft but raised questions and concerns, including whether the text adequately reflects policy flexibilities for developing countries such as public stockholding for food security. Other Members, such as China, Japan, and the European Union, did not express reservations and indicated readiness to work with the text as a basis for further discussions.¹⁷

Members underscored the disproportionate impact on developing and small island economies, while emphasizing the importance of trade cooperation in addressing the crisis.¹⁸

- Parallel initiatives, including Trade and Environmental Sustainability Structured Discussions and Fossil Fuel Subsidy Reform, also reported progress, reflecting growing momentum on environmental priorities within the WTO.¹⁹

We hope you have found this information useful. For any queries/clarifications please write to us at insights@elp-in.com or write to our authors:

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DIALOGUE ON PLASTICS POLLUTION AND ENVIRONMENTALLY SUSTAINABLE PLASTICS TRADE (DPP)

- Members advanced environmental sustainability efforts through the DPP, presenting a ministerial statement and technical documents outlining a roadmap for trade-related action on plastics pollution.

¹⁵ ‘WTO reform push: India flags dysfunctional dispute system at MC14, seeks review of e-commerce duty moratorium’, *The Times of India* (26 March 2026), available at - [https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/business/india-business/wto-reform-push-india-flags-dysfunctional-dispute-system-at-mc14-seeks-review-of-e-commerce-duty-moratorium/articleshow/129830402.cms](https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/business/india-business/wto-reform-push-india-flags-dysfunctional-dispute-system-at-mc14-seeks-review-of-e-commerce-duty-moratorium/articleshow/129830402.cms;);

https://www.business-standard.com/industry/news/wto-mc14-us-pushes-e-commerce-duty-moratorium-permanent-india-resists-126032601094_1.html

¹⁶ ‘WTO reform push: India flags dysfunctional dispute system at MC14, seeks review of e-commerce duty moratorium’, *The Times of India* (26 March 2026), available at - <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/business/india-business/wto-reform-push-india-flags-dysfunctional-dispute-system-at-mc14-seeks-review-of-e-commerce-duty-moratorium/articleshow/129830402.cms>.

¹⁷ D Ravi Kanth, ‘WTO: US rejects draft farm text ahead of MC14 as others signal support’, *TWN Info Service on WTO and Trade Issues* (5 March 2026), available at -

<https://twn.my/title2/wto.info/2026/ti260304.htm#:~:text=WTO:%20US%20rejects%20draft%20farm,from%2026%20to%2029%20March>.

¹⁸ World Trade Organization, ‘Plastics Dialogue coordinators issue MC14 ministerial statement’ (26 March 2026), available at - https://www.wto.org/english/news_e/news26_e/ppesp_26mar26_342_e.htm.

¹⁹ World Trade Organization, ‘Plastics Dialogue coordinators issue MC14 ministerial statement’ (26 March 2026), available at - https://www.wto.org/english/news_e/news26_e/ppesp_26mar26_342_e.htm.



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