



ECO Newsletter

Economic Cooperation Organization

March, 2026- No. 19



Dear Readers,



In March, an illegitimate and illegal war of aggression was imposed upon the Islamic Republic of Iran and its people. This has placed the peace and security of the ECO region under serious strain and necessitated the evacuation of ECO's non-Iranian international staff from Tehran. The martyrdom of His Eminence Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei, Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, has been met with a period of mourning and reflection across the region.

In response to this tragic development, I visited the Iranian Embassy in Islamabad to register our profound shock and convey our sincere condolences. The ensuing escalation of events has created a very difficult and challenging situation for our host country, the region as a whole, and for the Organization itself. It therefore calls for continued solidarity and steadfastness.

I am pleased to note that, despite these difficult circumstances, the ECO Secretariat has remained fully operational, thanks to the dedication, bravery, and resilience of our Iranian colleagues. We continue to work with our Member States to plan and organize ECO activities. Indeed, these trying times have only strengthened our collective resolve to deepen regional cooperation in pursuit of peace, stability, and shared prosperity.

During March, I also had the opportunity to participate in the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference in China, where I shared our perspective on the evolving global and regional geopolitical landscape. In parallel, the Organization held a virtual meeting with representatives of Uzbekistan to advance efforts toward establishing a Digital Transport and Customs Office for the ECO Region. The Organization also hosted a webinar in cooperation with the Asian and Pacific Training Centre for ICT for Development of UNESCAP. These initiatives reaffirm that regional collaboration is not only necessary, but indispensable, in navigating periods of transition.

As we move forward, ECO will continue to serve as a platform for dialogue, partnership, and progress. In honoring the past, we also embrace our responsibility to shape a future founded on cooperation and stability.

Secretary General
Economic Cooperation Organization



SG Visits the Iranian Embassy to sign the Condolence Book

The Secretary General visited the Iranian Embassy in Islamabad to offer heartfelt condolences over the martyrdom of Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei, the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The Secretary General and the Secretariat of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) expressed their profound sorrow and heartfelt condolences on the martyrdom of the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, extending deepest sympathies and sincere condolences to the bereaved family, the Government, and the noble people of the Islamic Republic of Iran.



The ECO Secretariat also showed its deep concern over the violation of the sovereignty of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the resulting escalation, which poses a serious threat to the security and stability of the entire ECO region.

Secretary General Participates in High-Level Luncheon at the BOAO Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2026



The Secretary General of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), Dr. Asad M. Khan, participated in a high-level luncheon discussion titled “New Opportunities for Asia–Europe Cooperation amid Transformative Changes”, held during the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2026 in Boao, China.

The session convened senior policymakers, business leaders, and representatives of international organizations from across Asia and beyond to examine emerging avenues for cooperation in a rapidly evolving geopolitical, technological, and economic landscape.

In his remarks, the Secretary General underscored ECO’s role as a vital bridge between Asia and Europe, highlighting the Organization’s strategic position in fostering regional connectivity, facilitating trade, and promoting economic integration across Eurasia. He emphasized that ECO member states collectively represent significant economic and geographic linkages that can help anchor deeper interregional cooperation. In this context, he stressed the importance of both Asia and Europe engaging more proactively and working towards institutionalizing their cooperation, noting that the scale of their economic contributions and their shared stakes in the global system necessitate more structured, sustained, and forward-looking engagement.

Dr. Khan stressed the importance of advancing digital transformation, developing sustainable and resilient infrastructure, and expanding diversified trade partnerships. He called for enhanced collaboration among governments, regional organizations, and international financial institutions to mobilize resources and implement projects that strengthen connectivity across the ECO region and beyond.

Dr. Khan expressed his sincere appreciation to Mr. Zhang Jun, Secretary General of the Boao Forum for Asia, for the kind invitation to participate in the high-level discussion. He also highlighted ECO’s strong interest in fostering closer collaboration with the Forum, emphasizing the value of such platforms in facilitating dialogue, partnerships, and joint initiatives. Dr. Khan also reaffirmed ECO’s commitment to deepening engagement with the forum as well as with China, in promoting regional connectivity, sustainable development, and broader Asia-Europe cooperation.



Meeting Between ECO Secretary General and Chairperson, CCPIT Hainan on the Sidelines of Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference

Boao, 26 March 2026

Secretary General of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), Dr. Asad M. Khan, met with Ms. Ning Hongwen, Chairperson of the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade (CCPIT) Hainan, on the sidelines of the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2026.

The discussion focused on strengthening trade and investment ties between ECO member states and Hainan, China, with particular emphasis on opportunities presented by the Hainan Free Trade Port.

The Chairperson CCPIT provided an overview of the Hainan Free Trade Port's policy framework and incentives, highlighting its role as a gateway for high-quality trade and investment. She emphasized CCPIT Hainan's readiness to support collaboration with ECO and its member states through business facilitation, trade promotion initiatives, and institutional linkages. She also shared specific policies, including visa-free entry to Hainan and zero-tariff measures, and encouraged cooperation between the ECO Chamber of Commerce and CCPIT Hainan, underscoring the potential for mutually beneficial outcomes.

The ECO Secretary General highlighted ECO's efforts to promote regional connectivity, facilitate trade, and advance economic integration among its member states. He stressed the importance of leveraging platforms like BFA to expand market access and enhance engagement with regional value chains, welcoming the proposals for deeper collaboration.

Both sides agreed to explore practical avenues for cooperation, including business-to-business engagement, participation in trade fairs and exhibitions, and joint events to promote trade and investment between ECO member states and Hainan.



Meeting Between ECO and CICA Secretaries General on the Sidelines of the Boao Forum for Asia

Boao, China – 26 March 2026

The Secretary General of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), Dr. Asad M. Khan, met with the Secretary General of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA), Mr. Kairat Sarybay, on the sidelines of the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2026.

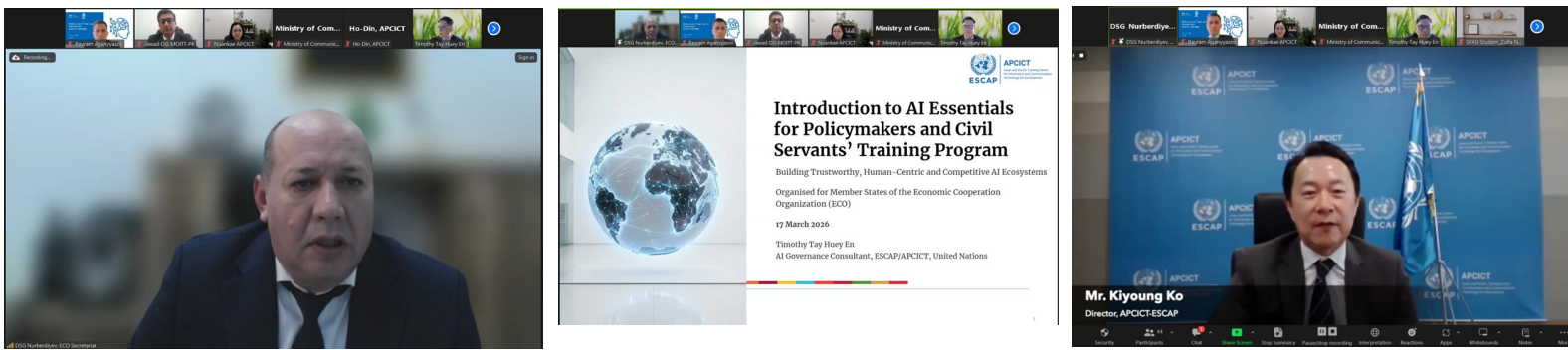
During the meeting, both sides exchanged perspectives on key regional and global developments, placing particular emphasis on enhancing cooperation across Asia. Discussions focused on advancing collaboration in connectivity, sustainable development, and economic resilience. The two sides acknowledged the increasing importance of regional platforms in addressing shared challenges and promoting inclusive growth.

The ECO Secretary General outlined ECO's ongoing efforts to strengthen regional connectivity and deepen economic integration among its member states. He stressed the value of closer engagement with CICA to leverage mutual strengths and create synergies.

Mr. Sarybay provided an overview of CICA's current priorities and activities, reaffirming the organization's commitment to fostering dialogue, confidence-building, and cooperation across Asia. He also extended an invitation to Dr. Asad M. Khan to participate in a Roundtable scheduled for later this year to mark the 20th anniversary of the CICA Secretariat.



ECO and APCICT Organize Webinar on Artificial Intelligence for Policymakers and Civil Servants



17 March 2026

The Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), in cooperation with the Asian and Pacific Training Centre for ICT for Development (APCICT) of the UNESCAP, organized a webinar titled “Artificial Intelligence Essentials for Policymakers and Civil Servants” on 17 March 2026. The event brought together government officials, policymakers, and experts from ECO Member States to exchange knowledge and perspectives on the growing role of artificial intelligence (AI) in public governance and economic development.

The webinar aimed to strengthen the understanding of AI governance among policymakers and civil servants by highlighting global trends, regulatory developments, and practical approaches for responsible AI adoption. Participants discussed the strategic implications of AI in the context of digital transformation and the emerging Industry 5.0 paradigm, which emphasizes human-centric and sustainable technological innovation.

In his opening remarks, H.E. Amb. Silapberdi Nurberdiyev, Deputy Secretary General of the ECO emphasized the importance of building institutional capacity to enable governments to harness the benefits of AI while addressing its potential risks. He noted that responsible AI governance requires effective regulatory frameworks, informed policymaking, and international cooperation. He also informed that the webinar forms part of the preparatory process for the 4th ECO Ministerial Meeting on ICT, scheduled to be held in 2026 in Islamabad, Pakistan.

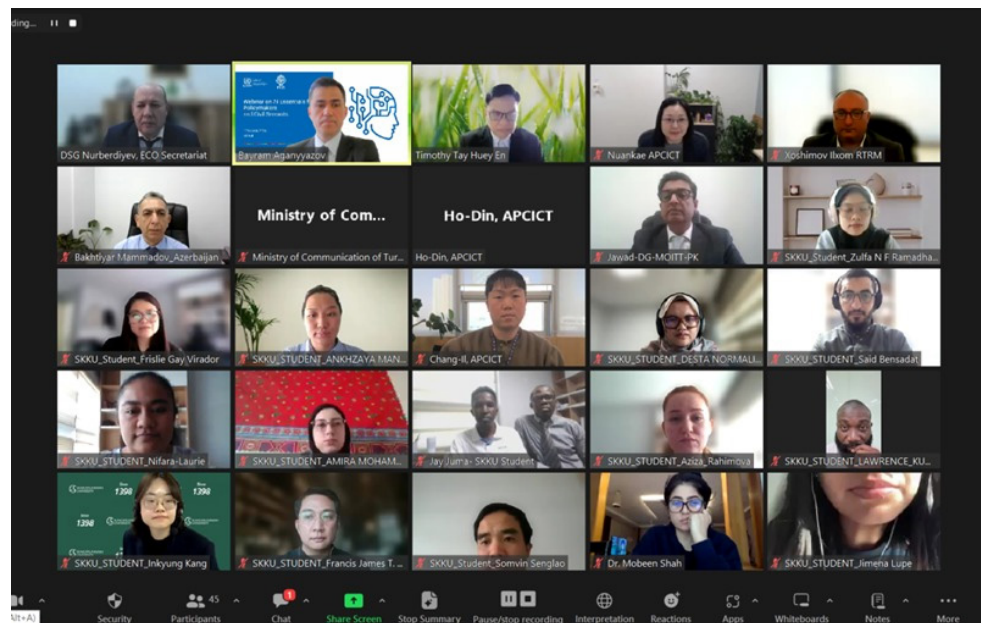
The discussions also contributed to the ongoing development of a new ECO regional strategy on ICT, which will address emerging technologies and digital innovation. Artificial intelligence is expected to be one of the key focus areas of this strategy, reflecting its growing importance for economic competitiveness, industrial development, and public service modernization.

During the session, an expert presentation delivered by Mr. Timothy Tay from APCICT provided an overview of global AI governance frameworks and emerging regulatory approaches. The presentation addressed key international initiatives, including the UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence, the OECD AI Principles, and other internationally recognized standards aimed at promoting safe, secure, and trustworthy AI systems.

Representatives of ECO Member States have also briefly outlined their national ICT, digital transformation, and AI policy initiatives.

The webinar concluded with a discussion on potential areas for future cooperation, including knowledge exchange, policy capacity building, and regional collaboration in AI governance.

The ECO reaffirmed its commitment to supporting Member States in advancing digital transformation and promoting the responsible use of emerging technologies for sustainable development across the ECO region.



ECO- Uzbekistan consultations on the proposed digital transport and customs office

On March 30 2026, delegations from the ECO Secretariat and the Republic of Uzbekistan held virtual discussions on the ways and means to address proposal made by honourable president of Uzbekistan to establish Digital Transport and Customs Office for the ECO Region.

They reviewed procedural requirements envisaged in the ECO relevant rules, regulations and modalities for creation a new subsidiary organ for the ECO.

During the meeting, representatives from the Ministry of Transport as well as Customs Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan shared with the ECO Secretariat their views on the contributions this proposed regional office can make into the ECO activities in transport and transit.

It was agreed that the Republic of Uzbekistan will share with the ECO Secretariat the revised concept paper and supporting documents for the consideration of the Member States.

Relevant directors and officers from the ECO Secretariat attended these online consultations.



Economic Cooperation Organization



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