

Eldor Aripov: Located at the junction of Central and South Asia, this ancient city has served as a "nodal point" of interregional connectivity since time immemorial



Today, the first session of the Termez Dialogue on Connectivity between Central and South Asia on the topic "Building a Common Space of Peace, Friendship and Prosperity" started in Termez, reports Duniyo IA correspondent.

In his welcoming speech, Eldor Aripov, Director of the Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies under the President of Uzbekistan (ISRS), emphasized the significance of holding the forum in the city of Termez. "Located at the junction of Central and South Asia, this ancient city has served as a "nodal point" of interregional connectivity since time immemorial", - the expert noted.

He also added that Termez was a center of intercultural and religious dialogue, where the traditions of Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam were born and developed. The city was located between ancient states such as the Greco-Bactrian and Kushan kingdoms, and flourished during the Timurid era, becoming a major trade, craft and scientific and educational center.

Moreover, the expert noted, the ancient Northern Trade Route, connecting India and Central Asia, passed through Termez. Today, the city is actively modernizing and reviving its role as the southern gate of Uzbekistan, once again becoming an important link between Central and South Asia.

"The rich historical heritage of Termez creates a solid foundation for the formation of a single space for cooperation, opening up new strategic opportunities for common development", - he said.

Developing this idea, Eldor Aripov emphasized the importance of holding the Termez Dialogue. According to him, "in the conditions of global instability, a free and constructive dialogue based on respect and equal participation of all parties is more important than ever".

Based on this logic, the expert said, in July 2021, at the initiative of Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, a high-level international conference "Central and South Asia: regional connectivity. Challenges and Opportunities", and in 2022 the UN adopted a relevant resolution. These steps laid the foundations for a new regional agenda based on cooperation and revitalization of historical ties.

"Today, all the necessary conditions have been created for this", — Aripov noted. A strong consensus has been formed in Central Asia regarding joint deepening of cooperation with South Asia, which is confirmed by support for the CASA-1000, TAPI and Trans-Afghan Corridor projects.

In addition, the ISRS Director noted that Afghanistan is gradually transforming and striving to live in peace and harmony with its environment. The country's interest in fully integrating into regional ties, including those with Central Asia, provides an opportunity to strengthen the connection between the two regions.

Speaking about the interaction between Central and South Asia, Eldor Aripov noted that in recent years it has been developing steadily, with the economic agenda playing a key role in this process. According to the results of last year, mutual trade turnover exceeded five billion dollars. However, according to him, these figures remain quite modest and do not correspond to the enormous potential that the regions have.

In order to take economic cooperation to a qualitatively new level, the expert believes it is important to further simplify trade procedures, create a multi-variant system of transport corridors and develop energy infrastructure.

In this context, special attention was paid to the strategic importance of the speedy implementation of the Trans-Afghan Corridor construction project. It was emphasized that its implementation will provide the countries of the region with the shortest access to the ports of the Indian Ocean, and will connect South Asia with the markets of Central Asia, Russia, China and Europe".

The expert expressed hope that the Termez Dialogue will offer a new paradigm of relations, free from conflicts and confrontation, based on the principle of cooperation for the benefit of the prosperity of the regions.

In this context, concluding his speech, ISRS director quoted the words of the President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, that "the historical and civilizational community of Central and South Asia, the coinciding interests of our countries and peoples are a solid foundation on which we can build a common prosperous future. The time has come to realize that without strengthening cooperation and effective regional connectivity, we will not be able to overcome the challenges that our countries face today".

It is worth noting that, the first meeting of the Termez Dialogue on the connectivity between Central and South Asia on the topic: "Building a common space of peace, friendship and prosperity" is being held in Termez from May 19 to 21.

The event was organized by ISRS, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan, and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

The forum brought together about 200 participants from Central and South Asia, Europe, the CIS, Asia Pacific, America, and the Middle East. Among them were representatives of political and economic circles, business circles, financial institutions, international and regional organizations, as well as prominent experts from analytical and research centers around the world.

**Source**