12th Asia-Pacific Trade Facilitation Forum x Paperless Trade Week (APTFF x PTW) 2026

Bangkok, Thailand, 8-12 June 2026[1]

Summary & Highlights

The 12th Asia-Pacific Trade Facilitation Forum x Paperless Trade Week (APTFF x PTW) 2026 was organized by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) in cooperation with a wide range of international organizations and partners.

Under the theme of "*Next Generation Trade Digitalization – Advancing Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation,*" the APTFF x PTW 2026 brought together over 400 in-person participants from nearly 50 countries of the Asia-Pacific region and beyond, with additional close to 600 participants joining online.

As part of the opening session of the Forum, ESCAP and ADB launched the *Asia-Pacific Trade Facilitation Report 2026: Harnessing Artificial Intelligence in Trade Facilitation.*[2] The report examines the recent progress in trade facilitation in Asia and the Pacific and explores how emerging technologies, particularly artificial intelligence (AI), can enhance efficiency, transparency and resilience in international trade processes. It also highlights the transformative role of AI and machine learning in improving commercial documentation and compliance readiness, enabling more effective risk-based border management and streamlining document-intensive trade finance operations. Looking ahead, the report emphasizes the need for sustained progress in strengthening human capital and institutional readiness, building integrated data and digital infrastructure, and enhancing regulatory frameworks to support AI adoption in trade facilitation.

Focusing on the theme of the event, the high-level panel session explored key dimensions of how next generation trade digitalization is accelerating progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. Against the backdrop of rising geopolitical tensions, the session focused on developing enabling environments for increasingly complex cross-border trade systems, with particular emphasis on supporting groups with special needs, especially small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The session noted national efforts from the Kyrgyz Republic and Thailand on developing digital public infrastructure and legal frameworks (e.g. data protection, cybersecurity). Moreover, building on these national efforts, the importance of international standards, regional cooperation and integration mechanisms, as well as strong public-private collaboration, were particularly noted. The panel also examined the challenges the private sector faces while trying to adopt new technologies and adapt to evolving regulatory requirements, while noting the crucial role they could play in policy development. To overcome current challenges, one key recommendation was to ensure interoperability by using globally recognized standards and

[1] The Plenary sessions were held on 9-10 June.

[2] Available at https://www.adb.org/publications/asia-pacific-trade-facilitation-report-2026; and https://www.unescap.org/kp/2026/asia-pacific-trade-facilitation-report-2026-harnessing-artificial-intelligence-trade

harmonized legal frameworks. Another recommendation was to adopt a holistic approach and build enabling digital trade infrastructure for advancing trade digitalization. It would include establishing effective governance mechanisms, building high-quality data infrastructure, enhancing institutional and stakeholders' capacities, securing trade financing and fostering trust through transparency and predictability. The Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific (CPTA) was identified as a crucial platform in supporting regional advancements by complementing and scaling up national and bilateral trade digitalization efforts and fostering regional cooperation and connectivity. It was further highlighted as a multilateral mechanism enabling legal recognition of electronic trade documents, promoting interoperability, and providing an inclusive, scalable pathway for countries at different levels of digital readiness.

Plenary Session 1 *"Artificial Intelligence in Trade Facilitation: State of Play and Way Forward"* provided an in-depth discussion on the practical applications, implementation challenges, and future priorities for scaling up AI-enabled trade facilitation across the region. Representatives from government, private sector and international organizations noted that the AI-enabled trade facilitation ecosystem rests on strengthening human capital capacity and institutional readiness, building integrated data and digital infrastructure. In this context, the State Customs Committee of Azerbaijan shared the country's experience in applying AI to customs risk management and trade data analytics. Yet despite launching pilot projects using AI, many economies struggled to scale them up due to weak digital infrastructure, governance gaps, and limited capacity. Therefore, it was noted that strong digital foundations must come before AI adoption. The importance of interoperability remained central to the discussion, as without it, governments risk digitizing the existing inefficiencies instead of transforming trade processes. Speakers emphasized the need to harmonize legal frameworks, adopt international standards and recognize electronic trade documents in the region. Finally, the discussion concluded by reiterating the importance of regional cooperation and trust to ensure inclusive AI adoption and to avoid widening the digital divide.

Plenary Session 2 *"Harnessing Digital Innovation for Smarter Trade Facilitation"* brought together senior officials and representatives from international organizations and the private sector to discuss how digital innovation is reshaping trade facilitation and the policy conditions needed to make it work. The session opened with a keynote address from Pakistan, which shared the country's Single Window journey and ongoing efforts toward CPTA accession. China then shared Tianjin Custom's Electronic Certificate (ECERT) system, demonstrating how electronic exchange of trade certificates with partners economies had significantly reduced verification times and improved border efficiency. Japan shared lessons from its e-invoicing initiative, highlighting how the adoption of Pan-European Public Procurement On-Line (PEPPOL) as a standardized network boosted the digital capabilities of Japanese businesses. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Secretariat provided an update on the Digital Economy Framework Agreement and key regional tools such as the ASEAN Single Window and payment connectivity. Finally, United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT) introduced portable digital verifiable credentials as a scalable approach to trusted cross-border data exchange. The session concluded with broad agreement that digital technologies can substantially improve the efficiency, transparency, and resilience of cross-border trade. However, speakers emphasized that

realizing these benefits requires more than technology alone - it depends on interoperable standards, enabling legal and regulatory frameworks, institutional readiness and sustained collaboration among governments, international organizations, and the private sector.

Plenary Session 3 "*Enabling Green and Inclusive Trade Facilitation through Digital Transformation*" examined how digitalization can support greener trade and more inclusive participation in international trade. Discussions emphasized the growing importance of environmental regulations and market access requirements, such as carbon pricing and deforestation-related rules, and underscored the challenges that SMEs face in navigating these and other trade rules and processes, including in relation to fragmented systems, border delays, complex procedures, lack of trust and verifiability, and limited access to trade finance. The session explored how digital tools and processes can help address some of these issues through initiatives such as the Electronic Queue Management System (e-QMS) in Kyrgyz Republic, Sri Lanka's paperless Certificate of Origin system, and implementations of national digital trade platforms and digital product passports. Speakers further explored how green trade facilitation can be supported through improved measurement and calculation of carbon emissions, circular economy investment tracking, product and supply-chain traceability, and greater use of common platforms and international standards. At the same time, speakers warned that digitalization can risk reinforcing the digital divide if poorly designed, and efforts should be made to enhance Information and Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructure, capacity building, and (greener) energy access.

Plenary Session 4 "*Building the Future – Institutional Pathways and Partnerships for Next Generation Trade Facilitation*" concluded the plenary programme by examining how public-private partnerships and international cooperation can advance the next generation of digital and sustainable trade facilitation. The session featured experiences from Timor-Leste and Mongolia, illustrating how developing economies are making tangible progress through digitalization of customs procedures and national Single Windows, as well as active engagements under the CPTA framework. They also highlighted the importance of sustained technical assistance and capacity building support from international partners. Representatives from regional and international organizations discussed how frameworks, for example, the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) programme, UN/CEFACT and the Commonwealth digital trade agenda, are supporting countries in building interoperable digital trade architectures and translating regional dialogue into concrete national action. The session emphasized that sustained collaboration and legal reform supported by investment in digital infrastructure and human capacity remain essential to ensuring that no country is left behind in the transition to next generation trade digitalization agenda.

A dedicated session was held for the three winners of the Asia-Pacific Trade Facilitation Innovation Awards 2026. The awards were given to cases that demonstrated implementation of innovative trade facilitation measures, such as using digital means and channels, and with a strong linkage to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The winners were: China Academy of Information and Communications Technology (CAICT) for their project on Astron Network; Pakistan Single Window for its Integrated Risk Management System; and GS1 China for its project on ESG Supply Chain Transparency.

In addition to the plenary sessions, numerous events were held throughout the APTFF x PTW 2026. The fifth session of the Paperless Trade Council of the CPTA reviewed progress in implementing the Framework Agreement and made strategic decisions on further implementation. The 21st session of the SPECA Working Group on Trade, which supports cross-border and regional cooperation for implementing the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda in Central Asia, in the area of sustainable trade, was also convened. Moreover, 18 capacity-building sessions, along with several expert group meetings, exhibitions and receptions took place. Finally, a field visit to Thailand Post was organized by the Electronic Transactions Development Agency (ETDA) for enabling participants to explore its facilities and gain a deeper understanding of digital solutions for logistics and delivery operations.

All programmes and presentations are available online. For details, please visit https://www.unescap.org/events/2026/ptw2026.