

# ECONOMIQUITY

News Wrap – #1/March 2026



## MC14 Knocking on the Door: the WTO has to Find a New Direction?

As the 14th Ministerial Conference approaches, the future of the World Trade Organization remains unclear. Core issues such as dispute settlement reform, agriculture negotiations, and the e-commerce moratorium continue to divide members. Sharp differences between major economies, particularly the United States and China, have slowed consensus, raising challenges about the WTO's ability to remain relevant in a rapidly evolving global economy, which could otherwise harm a large number of developing countries..


Beyond institutional challenges, geopolitical tensions are reshaping trade flows. The US-Israel-Iran conflict has disrupted key shipping routes and energy markets, increasing freight, insurance, and input costs globally. Strategic connectivity projects such as the North-South Transport Corridor have also been affected, exposing vulnerabilities in regional integration efforts. These developments reflect how deeply trade is now intertwined with geopolitical risk.

In this complex environment, India occupies a pivotal position. On the one hand, it faces growing scrutiny from the United States Trade Representative, particularly over supply chains linked to China. On the other hand, India is actively pursuing trade agreements, easing foreign investment norms, and diversifying partnerships. Its emphasis on economic growth, resilience, and strategic autonomy reflects a pragmatic approach to navigating global uncertainty.

As MC14 draws closer, the need for credible reform and renewed cooperation becomes urgent. A fragmented system risks undermining global trade stability, especially for developing economies. India's role as a bridge-builder balancing national interests with multilateral commitments will be critical in shaping outcomes that restore trust, strengthen rules, and ensure a more inclusive and predictable trading system.

We are pleased to share that CUTS is curating a compilation of op-ed pieces in *The Economic Times* under a "Trade-Off" column, covering select priority trade policy topics. These pieces, which have been published by trade and policy experts over the past few months, are intended to generate actionable and implementable insights for the Government of India to bolster India's trade policy, enhance competitiveness, and navigate the ongoing turbulence in global trade. The [first story in the National Trade section](#) is this edition's *Trade-Off* story, which discusses how India is emerging as a key bridge-builder in shaping inclusive and practical reforms while the World Trade Organization faces a deep crisis.

## International Trade

1.	<p><i>India must steer WTO 2.0 forward</i></p> <p><b>The Economic Times</b></p> <p>March 13, 2026</p> 	<p>The World Trade Organization faces a deep political crisis, with stalled negotiations, a paralyzed dispute system, and rising fragmentation, challenging its relevance. Reform debates stress flexibility and inclusivity, with India positioned as a key bridge builder. <a href="#">In this context, CUTS International initiative TRANJA gains relevance by promoting narratives, research, and coalitions to shape practical WTO reform.</a></p>
2.	<p><i>WTO ministerial in Cameroon may discuss reforms, agriculture, e-commerce moratorium</i></p> <p><b>The Economic Times</b></p> <p>March 08, 2026</p>	<p>The World Trade Organization’s 14th Ministerial Conference in Yaoundé will address WTO reforms, agriculture, dispute settlement, and e-commerce. India seeks solutions on food stockholding, opposes the e-commerce moratorium, and defends S&amp;DT, <a href="#">while debates continue on fisheries subsidies, IFD agreement, and restoring the dispute settlement system.</a></p>
3.	<p><i>Abandon ‘most favoured nation’ at your peril</i></p> <p><b>Borderlex</b></p> <p>March 10, 2026</p>	<p>The World Trade Organization’s core Most Favoured Nation (MFN) principle is being questioned by the European Union and the United States, which argue that rising developing economies should undertake greater trade obligations. However, it is being argued that weakening MFN could legitimise discriminatory trade practices, undermine predictability for smaller economies, and destabilise the multilateral trading system. They emphasise that existing WTO flexibilities already address imbalances, and reopening <a href="#">MFN negotiations risks derailing broader reform efforts while eroding a foundational pillar of global trade governance.</a></p>
4.	<p><i>US rejects WTO reform proposal before Cameroon meeting</i></p> <p><b>Reuters</b></p> <p>March 13, 2026</p>	<p><a href="#">Ahead of the WTO MC14, the United States rejected a WTO reform draft, citing ambiguity and lack of consensus.</a> The move highlights divisions over reform priorities, especially dispute settlement. With unanimity required, the rejection risks delaying progress and underscores deep structural challenges facing the World Trade Organization.</p>
5.	<p><i>China slams US trade probe ahead of Paris talks</i></p> <p><b>Reuters</b></p> <p>March 13, 2026</p>	<p><a href="#">Trade tensions between the United States and China escalated after a new US trade probe into overcapacity and labour practices.</a> China criticised the move and warned of countermeasures. The dispute threatens ongoing negotiations and reflects persistent structural frictions, highlighting uncertainty in global trade relations ahead of high-level diplomatic engagements.</p>

## Regional Trade

1.	<p><i>Indian exporters fear freight surge as US-Israel strike on Iran disrupts Red Sea routes</i></p> <p><b>Business Today Desk</b></p> <p>March 02, 2026</p>	<p><a href="#">Indian exporters are concerned that escalating tensions</a> involving the United States, Israel, and Iran could disrupt Red Sea shipping routes, forcing longer voyages via the Cape of Good Hope. This may raise freight, insurance, and energy costs, delay shipments to key markets, and strain global logistics and India's export competitiveness.</p>
2.	<p><i>Iran war economic impact: US, China, India, Gulf countries, Russia, Europe - who are the winners and losers?</i></p> <p><b>TOI Business Desk</b></p> <p>March 12, 2026</p>	<p><a href="#">The US-Israel-Iran conflict is disrupting global energy markets</a>, raising inflation and slowing growth. India and Europe face import pressures, while the United States is relatively insulated. China remains resilient. Gulf economies risk contraction, whereas Russia and other oil exporters benefit from higher prices.</p>
3.	<p><i>China blocks petrol, diesel, jet fuel exports: What it means for India and Asia</i></p> <p><b>Zee News</b></p> <p>March 15, 2026</p>	<p>Amid the US-Israel-Iran conflict, China has tightened fuel export controls to protect domestic energy security, reducing the global supply of refined petroleum. <a href="#">This may worsen shortages and raise fuel prices, especially in Asia.</a> India and others could face higher energy costs, highlighting global market interdependence.</p>
4.	<p><i>DG Okonjo-Iweala urges members to explore new ways to revitalize WTO at South-South event</i></p> <p><b>WTO</b></p> <p>March 06, 2026</p>	<p>At a WTO dialogue, World Trade Organization Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala stressed that WTO reform ahead of 14th Ministerial Conference is vital for least-developed countries (LDCs). <a href="#">Discussions highlighted opportunities in digital trade, investment, and services</a>, while emphasising development-focused reforms to strengthen LDC integration into global trade and economic growth.</p>
5.	<p><i>Pakistan Can't Replace Iran's Role in the North-South Transport Corridor</i></p> <p><b>Andrew Korybko</b></p> <p>March 12, 2026</p>	<p>The North-South Transport Corridor has been effectively disrupted by the Third Gulf War, weakening Eurasian connectivity. While Pakistan has been proposed as an alternative route, poor ties with India and Afghanistan, along with geopolitical constraints, make it unviable. <a href="#">The article suggests maritime alternatives like the Vladivostok-Chennai corridor as more stable solutions.</a></p>

## National Trade

<p>1. <i>India-EU trade deal text falls short on recognising local CBAM accreditors</i> <b>Indian Express</b> March 01, 2026</p>	<p><a href="#">India-EU talks on Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism secured MFN treatment</a>, ensuring India gets similar concessions as others. However, the deal does not recognise Indian accreditation bodies, adding compliance burdens. It allows technical dialogue and cooperation, while EU support on emissions reduction remains non-binding.</p>
<p>2. <i>Govt eases FDI norms for China, other countries sharing land border with India: Sources</i> <b>The Economic Times</b> March 10, 2026</p>	<p><a href="#">India has eased foreign investment rules for nations sharing land borders</a>. This includes China, a significant trading partner. The government amended a key policy requiring mandatory approval for investments from these countries. This move aims to streamline foreign direct investment. Trade figures show a substantial imbalance with China. India's exports to China have seen fluctuations.</p>
<p>3. <i>India exercises strategic autonomy based on moral strength: Pradeep S Mehta, CUTS International</i> <b>The Economic Times</b> March 08, 2026</p>	<p><a href="#">Experts at a New Delhi roundtable discussed India's strategic autonomy and its evolving relationship with the US, emphasizing economic growth as crucial for global influence</a>. The conversation also touched upon India-China dynamics, multilateralism, and the importance of democratic values in shaping the emerging world order. India's moral leadership and diversified trade strategy were seen as key to enhancing its global influence.</p>
<p>4. <i>US forced labour probe targets China, may put India exports under scrutiny: GTRI</i> <b>Business Standard</b> March 15, 2026</p>	<p>The United States Trade Representative has launched a Section 301 probe into forced labour practices across 60 economies, with a strong focus on China, particularly Xinjiang-linked supply chains. <a href="#">India may face scrutiny as its exports, such as solar panels, electronics, and garments</a>, depend on Chinese inputs, potentially leading to tariffs or trade restrictions if violations are found.</p>



D-217, Bhaskar Marg, Bani Park, Jaipur 302 016, India. Ph: +91.141.228 2821 Fx: +91.141.228 2485, E-mail: [citee@cuts.org](mailto:citee@cuts.org), Web: [www.cuts-international.org](http://www.cuts-international.org).

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