Q5(c)

"Nothing is going to move within the WTO negotiations unless India is on board." Discuss the main reasons behind India's increased clout in the WTO.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2024 · PSIR GS 2 · 10 marks · India's Contribution to the Non-Alignment Movement

India's Contribution to the Non-Alignment Movement: Different phases; current role.

Core demand of the question

- Explain the claim that WTO talks do not move without India
- **Give reasons for increased clout:** market size, coalitions, food security, services, consensus rule
- Keep the claim as exaggeration with a real core

Revision summary

The claim that WTO talks cannot move without India is shorthand, not a literal rule of the house.

Clout grew from market size, consensus voting, G33 coalitions and a non-negotiable public-stockholding/food-security line after Bali.

India also has offensive services interests and defensive digital policy space, so it matters on more than farms.

The U.S. and China can still freeze the system on their own; plurilaterals can proceed without Indian enthusiasm.

On a multilateral development bargain, India's consent is now a political requirement.

Introduction

The remark that **nothing moves in WTO negotiations unless India is on board** is diplomatic shorthand. It is **overstated** as a law of Geneva. It is **fair** as a description of India's **increased clout** since the Doha years. India is no longer a quiet developing member. It is a veto-capable coalition maker on the issues that still define the round.

Body

Why the clout grew

First, **economic weight**. A large and growing market, a major agricultural population, and a competitive services and generic-pharma sector mean that a deal which ignores India leaves a hole in any 'world' trade bargain. Second, the **consensus rule** of the WTO, discussed as a cause of decline in 4(b), turns a determined large developing member into a blocking player. Third, India learned to **organise**: the **G33** on food, alliances with African and Caribbean states on public stockholding, and a consistent line on special and differential treatment. Fourth, **food security** after the 2008 price spike and India's National Food Security Act made

public stockholding a non-negotiable. The **Bali 2013** **peace clause** and later fights to make it permanent showed that the membership cannot close agriculture without Delhi. Fifth, **services and movement of people** (Mode 4) give India offensive interests, not only defensive farm politics. Sixth, **digital and e-commerce** plurilaterals meet Indian caution on data and policy space, so 'willing clubs' still feel India's absence as a legitimacy problem. Seventh, after the Appellate Body crisis, political bargains matter more than panel law; a vocal India in G20 and Voice of Global South settings carries that politics into Geneva.

What the slogan gets wrong

The United States and China can still move or freeze the system without India, as tariffs and the appellate crisis show. Many plurilaterals proceed with India in the room as a sceptic or outside as a non-party. 'Nothing moves' is **caucus language. The true statement is: on development, agriculture and a multilateral single undertaking, India's no is still a hard no**, and India's yes is now needed for any claim that the South consented.

- **Clout also comes from** coherence**:** India links WTO food rules to livelihood, and links that to a democratic mandate. That is harder to buy off than a small member's tariff line.

Flow diagram

Indian clout -> Market consensus G33

Indian clout -> Public stockholding food

Indian clout -> Services data policy space

Public stockholding food -> Hard to close Doha-type deals

Conclusion

India's WTO clout rests on market size, consensus, G33 coalition practice and an immovable food-security file. The slogan that nothing moves without India is too absolute. It is accurate for the surviving multilateral development agenda. That is why Geneva still waits on Delhi.

Facts & figures

G33
Coalition of developing countries, with India central, defending agricultural livelihood and public stockholding.

Bali 2013
Peace clause on public stockholding; India treated a permanent solution as unfinished business.

Consensus
WTO decision rule that makes a large developing hold-out a veto player on single-undertaking deals.