RIS
Research and Information System for Developing Countries
विकासशील देशों की अनुसंधान एवं सूचना प्रणाली

# Brainstorming Session on
# Future of WTO in an Evolving Global Economic Order

**22nd July 2026 | Wednesday | India Habitat Centre, New Delhi | 10:00 AM Onwards | Hybrid**

## Concept Note

The multilateral trading system, enshrined initially in the GATT and subsequently the WTO, is in a contested and uncertain phase. Nearly three decades after the establishment of the WTO, the institution continues to grapple with longstanding challenges, including the impasse over dispute settlement reform, a stalled negotiating function, and the unfinished Doha Development Agenda. At the same time, trade governance is increasingly being shaped by issues such as sustainability, digital trade, artificial intelligence, industrial policy, and economic security.

The discussions at the Fourteenth WTO Ministerial Conference (MC14), as reflected in the MC14 Takeaway Document on WTO reform, emphasized the enduring value of the WTOs foundational principles, including multilateralism, non-discrimination, consensus, inclusiveness and development, while recognising the need to restore trust, predictability and effectiveness in the multilateral trading system. The post-MC14 reform agenda, encompasses broader questions relating to institutional legitimacy, decision-making, development, level playing field concerns, industrial policy, transparency, policy space, and the role of the WTO in an increasingly fragmented global economy.

Alongside developments within the WTO, countries are increasingly pursuing bilateral, regional and plurilateral arrangements to advance their strategic and economic interests. New disciplines on critical minerals, digital trade, investment, and sustainability are being developed outside the multilateral framework, while informal negotiating processes, issue-based coalitions and regulatory initiatives are increasingly influencing the evolution of international trade rules and practices. Together, these developments are contributing to a more fragmented and multi-layered global trading landscape.

Against this backdrop, the post-MC14 period provides an important opportunity to reflect on the future of the multilateral trading system. Building upon the MC14 Takeaway Document, the Brainstorming Session will examine the principal reform questions identified by Members, assess their implications for the evolution of global trade governance, and explore how India and the Global South can contribute to shaping a balanced, inclusive and development-oriented multilateral trading system. Particular attention will be given to identifying areas of convergence on foundational principles, development, decision-making, and level playing field issues that could guide the post-MC14 reform process.

This Brainstorming Session is being organised as the inaugural event under the ***Building Emerging Economic Order Project***, a flagship initiative by RIS, that aims to generate evidence-based recommendations and contribute to shaping a more inclusive, equitable and development-oriented international economic order.

**Questions for Discussion:**

1. How can the WTO remain relevant in an increasingly fragmented global trading system characterised by unilateral trade measures, economic security measures, industrial policies, and competing regional and plurilateral arrangements?

2. What role could ongoing WTO reform efforts, emerging bilateral and regional trade arrangements, and new forms of inter-regional economic partnerships play in shaping the future global trade architecture?

3. What elements of convergence identified in the MC14 Takeaway Document could guide the post-MC14 WTO reform agenda in an evolving geoeconomic landscape?

4. How can the WTO restore trust, predictability and legitimacy while preserving its foundational principles?

5. What lessons can be drawn from nearly eighty years of the GATT/WTO experience regarding the strengths, weaknesses and future direction of multilateral trade governance?

6. What common priorities should India and the Global South advance to ensure that WTO reform remains inclusive, development-oriented and responsive to contemporary economic challenges?

7. In the context of a fragmenting global trading order, how can South-South cooperation contribute to shaping an emerging global trading system?