# Is India Keen on Taking Forward the Multilateral Trading System?

**Venue:** Mini Auditorium 2, Rajasthan International Centre (RIC), Jaipur
**Date:** Tuesday, 6 October 2026 | **Time:** 5:30 PM onwards
**Organised by:** CUTS International in association with Rajasthan International Centre (RIC)

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## 1. Background

1.1. International trade works because countries have rules that provide businesses with a degree of predictability when they buy, sell and invest across borders. The World Trade Organisation (WTO) provides the broadest common framework for these rules and today has 166 Members.

1.2. According to the World Trade Report 2026, around 72 per cent of global merchandise trade continues to take place on non-discriminatory, most-favoured-nation terms, underlining the continuing relevance of the multilateral system.

1.3. Yet, agreeing on new global trade rules has become increasingly difficult. Differences in economic interests, levels of development and policy priorities, combined with the WTO's consensus-based decision-making, have slowed negotiations.

1.4. At its 14th Ministerial Conference in March 2026, Members reached agreements in several areas but could not reach consensus on broader WTO reform. This raises a practical question: when all Members cannot move forward together, how can those willing to advance on particular issues do so without weakening the wider system or leaving others behind?

1.5. This question is particularly relevant for India. India has historically been a strong supporter of trade multilateralism, with the WTO at its core. But it remains unsure about supporting less-than-multilateral (or “plurilateral”) agreements in today’s changed context. At the same time, it is actively expanding its network of Free Trade Agreements (FTAs), including recent agreements with the UK, EFTA and other partners.

1.6. FTAs can provide deeper and more targeted market access, whereas the WTO provides a common framework for global trade. The question, therefore, is not whether India must choose between the two, but how its FTA strategy and WTO engagement can reinforce each other.

1.7. The issue also connects directly with Viksit Bharat @ 2047. As India seeks to become a developed economy, stable and predictable global trade rules will matter for its exporters, MSMEs, farmers, manufacturers and services sector. India's participation in the emerging

Partners for Multilateralism (P4M) initiative further raises the question of what role India can play in strengthening global cooperation.

1.8. The discussion therefore asks a simple but consequential question: India is increasingly negotiating broader and deeper trade agreements - is it also ready to help shape the rules of the global trading system? While India's approach to FTAs has evolved, has its approach to engagement with the WTO remained stuck in time?

## 2. Proposed Agenda

| Time (IST) | Session |
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| **17:30-18:00** | Registration and Tea |
| **18:00-18:05** | Welcome and Context Setting (CUTS Representative) |
| **18:05-18:50** | **Moderated Discussion (*Is India Keen on Taking Forward the Multilateral Trading System?*) followed by Audience Interaction**<br>- *Pradeep S Mehta*- **Secretary General, CUTS International (Moderator)**<br>- *Aashish Chandorkar*- **Former Counsellor, Permanent Mission of India to WTO, Geneva**<br>- *Dammu Ravi*- **Former Secretary (Economic Relations), Ministry of External Affairs**<br>- *Rajesh Aggarwal*- **Chairman, Board of CUTS International, Geneva & Former Chief of Trade Policy and Trade Facilitation, International Trade Centre, Geneva**<br>- *R V Anuradha* - **Partner and Head, International Trade, Investment Law and Policy Practice, Clarus Law Associates** |
| **18:50-19:00** | Key Takeaways and Way Forward |

## 3. Expected Takeaways

The discussion is expected to generate:

3.1. A clearer understanding of how India's growing FTA network relates to its engagement with the WTO.

3.2. Greater clarity on the practical challenges facing WTO negotiations and possible ways of making the system more responsive.

3.3. Discussion around safeguards that could allow willing countries to move ahead without weakening the wider WTO framework or disadvantaging countries that do not participate.

3.4. Ideas on how India can contribute to WTO reform while representing the interests of developing economies.

3.5. Possible areas for further research and dialogue linking **WTO reform, Viksit Bharat @ 2047 and Partners for Multilateralism (P4M)**.