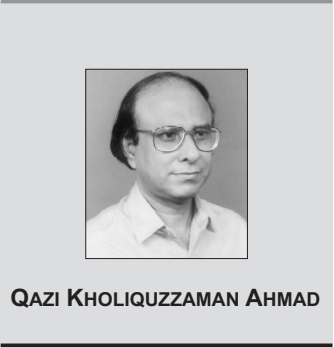


# Single currency in South Asia



GREAT visions can be translated into reality only if they capture the imagination of all concerned and inspire appropriate actions towards reaching the goals. It is indeed a great vision that the peoples of the South Asian countries will one day cooperate in all possible ways, eventually establishing a common currency in the region, and, in the process, achieve the cherished goals of poverty alleviation, human development, environmental security, establishment of peace, and a common voice in the international arena, ensuring sustained satisfactory improvements in the lives and living of the South Asians.

European Union needed about half a century, following the devastating and disruptive World War-II, to reach the very high level of integration, signified by the adoption of a single currency by most of its members. The EU member countries had to move forward step by step but resolutely, achieving hierarchical levels of integration. The UK and few other countries have not yet subscribed to the single currency. In the meantime, the Euro has been hailed as "a symbol of European integration in very sense of the word." This remark by the President of the European Central Bank may be interpreted as an articulation of the region's hopes and aspirations that have gone into the shaping of the integration and is also indicative of more efforts to come from all concerned to further cement the Union.

The call made by the Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee for establishing a single currency in South Asia is clearly a laudable vision. Indeed, this vision sets a very high goal; and however distant the goal may be, it has the potential of mobilizing opinion and action towards that goal.

Obviously, there will be stumbling blocks and distractions along the way. In this connection, one may note the so far discouraging progress of

**Given India's overwhelming size and economic and industrial strength, Prime Minister Vajpayee's announcement of the vision of a single currency in South Asia carries a great deal of weight. One may expect that India will strongly pursue and other regional countries will join in to remove mistrust, discord, and tension among the regional countries by addressing the persisting irritants in a manner that is underpinned by equity and fair play for all.**

SAARC, and the insignificant implementation of South Asian Preferential Trading Arrangement (SAPTA), which was signed on 11 April 1993 in fact, within-SAARC trade of the regional countries remains at about five per cent of the region's total trade, marginally more than the pre-SAPTA level. The achievements at the Islamabad SAARC Summit held in January 2004 are, however, quite inspiring. Among other things, the SAARC social charter was signed and so was South Asian Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA). If one has to go by the uninspiring progress of SAPTA, one may prognose a similar or even worse fate for SAFTA. Why is it that the level of cooperation remains low in South Asia, despite the establishment of SAARC and reaching various agreements and arrangements for increased cooperation in such aspects as economic (including trade) and social development and control of terrorism and drug and human trafficking?

The fundamental causes that are holding back progress have been

succinctly articulated by the Indian Prime Minister when he says "we must take the bold transition from mistrust to trust, from discord to concord and from tension to peace." In this statement he has boldly faced the realities prevailing in South Asia and recognized that the region continues to be plagued by mistrust, discord, and tension. While he calls for the establishment of a single currency in South Asia, which is obviously the pinnacle of a cooperative regime, he makes it clear that to move forward towards that goal, the persistent mistrust, discord, and tension must needs to be removed from inter-state relationships in the region.

However, there is a tendency on the part of some people not to recognize the persisting severe constraints, maybe due to over-enthusiasm or euphemism or expediency on their part. Ignoring those constraints and realities, they tend to engage themselves in discussing proposals relating to certain cooperative arrangements (a single currency,

regional irritants. We are indeed Bangladeshis, Indians, Nepalese, Pakistanis, Sri Lankans, Moldavians, or Bhutanese but we are also South Asians. If we can get out of the prevailing negative mindsets, we can surely build a bright future for all us together. It is crucial that there is political will and action to remove the bottlenecks and build on what has been achieved so far.

Given India's overwhelming size and economic and industrial strength, Prime Minister Vajpayee's announcement of

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## Who attempts to murder whom?

A.H. JAFFOR ULLAH writes from New Orleans, USA

THE article I am penning is a result of my knee-jerk reaction to one short news story in *The Daily Star* on April 14, 2004. From the amazing news story, I came to learn that a case had been lodged against a three-year-old infant in Dhaka. The charge is a serious one – attempted murder. I never knew that a three-year-old juvenile could hold tightly a knife or the butt of a revolver, aim, and try to kill an adult. Something seriously has gone bad in my ancestral homeland. Is the society had become so litigious?

The case of this juvenile boy charged with attempted manslaughter should grace the page of not only *The Guinness Book of World Records* but it should also be deposited in the annals of law journal. In my lifetime, never have I heard that a child so young

charged with such grievous crime. A person has to go to a police station to lodge any complaint – criminal or civil.

As per news story, the complainant sued not only the adult members of the family of the juvenile but also the three-year-old boy. The complaint is a serious one: The members of family tried or conspired to kill the complainant. The desk officer in the police station should have used his God-given brain to rationalise that a three-year old could hardly commit a crime as grievous as murdering an adult. Also, at such tender age, a boy hardly could conspire to kill any person. This falls into the category of absurdity. But our police are so inept that they would record a complaint without even thinking whether the case falls into the domain of the absurd.

The *Daily Star* printed the photo of the puzzled three-year-old whose petrified face tells the sordid drama of

lawsuit going haywire. However, law is law. The boy's father Mr. Anwar Ali brought the frightened boy to the court for bail petition. The judge was kind enough to grant a bail to boy Iman Ali for Taka 5,000. Any intelligent judge would have thrown the case in the dustbin elsewhere in the world. But mind you, we are dealing with Bangladesh. Nonetheless, a three-year-old boy gets to come to the court for bail hearing! Isn't it amazing?

Sadly, Bangladesh has also become a very litigious society. Only to grab 3-katha land in the outskirts of Dhaka, the complainant and his son-in-law had lodged 10 criminal cases against the family members of Iman Ali, the three-year-old boy. Many desperate people would do anything to grab other's land. Perhaps the high population density coupled with paucity of land near urban metropolis is driving our people to insanity. In my

judgment, only an insane person can lodge complaint against a three-year old boy. If my hunch is correct, the laws are based on sound judgment. The police officer recording the complaint and the judiciary in Bangladesh should have thrown out this frivolous case on the ground of absurdity. Not only that, the complainant should be tried for harassing the family of the little boy. The laws are there for use and not for abuse.

The Golden Fleece award in this case should squarely go to the police officer who initially recorded the complaint! He should have better known that a boy who is merely three years of age could hardly hold a weapon; never mind the act.

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