

G20 SUMMIT

Why aren't the leaders smiling?

DR. ABDULLAH SHIBLI

THE leaders of the world's twenty largest economies, known collectively as the G20 Group, last week finished their two-day summit in Hangzhou, China. G20 members include Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, Italy, India, Indonesia, Japan, Mexico, Republic of Korea, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Turkey, UK, USA, and the EU. While the host nation, China, issued tons of communiqués each day on September 4 and 5 while the conclave was in progress, the joint declaration at the end of it while long was devoid of any substance, particularly on how the mighty powers would boost the sluggish world economy, or even give it a gentle push. For economies of Bangladesh and other developing countries which are at the mercy of its trading partners and the recent rounds of uncertainty in the financial and foreign exchange sectors, as well as in the prospects of globalisation and trade regimes means another few months of nail-biting journey through choppy waters, the G20 summit was a non-event. We work hard for every penny we make from our exports and pay a premium for our imports (except for oil in recent months), the least the G20 leaders could have done was to be specific about how they plan to increase trade, investment, and economic growth.

This is the eleventh G20 summit and comes at a time when we have witnessed a slowdown in world economic growth and continual uncertainty in global political outlook. China's President Xi Jinping was not shy, though, when he declared, "We aim to revive growth engines of international trade and investment. We will support multilateral trade mechanisms and oppose protectionism to reverse declines in global trade." Xi was referring to recessions in many of the participating countries, and potential headwinds that many G20 economies faced in the wake of Brexit and UK-EU negotiations, global

resistance to trade agreements, and political uncertainties in the USA and the Middle East. The Chinese government appeared to be holding out an olive branch to the rest of the world excluded from this parlay by slogans of "the four I's": innovation, invigoration, interconnectedness, and inclusiveness. While these are good intentions, without any concrete measure to transform these words into actions, the rest of the world can only hope.

In a communiqué issued several hours after the close of the summit, the G20 leaders warned that global growth was weaker than anticipated, with downside risks continuing, and repeated the acknowledgement that monetary policy alone could not create balanced growth. Before the summiters began to arrive in Hangzhou located in the Zhejiang province, China raised the hope of those who were watching in the sidelines by pointing to Blueprint for Innovative Growth, which announced a "historic consensus on world growth". Hangzhou is the capital of Zhejiang province and embodies China's new economy based on high technology and the hometown

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of Alibaba's founder Jack Ma. While Xi had earlier said, "Facing current risks and challenges in the world economy, we will con-



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tinue to reinforce macro policy communication and coordination," unfortunately in his speeches, the Chinese statements or the final communiqué gave no hints of any concrete steps. On the positive side, the summit also had the global refugee crisis, the fight against the financing of terrorism, financial regulatory reform, and sustainable development on its agenda, but it is not clear how much real attention these issues received.

Now, why do I sound so sceptical? For a start, the global economic outlook continues to be uncertain. The world economy has been on a roller coaster since previous summer when the Chinese economy set off some major tremors. There has been no respite for the major world economies from weak economic growth, a pushback against globalisation in the form of trade pacts such

as TTIP and TPP, and spiralling commodities prices. In an op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal*, two observers commented "The policies of the G20, the International Monetary Fund and the major central banks aren't working." For world leaders, the challenges they face are low interest rates, sky-rocketing real estate prices, weak exports, sluggish job markers, and increasing income inequality. The IMF which has now lost a lot of its forecasting credibility because of its penchant for painting "rosy" pictures had originally projected a 3 percent annual growth rate for 2016. However, it did warn G20 leaders ahead of its meeting that the world economy is stalling and lowered its forecast of growth in the largest economies to 2.2 percent. Some G20 countries, including Brazil, South Africa, Russia, China, and India have experienced recession or strong recessionary pulls in the last year. Even Saudi Arabia has experienced recession in its non-oil sector, and the overall GDP is expected to grow by 1.5 percent year on year in the first three months of 2016.

The most recent jobs data in the USA paint a gloomy picture of the state of this economy as the country moves into the final phase of the Presidential election campaign. In August, only 151,000 jobs were added to the economy, a sharp downturn from the 270,000 jobs that were added in the previous two months. Since jobs growth did not meet the expectations of the Federal Reserve to raise the key interest rate in its September 20-21 meeting and the Fed will wait until December, i.e., until the political outlook following the elections is clearer. "The US economy pattered along at around 2.4 percent growth in 2015, with falling unemployment but poor job growth, real wage increases, strengthening bank balance sheets and various other signs of economic life." (www.globalpolicywatch.com) Nonetheless, a Harvard economist Larry Summers foresees a good chance of a global recession in the next three years.

I hate to leave my readers with in a state of "gloom and doom". There are some very positive outcomes that emerged from, or followed the G20 summit. The British economy seems to have bounced back from the Brexit shock, the pound has been rising steadily even in the face of continuing uncertainty on the terms Britain will be able to secure in its exit negotiations. There was also progress in protecting the environment at the summit. And finally, there is growing optimism that the "emerging economies" are bouncing back and even the *Wall Street Journal* ran a recent story which advocates that the greatest strength in the world economic engine will come not from the G7 but from the emerging markets.

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Rethinking higher education

M. M. SHAHIDUL HASSAN

AT the time of independence, there were only 6 public universities in Bangladesh. At present a total of 38 public universities have been established. As the government funding in higher education sector is continually falling, we cannot expect many more public universities to come in future. On the other hand, private universities are in high demand today. From the humble beginnings of the first private university in Bangladesh in 1993 with only 143 students, today the number of universities has increased to 91, catering to a mass of 0.3 million students or more. In fact the expansion of higher education is a worldwide phenomenon in the mid 20th century. During this time, higher education has seen an increased number of students and institutions all over the world.

But the question remains whether higher education is truly necessary for the prosperity of a nation, and how much it contributes to economic development of the nation. Recent evidence suggests that higher education increases savings and investment, and also lead to a more entrepreneurial and civic society. Skilled workforce contributes significantly to economic growth in both developed and developing countries. Hence a country definitely needs graduates who are better educated, more creative, and more international. To create these graduates who will serve our society and bring our country to prosperity, our universities must play a crucial role. But the universities in Bangladesh still follow a traditional education system, which has been shown to be an ineffective system for producing graduates who are ade-



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quately prepared for handling the real world. It is time we make a bold move forward to change our education system to a more objective based, and interactive learning styled one.

How can we improve university teaching, and produce the kind of graduates that Bangladesh needs to be competitive on world markets? We can establish a national institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, and there should be a centre of academic excellence in each university. Excellence in teaching

requires deep thought and often profound and subtle changes in the way we think about the nature of both teaching and learning. It is the 21st century now, everything around us has changed, and it is only natural that we need to bring a change to our age old teaching system. I have been in the career of teaching for about forty years. I began my teaching career as most young teachers do, consciously modelling my teaching style on that of the teachers I'd had. And in my years of teaching I have

not witnessed many teachers talking about teaching improvement, although teaching is what earns their bread and butter. We see professors glow and roar about their new research ideas, but they never show the slightest excitement about new ideas in teaching. They are willing to spend day and night to write research papers, but very reluctant to develop a creative course for their students.

Our current system follows teacher-centered instructions, where students put all of their focus on the teacher. This mode of instruction does not encourage the students to express themselves, ask questions, and direct their own learning. The students become too dependent on the teacher's teaching, and start to lose their own creative and critical capacities. On the other hand, when a classroom operates through student-centered instructions, students and instructors share the same focus. Instead of listening to the teacher exclusively, students and teachers interact equally. Group work is encouraged, and students learn to collaborate and communicate with one another. Students are more interested in active learning activities. Establishing a student-centered educational system would bring about a paradigm shift in our system and will entail fundamental changes in teaching/learning practices in our country. It might be that we need our own version, blending the better of the two instruction systems, which will serve our students best. For this we have to first develop our own understanding of teaching methods available, and create one that will meet the needs of our students.

Students' academic performance in most of our public universities is assessed through a final examination

and two or three class tests. Private universities do their assessment through one or two midterm and final examinations, and three or four class tests. But such closed-book, timed exams only encourage memorising and not internalising course contents, and exist mostly for administrative and not educational reasons. Although they are a very convenient form of evaluation, but whether these are truly worth the educational costs is a question up for debate. Open-book examinations remove the premium on memorisation of detail, but retain the time constraint. The assignment or term paper can facilitate deep learning as it does not impose a time limitation or require memorisation. Instead the student can consult any sources and acquire a deeper knowledge base synthesise learning to solve a given problem. However, plagiarism is easier in this case. The take-home work with shorter time limits, often overnight, makes plagiarism a little more difficult. There are now two popular methods of assessments, informative and summative. The goal of summative assessment is to evaluate student learning at the end of an instructional unit by comparing it against some standard or benchmark. Examples of summative assessments include: (i) midterm exam, (ii) final exam, (iii) project, etc. Formative assessments are generally low stakes, which means that they have low or no point value. Examples of formative assessments include asking students to: (i) draw a concept map in the class to represent their understanding of a topic, (ii) submit one or two sentences identifying the main point of a lecture, (iii) quizzes. Formative assessments help students identify their strengths and weak-

nesses and target areas that need work and help faculty recognise where students are struggling and thus address problems immediately. Formative assessments help teachers identify concepts that students are struggling to understand, skills they are having difficulty acquiring, or learning standards they have not yet achieved so that adjustments can be made to lessons, instructional techniques, and academic support. There is a saying about these two assessments: "When the cook tastes the soup that is formative assessment. When the customer tastes the soup, it is summative assessment."

Teaching and learning is an ego-threatening task. Too much challenge to the ego, and students rebel or retreat; too little and they don't progress: either way they don't learn. When students know what they do well and what they need to work harder on, it can help them take greater responsibility over their own learning and academic progress. But if we ask teachers to change their style of teaching and adopt a new model in teaching and learning without giving them much time for understanding it, they will react. Before implementing any new teaching and learning model, universities must arrange a series of training for teachers. Using technology in teaching and learning in higher education is also a great challenge. However, living in globalised and international environment, we cannot ignore the changes in higher education. When selecting among several teaching methods, it is best to choose the method that allows the most involvement in learning.

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QUOTABLE Quote

W.G. SEBALD IN VERTIGO

It is thanks to my evening reading alone that I am still more or less sane.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- Fishhook feature
- State frankly
- Traction aid
- Singer McEntire
- Declare
- "The King and I" star
- Nickels and dimes
- Carburetor valve
- Man-shaped mug
- Strike settings
- Parliament setting
- Wrap up
- Tchaikovsky ballet
- In the past
- Junior, e.g.
- High rating
- Smackers
- Strike settings
- Puts down
- Teachers' org.
- Pay to play
- Lusty looks
- Cutting
- Doles out
- Sunup site
- Dallas player, for short
- Bound
- Old movie
- Writer Primo
- Slapstick staple
- Karaoke need
- Low-cal snack
- Sophocles play
- City on the Passaic
- Fires
- Serving aid
- Commerce
- Ducks
- Ready for bed
- Assess
- Mecca resident
- Made demands on
- Writer Chopin
- Beam and Burrows
- Facial pair
- Down
- Fishing aid
- Night fliers
- Juan Perón's wife

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

DECA BERT
 XIDE TIMER
 SIMON JIRENE
 ELI DENDRON
 DENSITY GIT
 DONNA PER
 ANGLE
 ASP LINDA
 AVA DENTIST
 DENMARK SIE
 ANDOR ELUDE
 PUREE RISEN
 TEAS TESS

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

OKAY, KNOCK IT OFF THE BENCH.
 CRASH!
 HAMMIE! WHAT DID YOU DO THAT FOR?
 SEE? I'M BEING PROPELLED!

BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott

DO YOU THINK THERE'S OTHER LIFE IN THE UNIVERSE?
 I DON'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT THE UNIVERSE.
 ASK ME SOMETHING ABOUT THE ARMY.
 WHY?