

CUTS CITEE IN ACTION

JANUARY-MARCH 2024

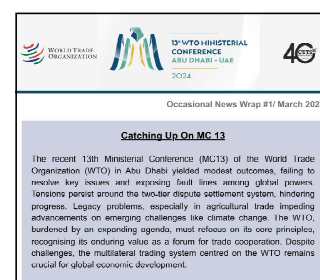


PUBLICATIONS

OCCASIONAL NEWS WRAPS

Catching Up on MC 13

The recent 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13) of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in Abu Dhabi yielded modest outcomes, failing to resolve key issues and exposing fault lines among global powers. Tensions persist around the two-tier dispute settlement system, hindering progress. Legacy problems, especially in agricultural trade, linger, impeding advancements on emerging challenges like climate change. The WTO, burdened by an expanding agenda, must refocus on its core principles, recognising its enduring value as a forum for trade cooperation. Despite challenges, the multilateral trading system centred on the WTO remains crucial for global economic development.



<https://cuts-citee.org/newsletter/onw-mc13-2024.htm>
<https://cuts-citee.org/newsletter/onw-mc13-2-2024.htm>



VIRTUAL PRESENTATION

Assessment of New and Emerging Issues in ASEAN Plus One FTAs

The Study Team undertaking the Assessment of New and Emerging Issues in ASEAN Plus One FTAs presented a status report and preliminary findings of the study to the 45th High-Level Task Force on ASEAN Economic Integration (HLTF-EI) on February 21, 2024.

This was followed by a similar presentation before the ASEAN Economic Ministers at the 30th ASEAN Economic Minister Retreat on March 09, 2024. The team received feedback on the study from the Ministers and Senior Officials of the ASEAN Member States and the ASEAN Secretariat.





Exploring Climate Resilience in the Mahakali Basin

Veena Vidyadharan, Sagnil Samadder, and Rijupalika Dey visited the transboundary Mahakali (Sharda) Basin, which spans Nepal's Far Western Province and India's Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh, in March 2024 as part of the Rivers Rights Resilience programme. Their primary objective was to assess the challenges faced by local communities dependent on agriculture due to climate change and identify resilient solutions. This visit was under the study entitled 'Need Assessment of Climate Resilient Agricultural Practices in the Mahakali Basin' by CUTS.



Partner organisations facilitating the visits included National Environment and Equity Development Society (NEEDS) in Mahendranagar; Rural Women's Development and Unity Centre (RUWDUC) in Dadeldhura; Community Rural Development Society (CRDS) in Darchula; and Grameen Development Services (GDS) in Lakhimpur.

Overall, the visit revealed disparities in the adoption of climate-resilient agricultural practices across the Sudurpaschim Province of Nepal. Common challenges observed included the untimely arrival of monsoons and aridity. Southern regions relied on drought and flood-resistant crop varieties, while the north embraced polyhouse farming for commercialising vegetables and fruits.

Farmers cultivated high-value crops like broccoli, cauliflowers, apples, walnuts, and citrus fruits based on local environmental conditions. In Uttar Pradesh's Lakhimpur and Pilibhit districts, government subsidies disproportionately favoured large farmers over smallholders, leading to reliance on traditional farming methods.

Both Indian and Nepali communities in the basin faced similar challenges, such as the need to educate small-scale farmers about crop insurance and the importance of short-duration crop varieties in flood and drought-prone areas. Sugarcane emerged as a major cash crop due to assured markets and high returns, although intercropping and livestock rearing were practiced by small-scale farmers to mitigate climate shocks.





Empowering Women in the Cardamom Value Chain

Insights from Kerala

A visit to Kumily, Puttady and Kattappana in Idukki, Kerala was conducted by Veena Vidyadharan in March 2024 to explore women's participation in the cardamom value chain. The purpose was to meet women cardamom growers and workers in the unorganised sector, the local traders, processing units and other stakeholders including Spices Board officials in the Spices Park in Puttady.

Cardamom plantations in the organised and unorganised sectors offer regular income to the female workforce in the Idukki district. The work in these plantations is gendered and considered as women's work. The nurturing, tending and harvesting and even irrigation are done by females.

It was observed that access to inputs and crop advisory services is mainly through the nearest input dealer. There is limited awareness about the subsidies/schemes provided by



the Spices Board for irrigation/water storage structures etc. However, once the harvest reaches the households, the men take over the functions in the value chain. The decision on the quantity to be sold or stored is mostly made by men, and only at times is a joint decision.

Creating women collectives either as FPOs or even through Kudumbashree can strengthen the power and agency of women farmers in cardamom production and marketing. Capacity building programmes on Good Agricultural Practices including

integrated pest management, integrated nutrient management and intercropping can reduce the cost of cultivation and make the crop more profitable.

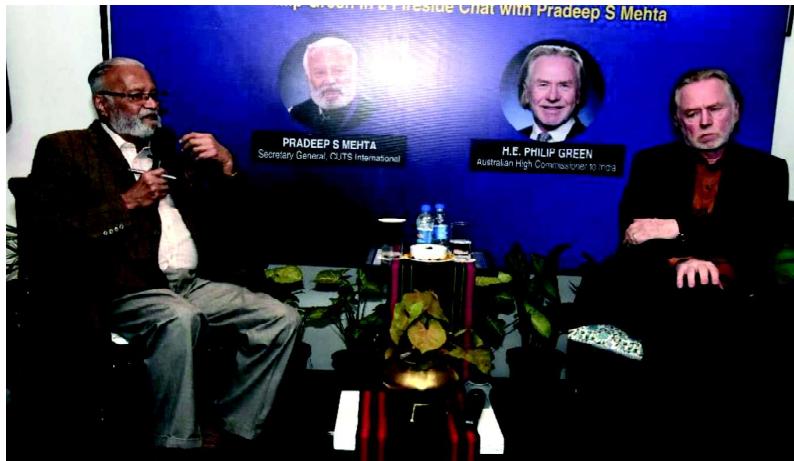


EVENTS

Strengthening Bonds – India-Australia Bilateral Relations

The event 'Strengthening Bonds – India-Australia Bilateral Relations' organised by CUTS International in Jaipur on February 04, 2024, was the 9th in the series to commemorate the 40th anniversary of CUTS. Australian High Commissioner Philip Green and Pradeep Mehta, founder and Secretary General of CUTS International, spoke at the event.

In his opening remarks, Mehta welcomed the Australian High Commissioner and shared his recent experience of having come back from Australia after organising three 40th Anniversary events at Australia National University, Canberra on Multilateral Trade; Australia India Institute, Melbourne on Critical Minerals and the Indian Consulate in Sydney on Bilateral Trade in partnership with Newland Group.



Mehta mentioned that over time, the defence relations are growing between Australia and India, and will continue to grow because of the changing dynamics of the Indo-Pacific region.

Green responded that the human bridge is a key strategic driver that navigates the cultural and social relations between the two nations. Over a million people from India are settled in Australia which is roughly four percent of the whole population of Australia. Indians are attracted to Australia for higher education and add to the Australian economy with their skills and dexterity.

Green stressed the need for continual efforts to strengthen the bilateral relationship, proposing targeted collaborations across various sectors, notably in education and beyond traditional areas like mining. He cited the proposed Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement as a potential avenue for fostering deeper ties. Green also discussed opportunities for economic collaboration in sectors such as agriculture, apparel, solar PV supply chain, and critical minerals.

The discussion also touched upon the evolving Indo-Pacific landscape and the growing strategic partnerships between India, Australia, and the US. Green highlighted the importance of civil society organisations like CUTS International in contributing to bilateral relations, particularly in addressing sensitive issues that diplomats might find challenging to broach.

<https://cuts-international.org/strengthening-bonds-india-australia-bilateral-relations/>



Growth Prospects of the Indian Economy

The event 'Growth Prospects of the Indian Economy' organised by CUTS International in Chennai on February 06, 2024, was the 10th in the series to commemorate the 40th anniversary of CUTS. Dr C. Rangarajan, Former Governor of the Reserve Bank of India and noted Economist and Pradeep Mehta, founder and Secretary General of CUTS International, spoke at the event.



Rangarajan stated that CUTS's involvement in leveraging free trade and encouraging competition within the system, contributing to the interests of the developing countries in international forums is noteworthy. He appreciated efforts made by CUTS towards consumer sovereignty and reminisced about his long association with the organisation.

Speaking on the theme of the lecture, Rangarajan noted that the 1991 trade reforms especially focused on liberalisation. Highlighting that Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) can benefit nations, he said India should aim to capitalise on such agreements with countries that possess transparent trading mechanisms and robust business systems. The success of such initiatives hinges on India's capacity to capitalise on its demographic dividend by enhancing labour force participation, including through upskilling initiatives.

Mehta underscored that the Union Government's vision of Atmanirbhar Bharat does not merely imply self-reliance, but rather emphasises self-reliance while also contributing adequately to both its own needs and the global economy. This concept truly embodies the notion of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, as emphasised by Prime Minister Modi during India's G20 presidency.

The session wrapped up with an intense Q&A session with over 100 participants who joined both virtually and physically. Engaging queries were raised on topics such as skill development, the government's privatisation plans, and various other matters of economic concern.

<https://cuts-international.org/growth-prospects-of-the-indian-economy/>



Why Should the WTO's Dispute Settlement System be Put Back on Track?

CUTS International organised a Side Event on “Why Should the WTO's Dispute Settlement System be Put Back on Track?” at the 13th WTO Ministerial Conference, Abu Dhabi on February 27, 2024. The event brought together a group of global experts to present their thoughts and vision for the future of the two-tiered WTO Dispute Settlement Mechanism (DSM).



Mehta moderated the session. The panellists included Sumanta Chaudhuri, Principal Adviser, International Trade Policy, Confederation of Indian Industry; Christophe Bellman, Head of Policy Analysis and Strategy, Forum on Trade, Environment & the SDGs; Axel Berger, Deputy Director, German Institute of Development and Sustainability; Simon Ng'ona, Director, Foreign Trade, Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Industry, Government of Zambia; Sangeeta Khorana, Professor of International Trade Policy, Aston University, Birmingham.

Overall, the panellists agreed on the need to preserve an accessible and well-functioning DSM to maintain certainty, predictability and stability in the administration and enforcement of trade rules. However, they cautioned that it would not be easy to restore the two-tiered WTO DSM, given the systemic fractures in the past few years.

<https://cuts-citee.org/why-should-the-wtos-dispute-settlement-system-be-put-back-on-track/>



WTO MC13 and India's Trade Policy: Why India should take leadership at the WTO

CUTS International organised a roundtable on 'WTO MC13 and India's Trade Policy: Why India should take leadership at the WTO' in New Delhi on March 29, 2024. Many former Indian trade negotiators and eminent trade policy experts participated in the roundtable.

India needs to be active and not reactive in international trade policy and show greater engagement and leadership in trade rule-shaping, keeping in mind the goal of becoming a developed country, Viksit Bharat, by 2047. The world has transformed since the WTO came into being in 1995 and India can no longer afford to hold on to positions it took 30 years ago. As commented by many, this is India's century.

The roundtable was chaired by Montek Singh Ahluwalia, former Deputy Chairman, Planning Commission of India and moderated by Mehta. It was discussed that leadership in international trade policy requires a delicate balancing act between advancing negotiating positions, building alliances and protecting our interests.

Participants felt that India will have to work hard to dispel notions that it is locked in a developing country mindset on trade. A futuristic vision combined with ground-level interventions is the need of the hour. Overall, the roundtable provided a platform for the free and frank exchange of views among a group of people closely invested in India's trade policy and economic development. Participants commended CUTS for organising the event.

As a way forward, the group decided that CUTS should prepare a White Paper based on the discussions and share it with the PMO, NITI Aayog, Union Ministries and State Governments.

<https://cuts-citee.org/cuts-roundtable-on-wto-mc13-and-indias-trade-policy/>





PARTICIPATION

- Arnab Ganguly attended a meeting organised by the Bengal Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BCCI) on January 18, 2024. The meeting involved interaction with a business delegation from Myanmar led by Charlie Than, Union Minister of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar.
- Mihir Shekhar Bhonsale attended the INDUS-X Conference and Raisina Dialogue in New Delhi from February 20-23, 2024.
- Arnab Ganguly attended a small group, off-the-record, interactive session on 'Celebrating Two Years of the Indo-Pacific Strategies' with Nancy Izzo Jackson, Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs at the US Consulate General, Kolkata on February 26, 2024.
- Bijaya Roy attended an online session '*The Role of the WTO in Addressing Trade- Related Climate Policy Tensions*' in a webinar entitled 'Trade and Sustainability Hub 2024' organised by the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) on February 27, 2024.
- Rijupalika Dey attended the live-streamed session 'Delivering Deforestation-free Global Value Chains: How do we allocate the burden of change?' organised by IISD on February 27, 2024.
- Sagnik Samadder attended an online session titled 'Indigenous Peoples and a Fairer Trade System: A Path to Inclusive Prosperity' organised by the IISD in Abu-Dhabi on February 27, 2024.
- Asheef Iqubbal attended an online session titled 'Digital Trade for Development: From divides to dividends' organised by the IISD in Abu-Dhabi on February 27, 2024.
- Rageshree Bose attended an online session titled 'Building Inclusive Policies for Sustainable and Fair Trade: A Forum for Action and Commitment', organised by IISD in Abu Dhabi on February 28, 2024.
- Pracheta Acharya attended an online session titled "Climate Technology and Intellectual Property: A Repeat of the Access to Medicines Debate or Something New?" organised by the IISD in Abu Dhabi on February 28, 2024.
- Sanobar Imam attended an online session entitled 'Nature Protection and Just Transition: What Role for circular trade facilitation?' organised by the IISD in Abu Dhabi on February 28, 2024.
- Sohini Nayak attended a virtual Seminar on 'Bolstering cooperation among Quad and Pacific Islands countries' organised by the Indo-Pacific Security Initiative, Atlantic Council (Scowcroft Centre for Strategy and Security) and Embassy of Japan, USA on February 28, 2024.
- Trisha Dey attended an online webinar titled 'Building Inclusive Policies for Sustainable and Fair Trade: A Forum for Action and Commitment' organised by the IISD in Abu-Dhabi on February 28, 2024.
- Deepmala Ghosh attended an online session titled 'Trade's Contribution to Climate and Sustainable Development Goals' organised by the IISD in Abu-Dhabi on February 29, 2024.
- Sohini Nayak and Sumanta Biswas attended the in-person international conference on the Bay of Bengal and India-Japan Economic Relations at the BCCI premises on March 11-12, 2024.
- Pradeep S Mehta, Suddha Chakravarti and Advaiyot Sharma participated in the 13th WTO Ministerial Conference (MC13) in Abu Dhabi, UAE from February 26-March 01, 2024. They also attended sessions of the Trade and Sustainability Hub 2024 organised by IISD on the sidelines of MC13.
- Bipul Chattopadhyay participated in various events:
 - ♦ 'Investment Forum for Advancing Climate Resilient Agrifood Systems,' organised by the NITI Aayog, the Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare, Government of India, and the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations in New Delhi on January 18-19, 2024.
 - ♦ The Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity and the Contours of Economic Security in the Indo-Pacific, organised by the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Japan Office and the Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore in Tokyo on March 01, 2024.
 - ♦ Informal Discussion with Senthil Pandian, Permanent Representative Designate of India to the WTO in Geneva, organised by the Centre for WTO Studies and the Centre for Research on International Trade, Indian Institute of Foreign Trade in New Delhi on March 12, 2024.



Navigating the Trade and Environment Nexus: A Call for Actionable Equitable Policies

The Economics Times, January 01, 2024 • By Pradeep S Mehta and Swati Sharma

As the global community grapples with climate change, plastic waste, biodiversity loss, and pollution, the need for a balanced approach that fosters sustainable development, meaning the triumvirate of economy, equity, and ecology, is more crucial than ever.

In the complex web of international trade policies, the intersection with environmental and other considerations has become a pressing concern, particularly for the developing and emerging world. As the global community grapples with climate change, plastic waste, biodiversity loss, and pollution, the need for a balanced approach that fosters sustainable development, meaning the triumvirate of economy, equity, and ecology, is more crucial than ever.

<https://cuts-citee.org/navigating-the-trade-and-environment-nexus-a-call-for-actionable-equitable-policies/>

Tiger in the Room at Abu Dhabi

The Economics Times, February 16, 2024 • By Pradeep S Mehta and Bipul Chattopadhyay

India's foreign policy achievements are evident across various regions, underscoring its diplomatic prowess. As such, India should spearhead efforts for a fruitful conclusion of the 13th WTO Ministerial Conference in Abu Dhabi, starting February 26, 2024. Failing to do so might diminish the significance of its diplomatic endeavours.

India's foreign policy successes are visible from Jeddah and Medina to Tehran and Abu Dhabi. This is why India should take the lead for a successful outcome of the 13th WTO Ministerial Conference (MC13) in Abu Dhabi, UAE, starting February 26. Otherwise, India may not realise the actual value of its diplomatic initiatives.

<https://cuts-citee.org/tiger-in-the-room-at-abu-dhabi/>

Beyond the Banks: Unravelling the Complex Tapestry of Locals Leaving the Brahmaputra River Basin

Northeast News, March 04, 2024 • By Trisha Dey

The Yarlung Tsangpo-Siang-Brahmaputra-Jamuna system, spanning from Tibet to Bangladesh, stands as a monumental marvel among the world's grandest rivers. Encompassing a vast basin of 274,918 square miles across three nations, this majestic watercourse weaves through diverse landscapes, flowing from towering mountain ranges to expansive plains with breathtaking fluidity.

The Brahmaputra basin, located in northeast India, is a crucial region within the Indo-Burma biodiversity hotspot, recognised by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) as one of the 25 mega-biodiversity hotspots.

<https://cuts-citee.org/beyond-the-banks-unravelling-the-complex-tapestry-of-locals-leaving-the-brahmaputra-river-basin/>