

# WTO MC13: India to oppose work programmes, negotiating mandates on new issues

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India will oppose any attempt at the WTO's forthcoming Ministerial Conference (MC13) to establish work programmes or negotiating mandates on new issues such as MSME, environment & sustainability and gender, officials have said.

New Delhi will also not allow inclusion of external stakeholders, such as non-government organisations and private agencies, in trade policy making.

"There is no WTO mandate for work programmes or negotiations on trade aspects in areas such as MSME, environment and gender. India will oppose all attempts on these lines by members, led by rich nations, who want to push these issues without acquiring the consent of all members," the official said.

A number of developing nations largely share India's concerns on inclusion of new issues at the WTO, the official added.

**CONFERENCE ON FEB 26**  
The MC13 is scheduled in Abu Dhabi on February 26-29. India's delegation will be led by Commerce & Industry Minister Piyush Goyal.

While labour issues are not being urgently pushed by developed country members for inclusion in the WTO agenda, India has been maintaining a firm stance on it. "Issues like environment and labour are non-trade issues. There are specialised UN agencies, and also the UNFCCC, which discuss these matters. These are non-negotiable at WTO. We are sticking to that stand," another official said.

There are informal working groups on MSMEs, trade



& gender, and trade & environment sustainability where talks are taking place on a plurilateral (involving part of WTO membership) basis.

"India is very clear that it will not agree to formal work programmes in the non-trade areas. Even if there are discussions that take place on sustainable development, we can't allow India's rights and obligations at the WTO to be impacted," the second official said.

## **EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS**

Inclusion of external stakeholders, such as civil society organisations and other international organisations, in discussions on policy making at the WTO is also something that India is fiercely opposing.

"Decision making at the WTO is solely to be driven by members. Diluting this by involving external stakeholders cannot be allowed," the official added.

Last year, India and South Africa submitted a paper at the WTO on 'Concerns on emerging trend of using environmental measures as protectionist non-tariff measures'. The paper raised concerns on the increasing use of unilateral measures, such as EU's carbon tax (CBAM) and deforestation law which impact trade but are justified as environmental measures. Such unilateral actions undermine multilaterally negotiated rights and obligations of countries, it said.