

STATEMENT BY THE MINISTER OF STATE FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS,  
HIS EXCELLENCY SHRI . E. AHAMED

*(6<sup>TH</sup> MEETING OF THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS OF IOR-ARC, IRAN,  
TEHRAN)*

*FEBRUARY 21, 2006*

**Mr. Chairman**

**Honourable Ministers,**

**Distinguished Delegates**

Let me, at the outset, convey my warm appreciation to the Government and people of the Islamic Republic of Iran for the gracious hospitality extended to me and my delegation and for the excellent arrangements made for our meeting here.

2. We are very sad that the driving force behind the last two IOR-ARC Council of Ministers meetings at Colombo H.E. Mr. Laxman Kadirgamar is no more with us. May I offer our condolences to the departed soul and take a vow to keep his vision of a successful IOR-ARC alive!
3. Our senior officials have had detailed deliberations over the past two days. They have, inter-alia, discussed administrative and budgetary concerns. The recommendations they have made for our consideration are practical and result oriented. We need our Secretariat to be assured of logistical and budgetary support so that we can demand commensurate results from it. On our part, we would be happy to support the recommendations that have been made.
4. I wish to also place on record my delegation's appreciation for the generous financial contribution Mauritius has made in the running of the Coordinating Secretariat at Port Louis. We hope that the Coordinating Secretariat will closely monitor the implementation of the many activities and projects proposed by the Academic Group, the Business Forum and the WGTI. We understand that many of these projects would require additional financial assistance in the form of voluntary contribution from the Member States. I am, therefore, pleased to announce India's voluntary contribution of US\$50,000 to the Special Fund in the year 2006 to carry out IOR-ARC's activities. This reconfirms our trust in IOR-ARC and demonstrates our political will to support the activities of the grouping.
5. Mr. Chairman, in assessing the achievements of our organisation, we must also take into account the fact that we are a diverse group of countries, with different levels of economic development and also belonging at times to different regional groupings. However, it is the Indian Ocean, which sustains the maritime lifeline

of over 50% of world trade that binds us together. We should encourage the three working groups - the Academic Group, the Business Forum and the Working Group on Trade and Investment to come up with tangible proposals based on our complementarities and synergies.

6. I would like to suggest that we organise workshops on issues having direct relevance to our trade and industry sectors or for developmental activities in our countries. There are many areas where we can benefit by sharing each others' developmental experiences, technologies, traditional knowledge or best practices.
7. Disaster Mitigation and Management has emerged as a significant area of international cooperation, particularly after the Tsunami of 26 December 2004. India had organized an IOR-ARC Workshop on Disaster Mitigation and Management in 2005. Tsunami has made us to recognize the need for a comprehensive oceanogenic disaster forecasting and mitigation system. I am happy to note that the Committee of Senior Officials have accepted India's offer of establishing an Expert Group to discuss issues related to setting up of a network of early warning centers in the member countries to transact real time data. India is prepared to share the experience gained in Mitigation of Natural Disasters with other IOR-ARC Member States and provide training for building capacity in prediction, modeling, forecasting and early warning of natural disasters. At the same time, we would be happy to learn from the experiences of other member states in this important field.
8. Mr. Chairman, the private sector in India has made a significant progress in recent years. Our knowledge industries have created their own brand image. This is attracting major global corporations to invest and locate in India. At the same time, the Indian private sector is also looking for investment opportunities overseas. My Government is ready to facilitate private sector investments in IOR-ARC member states for mutual benefit. In this context, I am happy to announce that we would organise an IOR Trade Fair in India. On the sidelines of the Trade Fair, sectoral seminars, Buyer Seller Meets could also be arranged. In order to promote the private sector led business activities, we need to look at the issue of visa facilitation for bonafide business travelers. India grants multiple entry long term visa for individuals falling in this category.
9. Mr. Chairman, you would agree with me that people to people interaction would indeed play a pivotal role in bridging the civilization gaps in our region. Let us think of initiating such activities which can utilize this synergy and lead to a better visibility of the region in our own countries in particular and world at large. We can think of events such as IOR-ARC cultural festivals, Film Festivals etc. as way forward in this context.
10. Tourism is an important aspect of our interaction. According to a World Tourism Council report, South Asia and South East Asia have shown the largest percentage increase in tourist arrival which encompasses the entire Indian Ocean

Rim. India will be willing to host a roundtable of tourism sector representatives from the member countries leading to better synergy amongst our tourism industry players, including tour operators. They should be encouraged to work out tour packages encompassing more than two countries in our region.

11. Before I conclude, let me express Mr. Chairman, my delegation's full support and commitment for the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation. I am confident that our deliberations under your mature leadership would lead us to concrete decisions that would take forward our young grouping. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.