



DHAKA THURSDAY MAY 16, 2024, JAISHTHA 2, 1431 BS

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# CAMPUS

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## The prospects of pursuing postgraduate education in Bangladesh



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA



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MOVIES

# ALL INDIA RANK

## A refreshing take on the IIT dream

HASIB UR RASHID IFTI

*All India Rank* succeeds in being a refreshing take on the IIT journey and is one of the best coming-of-age stories to have come out of Bollywood in a while. Set in the 1990s, *All India Rank* follows Vivek, a seventeen-year-old boy from Lucknow, leaving for Kota to prepare for the IIT entrance exam and fulfil his father's dream. Upon reaching Kota, Vivek has a hard time coping with the cesspool of a city, the academic pressure, and the weight of expectations.

*All India Rank* focuses more on coming-of-age themes than the preparation for IIT itself. Starting from friendships and teenage infatuations to the weight of academic expectations, Vivek's struggles of adolescence



become the most relatable and key aspect of the film. The young cast does an excellent job of depicting the joy and complications of youth on-screen. The chemistry between Vivek's father and mother was the cherry on top. However, the success in *All India Rank* lies in its understanding of adolescence. At one point in the film, Vivek and his friends sit together and talk about their dreams. When it's Vivek's turn to share, he looks lost because till then, Vivek hadn't really thought about what he wanted to be in life. In the end, he replies that he wants control of his life, be it through IIT or in any other way. And that's what anyone really wants they're growing up – to have control over their lives and to build an identity of their own. Most importantly, *All India Rank* shows that our life is too vast to be bound by institutions, tags, and academic excellence.

OPPORTUNITIES



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Bachelor of Fine Arts in Graphic Design/ Drawing and Painting

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Ability to conceptualise and execute creative ideas

Adaptability to learn new tools and techniques in graphic design

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Basic IT knowledge

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■ OPINION ■

# How university rankings fail to paint

# THE FULL PICTURE

ZIBA MAHDI

Rankings are useful tools for quickly assessing an institution's reputability. They influence whether the university gets funding for its research, how many students apply to the institution, and how the government assesses its research calibre. That said, what rankings show us is far from the full picture.

First, we need to have an understanding of what influences an institution's ranking. QS World University Rankings, for example, evaluates universities based on academic reputation, employer reputation, faculty-student ratio, citations per faculty, international faculty ratio, international student ratio, international research network, employment outcomes, and sustainability.

The Times Higher Education World University Rankings uses 18 performance indicators grouped into five areas – teaching, research environment, research quality, international outlook, and industry.

The formulaic nature of rankings means that universities can easily game the system to climb up certain data points. One prominent example is Boston's Northeastern University's meteoric rise in US News & World Report ranking. The university employed some tactics to get ahead of the competition, such as getting higher ratings on peer assessment scores from other universities, decreasing class size by recruiting more faculty, and building new dorms.

Not all universities share

Northeastern's enthusiasm for rankings, however.

Columbia University decided to drop out of the aforementioned US News rankings in 2023, citing its excessive influence as a point of concern. In the same year, more than 40 law schools and a dozen or so medical schools (including Harvard Medical School) also put an end to their participation in the US News ranking.

Critics of university rankings argue that assigning a single number to represent a university is too simplistic. There are also concerns regarding malpractice, especially since some ranking organisations allow self-reported data and proprietary surveys. There have been numerous scandals in the past where institutions were found to have misrepresented their datasets. Some claim that the overreliance on numbers penalises schools that would have otherwise admitted promising students with less-than-stellar scores.

To obtain authentic data as the basis for university rankings, ranking organisations would have to collect it themselves by being physically present at the universities in question and conducting

assessments and surveys. However, such a system has not yet been feasible to implement on a large scale, considering the manpower and resources it would cross the hundreds of universities worldwide being ranked per year.

Given all the ways rankings can be manipulated, they should not be the only factor influencing a student's decision to attend a university. A good way to conduct the decision-making process is to identify some of your own personal preferences and priorities as a student. This could be class sizes, industry placement,

**The formulaic nature of rankings means that universities can easily game the system to climb up certain data points.**

the reputation of a certain academic department of choice, the social scene, etc. The next step is to read up on how your options measure up against each other based on these factors on the university's website, student reviews on external sites,

discussion websites, etc. This gives you more freedom to choose a university that matches up to your own personalised needs, instead of the arbitrary number of its ranking granted to the university based on its performance on certain things you may not care about.

For example, a certain university may be highly ranked because its faculty has a lot of research citations, but an undergraduate student who has no interest in going into research and academia may benefit more from going to a less highly ranked university where the faculty dedicates more of their time attending to a student's individual needs.

Rankings won't be going away anytime soon. They do a great deal to quantify a range of factors and simplify our decision-making process. However, making our decisions entirely based on rankings harms our chances of having a well-rounded academic experience. In our decision to attend a university, there should be a few considerations beyond its ranking to back us up in our choice.



ILLUSTRATION: ABIR HOSSAIN

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■ CAREER ■

# Things to consider before you **START TUTORING**

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**As a home tutor, you are held completely responsible for your tutee's grades. I think this is unfair to some extent, as effort from the student's end is also equally important for good grades.**

**BIPRA PRASUN DAS**

After completing my A levels, the prospect of making some money from something I enjoyed, teaching, lured me into tutoring. I was excited to start teaching young people, solve their problems, and have a real impact on my tutees' academic lives. However, my excitement was short-lived as I was faced with difficulties I had not previously encountered.

For many Bangladeshi students, home tutoring is often the only way to earn money. While the idea of being a home tutor may feel like a fulfilling part-time gig that rakes in the dough, the reality can be quite different. There are risks of being exploited, the burden of time and stress management, and the feelings of being undervalued, underpaid, and underappreciated can prevail.

Some tutoring arrangements entail tutors working long hours without breaks while being paid significantly less than the value of their services. This is often the case for students who desperately seek tutoring opportunities to finance their university tuition fees or to shoulder family responsibilities due to unforeseen circumstances.

Souhardya Dev, an undergraduate student at North South University, has been teaching for a couple of years now. He remarked, "While I understand the guardians' concerns for their child's academic performance, they often expect tutors like me to provide academic support

throughout the week, attempt to schedule extra lessons, and express dissatisfaction with the number of hours I am teaching, even though it was previously agreed upon. This is very overwhelming." Abritti Mondal, also an undergraduate student at North South University who has been tutoring for over a year now, added, "Often the tutee and their guardians have little respect for our time. The lack of punctuality from the student's end causes undue stress and makes it harder to manage an already busy schedule."

On top of this, tutors often encounter delays in receiving payment. In more unfortunate scenarios, student tutors report being paid less than what was agreed upon. Saptodipa Shaswate, a recent A level graduate who has been teaching for more than a year, shared her experience, "A few months ago, the parent of my now-former tutee offered me much less money than my agreed-upon tuition fees near the end of the month and informed me that my services were no longer required. When I insisted on being paid the appropriate amount, I was told that I had missed lessons, whereas I had actually missed only one lesson that month. I was then asked to leave."

Such experiences are not rare. Student tutors are especially vulnerable to being financially exploited as in most cases, tutoring arrangements are based on verbal agreements with no formal contracts. Tuition media, which act as intermediaries between clients and tutors, are often excessively exploitative. They provide no room for negotiation and charge way more than is reasonable. These intermediaries also often choose to conveniently leave out important information about the arrangement.

The act of teaching can often come with the sense that your efforts are not being reciprocated by your tutee. When I was just getting started with tutoring, it was a real challenge to get one of my mentees to put in any effort from their end due to their complete nonchalance towards their studies. When they fared poorly in the final exams, I was reprimanded by their mother. She held me entirely responsible for the bad result, even though I had previously expressed my concerns about her child's academic performance to her on multiple occasions.

Many tutors can report similar experiences. Abritti remarked, "As a home tutor, you are held completely responsible for your tutee's grades. I think this is unfair to some extent, as effort from the student's end is also equally important for good grades." Souhardya added to Abritti's comments, saying, "It is frustrating when the student is not willing to put in the effort by doing their homework, which often results in lower-than-expected grades."

Despite everything, tutoring remains a deeply gratifying experience for many. Reflecting on her positive experiences as a tutor, Abritti said, "When my tutees express their newfound comprehension of an academic concept that they previously found challenging, and when they share that they're achieving better grades at school because of my assistance, it fills me with joy. It's rewarding to know that my sincere efforts have yielded positive results."

However, the problems that most tutors face so often are very real, and are impossible to overcome without the collective efforts of all parties involved. It is important that tutors fulfil the duties they are paid to do, whilst not compromising their physical, mental and emotional well-being, and knowing where to draw the line. On the flip side, guardians and tutees need to understand that student-tutors have responsibilities outside of the tutoring arrangement, and do not owe them services beyond what they are paid to provide.

Before starting tutoring, it is important you assert boundaries, negotiate fair terms, and make your expectations known. You can do this by clearly communicating your availability, preferred working hours, payment rates, frequency of sessions, and limitations right from the get-go. Advocate for yourself and seek agreements that reflect the value of your services. Doing so can help prevent overwork and ensure that you are compensated fairly for your time.

*Bipra Prasun Das is an undergraduate student at North South University.*



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

■ EDUCATION ■

# The prospects of pursuing postgraduate education in BANGLADESH

After getting a Bachelor's degree, a Master's degree thus becomes widely sought after, as this has the potential of opening many doors. In this case, the prospects of pursuing your Master's in Bangladesh are often overlooked.

**RAIAN ABEDIN**

For those interested in stepping into academia, a degree from Bangladesh allows them to look for future prospects with more comfort. Labiba Rifah Nanjiba, a 24-year-old student at BRAC University, shares, "My future plan is to apply for a Master's in a foreign university but before that, I feel like there is a gap in my academic knowledge which I'm trying to fill here."

In most countries, getting into a Master's programme with proper funding or scholarship is extremely difficult. For Labiba, the choice to stay in Bangladesh also came about after realising the challenges of securing a scholarship. For many others, a Master's also leads to a PhD, where funding may be considerably more generous. This particular career path is quite popular among STEM students.

Nayara Noor, a 23-year-old Master's student of Biotechnology at BRACU, shares her plans. "The decision to pursue a Master's in Bangladesh was because of extenuating circumstances which forced me to stay here for longer than I had initially planned. I do plan on applying for a PhD afterward but I think I'd prefer a combined Master's and PhD program."

For research-heavy subjects, such as life sciences, the dearth of facilities available to the students seems to be a clear problem. Nayara shares, "If you want to do advanced-level research, it's difficult unless you go to specific organisations through links. In the universities themselves, a lot of the more sophisticated work just isn't done."

Mubtaseem Nower, a 25-year-old Master's graduate from Dhaka University's Criminology Department, adds, "We learnt whatever we learnt in our undergraduate years, with very little being added to it at a Master's level. As for research, from what I've seen I think a lot of the work done here is rather poor methodologically. Part of this could be due to poor infrastructure that plague some of the newer departments in our university, but another important factor is that there isn't a very big culture for research in our country."

Regarding the barriers students face while working on their

thesis, M Kabir Uddin, Assistant Professor of North South University's Biochemistry and Microbiology Department, says, "While the facilities we provide are quite robust, there's still plenty of limitations in what we can provide our students. Whatever practical knowledge we can't provide we try to make up for it by providing a strong theoretical understanding."

For many, a Master's degree is an important opportunity to build their skill set and to create networks that will lead to newer opportunities or provide a chance to explore something drastically different from their Bachelor's programme.

Kajali Chakma, a 23-year-old MBA student at Bangladesh University of Professionals, says, "When I finished my B.Sc in

**"My future plan is to apply for a Master's in a foreign university but before that, I feel like there is a gap in my academic knowledge which I'm trying to fill here."**

Computer Science and Engineering (CSE) and entered the job market, I realised that there is a lot of pressure to get jobs in the IT sector in Bangladesh. I initially had no plans to get a Master's, but my struggles made me realise that getting an MBA was just the better option for me in terms of employability."

If a four-year Bachelor's programme is not enough to arm a student with the required skillset to survive in the industry, then is that not a problem that needs addressing?

"Every single job listing I come across that's related to my field requires a Master's degree. So, I'd say that at least for life sciences, having a Master's degree carries significantly higher value," bemoans Nayara, painting an unfortunate picture of the current job market for fresh graduates.

NOTICE BOARD



## AUAP President Dr Md Sabur Khan advocates for integration of AI and mental health awareness

Dr Md Sabur Khan, President of the Association of Universities of Asia and the Pacific (AUAP), and Founder and Chairman of the Board of Trustees of Daffodil International University, participated in the AUAP Learning and Sharing Forum on Health hosted by Daegu Health College in South Korea from May 9 to 11.

The forum, attended by approximately 100 participants representing more than 12 countries and 45 universities from Asia, Europe, and Australia aimed to foster collaboration and knowledge exchange in the field of health education. The programme featured various sessions on medical technology, nursing and rehabilitation, paper presentations, and medical tours.

Dr Khan underscored the importance of addressing mental health issues within academic settings. He emphasised that graduates who possess both physical and

mental well-being can significantly contribute to societal welfare. Special guests at the Opening Ceremony included Dr Sunghee Nam, Former President of AUAP and President of Daegu Health College, and Jongchan Kim, Director General of the University Policy Bureau of Daegu Metropolitan City, South Korea.

During his keynote speech titled "Integrating AI and Technology into Higher Education Curriculum", Dr Khan highlighted the significance of incorporating AI technology into healthcare education. He articulated that academia plays a vital role in driving innovation, research, and training the next generation of healthcare professionals equipped with the skills and knowledge to leverage AI effectively. He added that academia can pave the way for a future where healthcare is not only more effective and efficient but also more equitable, affordable, and accessible to all.

## NSU celebrates Bangla New Year 1431 through a cultural programme and Baishakhi mela

North South University (NSU) celebrated the Bangla New Year 1431 and *Baishakhi mela* with much excitement and exhilaration, showcasing the essence of Bengali culture.

The campus was adorned with colourful decorations to welcome *Boishakh*. The programme began with the *Mangal Shobhajatra* in the morning. Then the cultural programme began. There were various arrangements, including dance, song, and *Baul* music.

NSU Shangskritik Shangothon organised the programme, and Professor Atiqul Islam, Vice Chancellor, NSU, graced the occasion as the Chief Guest. NSU Treasurer and Pro-VC (Acting) Professor Abdur Rob Khan, and NSU Registrar Dr Ahmed Tazmeen were also present.

While addressing the students, Professor Atiqul Islam said, "*Pahela Baishakh* is the festival of non-communal Bengalis. This year, we are celebrating this festival late as the university was closed due to the Eid holidays and due to the continuing heatwave. The NSU family



has made excellent arrangements for this event. I wish everyone a success."

Professor Abdur Rob Khan said, "We have to cherish our own culture and celebrate. We have to move society forward with a cultural revolution and positive energy."

The programme was supervised by Dr Md Syeed Uz Zaman Khan, Director of Student Affairs. He expressed his happiness to organise such a joyous event.

North South University Cultural Organization organised the cultural programme, and North South University Social Services Club organised the day long *Boishakhi mela*. The event was a huge success, showcasing the rich heritage and traditions of Bengali culture.

## Southeast Computer Club organises Battle of Bytes eSports tournament

Southeast Computer Club organised the Battle of the Bytes eSports tournament in association with Bangladesh Youth Development and eSports Association (BYDESA) on May 8 at the Southeast University campus in Dhaka.

The grand finale, held on May 7, saw "SEU Underdogs" claiming victory in the *Valorant* division, defeating "DeathWish" by a score of 2-0. In the *EA FC 24* category, Arman Kayes took the championship followed by Mahin Uddin and Al Amin Md Tanvir as first and second runners-up respectively.

The event welcomed esteemed guests, including Prof. Dr ANM Meshquat Uddin, Advisor, BOT, Southeast University Trust as the Chief Guest and Md Nafiul Islam, Head of Production, BYDESA as the Special Guest.

Prof. Dr M Mofazzal Hossain, Acting Vice Chancellor of Southeast University, and Prof. Dr Yusuf Mahbulul Islam, Professor, Department of Computer Science and Engineering (CSE), graced the ceremony with their presence and motivational remarks. Shahriar Manzoor, Associate Professor and Chairman of the Department of CSE, chaired the programme.



EDU GUIDE

# Why you should consider doing an exchange semester abroad

LABBY AHSAN

The concept of exchange semesters has long been popular in the education sector. In an exchange programme, students have the opportunity to explore another country for a short duration, ranging from seven days to a month. However, in an exchange semester, they can study abroad for a more extended period, typically three to six months.

Various exchange programmes and semesters are available to Bangladeshi students, including Erasmus +, Erasmus Mundus, and other university-specific exchanges. At BRAC University, we have something called the OSUN – Open Society University Network – exchange programme. OSUN is a global university network that facilitates the exchange of staff, faculty, students, and officials, allowing them to share their learning experiences with each other. As part of OSUN’s mobility initiative, I was fortunate to embark on an exchange semester at the Central European University in Vienna.

Exchange semesters offer opportunities to explore many new things. My exchange semester helped me grow the mindset that I should continue my studies further. The professors abroad are also amazing; they motivate students to continue learning. During my exchange semester, I learned vital points of global distributive justice, fair trade policy, and so on. I got advanced communication lessons from my faculty members, like how to be more responsive in class, practice empathy, and listen carefully to others.

Throughout the exchange semester, the universities try to give you a diverse experience of learning a lot in a short time. They also arrange consultation hours for you so that you can cope with new modules of learning. Moreover, you will also get to meet people from different parts of the world during your stay abroad and interact with several distinguished professors.

The education system abroad is exceptional; you might even find yourself learning about environmental policy from an environment minister who doubles as your faculty member. Additionally, there are intercultural festivals and excursions where you have the chance to represent your country. Presentations abroad are also much longer, ranging from 30 minutes to hours. This provides an excellent opportunity to hone your presentation skills.

Besides, exchange semesters can serve as a gateway to higher education opportunities too. You can ask for recommendation letters from your foreign faculty members, which can be beneficial for your applications. During the exchange semester, the university offers many education fairs where you can get information for your higher studies. I got the chance to participate in an education fair where I got to know about other European universities and their offerings for master’s and PhD-seeking students. One of the European universities at the fair even offered me a good



ILLUSTRATION: FAISAL BIN IQBAL

scholarship for pursuing my master’s degree over there.

You can also explore and visit foreign companies relevant to your field of study, gaining valuable insights. For instance, as a Business student, I visited European banks to gain practical knowledge of their banking and finance systems.

For those interested in participating in exchange semesters, you most likely will have to write an essay explaining why you wish to participate. Universities look for three points in an essay – what you’re looking to learn, trying to achieve, and the community impact you can have once you’re done with the exchange semester.

Before applying to any exchange semester, look into the university you are planning to apply to. Find one or two faculty members who motivated you through their lectures or research work. You may find their lectures on YouTube and their research work in different international journals. If you can mention these things in your essay, it will serve as an advantage for you.

Some exchange semesters are paid, while others are fully funded, depending on your capabilities and preferences. You need to convince the universities as to why you need funding.

Having said all that, do not wait to apply to these exchange semesters. Keep an eye on your university’s notice board for exchange programme or semester announcements. You may also browse sites like Opportunities Circle or foreign university websites directly. Foreign Embassies in Bangladesh are also valid sources for finding exchange opportunities.

## About the author

- Q Labby Ahsan is a final-year student at BRAC Business School, BRAC University. He is majoring in Marketing and is expected to graduate by Spring 2025. He recently completed an exchange semester in Vienna at the Central European University.
- Q Currently, Labby holds the position of Outreach Manager at Keeron – an upskilling platform – and serves as the President of Newspaper Olympiad – an initiative aimed at promoting the habit of reading newspapers among the youth. His overarching goal is to create skill development opportunities for young individuals in the future and build a community where he can actively contribute to creating social impacts.
- Q In his leisure time, Labby enjoys cycling and writing fiction books. He has so far authored two books and translated two more from English literature.





■ IN-FRAME ■

# RED HEAVEN

## The story of IUT

SADMAN AHMED

Tranquil is probably the best way to describe the Islamic University of Technology (IUT) campus. Upon crossing the main gate, it is immediately clear why the campus has earned the nickname "Red Heaven". The red colours all over the place welcome visitors with open arms. IUT's "five pillars", which signify the five pillars of Islam, are particularly eye-catching. Although not as large as many other universities, IUT has its fair share of greenery. With its "Tree Park" and "Great Lake", which can remind one of Hogwarts, and lots of cats waiting for warm hugs, IUT is surely worth a visit.



PHOTOS: ANM SHAHRIYAR, MAHIR FAIYAZ ANON, AND SAJID RAHMAN  
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