

# Roadmap for India in the field of electronic transmissions post moratorium

Convened by Innovative Thought Forum & Swadeshi Jagran Manch - April 2026

## BACKGROUND

The WTO moratorium on customs duties on electronic transmissions — in place since 1998 — lapsed in March 2026 after MC14 in Cameroon failed to reach consensus on renewal. India, alongside Brazil and South Africa, resisted extension. The U.S., EU, and China — which control ~80% of global ET trade — are actively seeking to restore or permanently enshrine the moratorium. A WTO General Council meeting is anticipated for May 2026.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Dr. Ashwani Mahajan · National Co- convenor Swadeshi Jagran Manch
- Mr. Anil Sharma · Resource Person SJM; International Trade Expert
- Mr. Parminder Jeet Singh · IT for Change
- Mr. Anil Srivastava · Technology Strategist
- Mr. Arun Goyal · Trade Policy & HSN Expert
- Mr. Amol Khire · Evangelist, Tech Sovereignty
- Mr. K M Gopa Kumar · Third World Network
- Mr. Roshan Agarwal · IPR & Patent Specialist
- Dr. V. Prakash · Former DG, CSIR (Padma Shri)
- Mr. S.B. Dangayach · Founder Trustee ITF (Convener)

## KEY ISSUES DELIBERATED

### 01 Definition of ET

Definition and scope of electronic transmissions is opaque and continuously evolving. There should be urgent discussion to concertise meaning and scope of electronic transmissions.

### 02 Revenue Foregone

Developing countries lost ~USD 48 billion in tariff revenue (2017–2020). India's net untaxed digital import base is ~USD 15–25 billion. Even a 1% customs duty could yield ₹1,200–2,000 crores per year; at 5%, it could nearly double the national R&D support budget.

### 03 Sovereignty & Risk

The risk is not merely fiscal. Unrestricted digital trade threatens India's education, healthcare, and cultural sectors; enables foreign surveillance and data extraction; and forecloses future policy options in a domain that AI will make exponentially larger.

## CONSENSUS POSITIONS OF THE ROUNDTABLE

- India must not sign away its right to levy customs duties on electronic transmissions — whether permanently or for any extended period. Retaining the right to tax is not the same as actually taxing.
- The 'digitisable goods' framing has been continuously changing and expanding. Hence there is urgent need to finalise definition and scope of Electronic Transmissions.
- A zero-rate tariff classification mechanism — modelled on Indonesia's 2022 approach — should be implemented immediately to begin collecting reliable data on digital imports, which is currently absent.
- Tariff remains India's most effective trade protection instrument. Non-tariff barrier infrastructure has not been built to scale. The mobile phone manufacturing boom — driven by graduated tariff protection — is the proof of concept.
- A risk-based, sub-segment classification of all ET categories is urgently required: quantifying value creation for Indian citizens versus foreign companies, and risks to sovereignty, culture, privacy, and domestic industry.

## CONTRARIAN VIEW NOTED

Mr. Arun Goyal cautioned against reflexive opposition: customs duties on digital content would burden Indian consumers and knowledge-seekers; India's large IT services export base could face retaliatory measures; and India's track record of opposing WTO agreements (e.g., ITA) and later benefiting from joining them should counsel greater engagement over blanket refusal.

## IMMEDIATE CALL TO ACTION

### Policy & Negotiations

Government must declare a clear position against moratorium renewal before the May 2026 WTO General Council. Coordinate with South Africa, Brazil, and other like-minded nations.

### Definitions, Data and Classification

Finalise definition and scope of ET. Establish ET tariff lines at zero rate immediately to begin tracking digital imports. Conduct a comprehensive risk-and-value assessment of all ET sub-segments.

### Awareness & Advocacy

Build public and policymaker awareness on digital colonisation risks. SJM and ITF to lead a coordinated advocacy and media campaign before May 2026.