

Need for Continued Assertiveness at the WTO

What is the issue?

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India should continue to resist attempts of the developed world to introduce newer issues and rather push with its long standing demands of the Doha Round.

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How did the 11th WTO ministerial conclude?

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- 11th Ministerial Conference of the WTO held recently at Buenos Aires, saw fierce confrontations between the developed and the developing world.

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- As the WTO membership failed to agree to a ministerial declaration at the end of conference, the challenges that such a stalemate constituted needs analysis.

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- This was a consequence of the aversion of the US to any mention of three issues — development, multilateralism and Doha Round.

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- Notably, the US chose to block India's efforts at securing a permanent solution to the issue of public stockholding for food security, for which a temporary clause is already in effect.

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What were the new issues brought up?

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- The current conference had few concrete outcomes and also new issues of fisheries related subsidies and e-commerce regulations failed.

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- **Fishing Subsidies** - WTO piloted intense negotiations, for prohibiting subsidies for illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing.
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- However, even basic concepts like the scope of subsidies that are to be prohibited, could not be resolved in the negotiations.
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- Hence, the negotiations were differed till 2019 ministerial, despite widespread concerns of the ecological impacts of subsidy aided irrational fishing practices.
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- Also, India must guard against any prohibition on subsidies that would constrain it from developing its any commercial fishing fleet in the future.
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- **E-commerce** - Despite the strong push to initiate negotiations on this issue, this was resisted by India and many African countries.
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- It was argued that discussion so these issues were to be taken in a not as negotiations but as a consensus building exercise for the future.
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- While 70-80 countries are backing these issues, India has been steadfast in opposing initiation of multilateral negotiations as it would dilute Doha issues.
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How can be future be best approach?

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- Commerce Ministry should institutionalise wide consultations in order to make a comprehensive assessment of the implications of WTO deals.
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- Also, considerable research is emerging that punctures the narrative of WTO negotiations on e-commerce being good for development.
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- India should take the lead in discussing such research with other developing countries, to bring greater awareness to the WTO forum.
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- India should work to build larger coalition of like minded countries who face issues that similar to that of India.
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- Odds now are more favourably staked than during 2001 Doha ministerial as multiple developing countries are in a position to question to US hegemony.
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- Hence, it is time to be assertive albeit with caution and clarity.

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Source: Business Line

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