

**STATEMENT OF H.E. MR. ABDUS SAMAD AZAD, M.P.,
FOREIGN MINISTER OF BANGLADESH AT THE
EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS OF IOR-ARC AT
MUSCAT, OMAN
22-23 JANUARY 2000**

Mr. Chairman,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is indeed a great honour for me to participate in this Extraordinary Meeting of the Council of Ministers of IOR-ARC in this beautiful city of Muscat. I deem it my duty, first of all, to thank all member states for admitting Bangladesh in the Indian Ocean Rim Association as a new member of the club. I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate Iran, the Seychelles, UAE and Thailand, as well as dialogue partners Japan and Egypt whose presence would undoubtedly add to the effectiveness and strength of our Association. Let me assure you that Bangladesh is fully committed to the principles, aims and objectives of the Charter and that we shall dedicate ourselves to the attainment of the goals of the Association. Let me also express our deepest thanks to the brotherly Government of the Sultanate of Oman for the warm reception that has been extended to me and the members of my delegation as well as the excellent arrangements that have been made for this meeting.

Mr. Chairman,

At the outset I would like to congratulate you for your highly illuminating speech, which, I am sure would set the tone of our meeting. We are also confident that with your vast experience and personal commitment to the cause of the Association, we shall be able to steer the deliberations of this meeting to a successful conclusion. It would be remiss on my part if I do not put on record our deep appreciation for the able leadership of Mozambique which has done an outstanding job as Chairman of the IOR-ARC.

Mr. Chairman,

The Government of Bangladesh under the leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina strongly believes in the concept of regional economic cooperation and this is precisely why Bangladesh attaches such great importance to its membership of IOR-ARC. This is what prompted Bangladesh to take the initiative in the launching of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). Bangladesh is convinced that member states of IOR-ARC could immensely exploit their untapped potential for increased economical cooperation which could be catalytic in promoting speedy economic growth in the member states. In this context, I am happy to say that since the establishment of SAARC in 1985, there is regional consensus among the SAARC countries to establish a free-trade area in South Asia (SAFTA), following the coming into effect of South Asian Preferential Trading Arrangement (SAPTA). Since the inception of SAPTA, three rounds of trade liberalization talks have been held, as a result of which member states have exchanged tariff concessions on more than 5400 items among themselves in these three rounds, Bangladesh has received tariff concessions on 3016 items from other member states of SAARC. In return Bangladesh has granted tariff concessions on 596 items to other member states.

Mr. Chairman,

Against the backdrop, the Government of Bangladesh places high priority on the trade and investment agenda of the IOR-ARC. Bangladesh would, therefore, be very keen to study and examine the individual country reports on coordination of quarantine regulations by Australia, on tariff database by India, on customs regulations by Sri Lanka and on compendium of trade rules and regulations by Mauritius..

Mr. Chairman,

We are meeting at a time, fortunately, when there has been significantly greater understanding, appreciation and awareness of the importance of regional economic cooperation. The frontiers of our thinking on trade, commerce and development has substantially expanded in this decade. Much of the wisdom has its roots in major global conferences as well as meetings like ours, where we have discovered new approaches and new strategies for trade and economic cooperation and have drawn up our economic and social agenda and established many goals and time-bound targets. However, it would be important for us to progress step by step to consolidate the gains already achieved before we move on the next phase. We may have difficulties in our path but we will surely overcome those through the synergies of our collaborative efforts.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, let me assure you that the Government of Bangladesh would extend its fullest support and cooperation to you in the aims and objectives of IOR-ARC. This would also help us to realize the dream of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to attain a good quality of life for our people.

I thank you.