

Understanding the ranking mismatch



BLOWIN' IN THE WIND

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As a Dhaka University faculty member, it was quite frustrating for me to see our institution outside the 1,000 universities ranked for sustainable impact measured by Times Higher Education (THE). Then again, it was a proud moment to see 20 universities, including a private one, from Bangladesh making it to the top 200 among the 1,500 ranked universities. The following day, another ranking agency, QS, published its vaunted World University Ranking (WUR). DU retained its top position, slotting among the top 600, followed by BUET in the top 800 and North South University in the top 1000. There are 12 more Bangladeshi universities in this year's QS ranking. The publication of these two rankings has created public confusion that merits both explanation and reflection.

While the THE Impact Ranking (THE IR) assesses universities against the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), QSWUR evaluates academic reputation, employer reputation, faculty-student ratio, citations per faculty, international faculty and student presence, and sustainability efforts. The THE-IR provides a clear set of metrics that measure how universities, as complementary forces supporting their nations' commitment to the SDG Agenda 2030, contribute to social, economic, and environmental sustainability through their research, stewardship, outreach, and teaching. To qualify for the THE-IR, universities provide evidence of their policies, actions, and research that are aligned with at least four of the 17 SDGs.

For instance, the best performer in Bangladesh, Daffodil International University, provided evidence in SDGs 4 (Quality Education), 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), 10 (Reduced Inequalities), and 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) to claim their spot among the top 200. This is a remarkable achievement considering the fact that the next best performers are in the 601-800 band: AIUB, BRAC University, Green University, and United International University. Two technical universities, Gazipur Agricultural University and the International University of Business, Agriculture and Technology (IUBAT), are in the 801-1000 band of ranked institutions. DU finds itself outside the 1000 alongside Bangladesh Agricultural University, IUB,

Jahangirnagar University, Jashore University of Science and Technology, Rajshahi University, ULAB, and World University of Bangladesh.

Personally, I was taken aback by this year's results as they did not accurately represent the scope, expertise, and legacy of DU, the nation's oldest and most esteemed university. The shock turned into curiosity when the QSWUR came out a day later. DU is ranked No 1 in sustainability—the criterion measured by the THE IR. How can one ranking agency credit the university highly for its sustainability-related initiatives, policies, and leadership while another holds a different view? The answer is simple: when participating in this year's impact ranking, DU failed to tell its impact story. The information for this year's ranking is based on data from 2023, which was submitted in October 2024. As a member of the ranking committee, I know how little scope we had in aligning our performance in the prescribed format of THE. The Impact Ranking requires evidence and submitted targeted data to demonstrate inclusion policies for disadvantaged students, community outreach programmes, environmental initiatives on campus, and research directly tied to sustainable development. Our website and documentation did not necessarily reflect those alignments. Other participating universities have been more successful in demonstrating their alignment of institutional strategies with specific SDGs.

As a public university, Dhaka University leads Bangladesh's transformation in line with Agenda 2030. Our colleagues are involved with national policy framing, research, and thought leadership. It produces graduates with SDG-aligned skills to address the country's biggest development challenges. Its alumni body, including Nobel Laureate Prof Muhammad Yunus, engages in reducing inequality and supporting marginalised communities. Yet, we have failed to tell our impact story in a format prescribed by THE-IR.

To put matters into perspective, the top UK university in the Impact Ranking is the University of Manchester, and the best US university is Arizona State University,

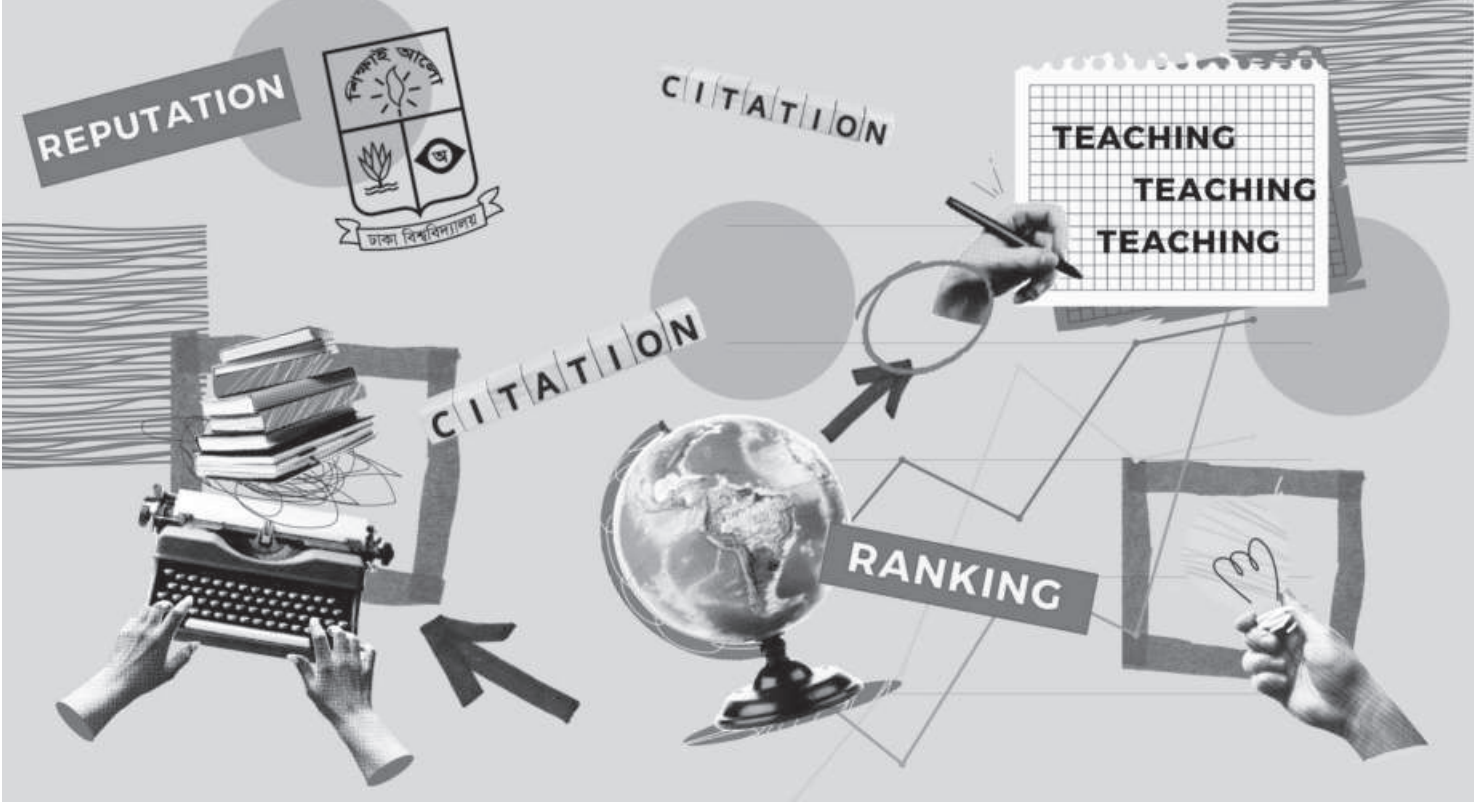
occupying the second and sixth positions, respectively. The exclusion of many iconic universities suggests that this ranking encourages institutions to highlight their strengths in alternative categories.

According to the QS institutional health card, DU is No 1 among the 15 institutions evaluated in Bangladesh in four out of ten categories: academic reputation, employment outcome, international research work, and

Additionally, a significant number of teachers do not publish in international journals or in English. Unlike private universities, which focus on STEM programmes, our degrees are comprehensively spread out, which have affected our citations per faculty. Despite having 115,900 gross citations from 5,720 papers published by DU teachers and indexed in the Elsevier database, we rank ninth among Bangladeshi universities in terms of

currency. They should receive incentives, not punishment in the form of VAT, for instance, treating education as a consumable commodity. Allowing BRAC University to become the first PhD-giving entity in collaboration with SOAS of the University of London is the right move. It indicates that private universities are becoming stronger in their infrastructure and logistics.

Similarly, the government needs to



VISUAL: ALIZA RAHMAN

sustainability. DU has seen a decline in its employer reputation compared to last year and still maintains the No 2 slot in Bangladesh. The areas in which DU needs to work are international faculty, faculty-student ratio, international students, citations per faculty, and international student diversity. And these weak areas are common to almost all public universities.

Take internationalisation, for example. Dhaka University does not have a provision to hire international faculty members, which many private universities can. It has also failed to attract international students because of its lack of a credit transfer system, complex bureaucratic admission processes involving education, home and foreign ministries, the medium of instruction, safety concerns, and poor accommodation facilities.

QS citations per faculty. Many of the newer universities lack a large faculty body like ours. Then again, many of our colleagues don't publish papers beyond the minimum promotion requirement.

The discrepancy serves as a warning to all of us. We need to change our mindset and up our game. Our university administration must set their priorities right. There should be some strategic directives from our leaders. What actions can the government take to attract foreign students and establish Bangladesh as a destination country? The policy so far has been to collaborate with foreign agencies to treat Bangladesh as a source country for overseas destinations. Private universities, striving to meet international ranking metrics, have been successful in retaining many students and saving foreign

incentivise public university teachers so that they can compete at an international level. They work with a paltry pay dealing with a large class size. The incentives may include financial rewards, research funding, publication processing fees, and annual recognition of high performers. On the other hand, at an institutional level, there should be more emphasis on transparency and accountability.

In absence of visible information and transparent policies, DU was unable to claim many of its impact ranking-related activities. But its QSWUR success will motivate it to compete in other categories. It is important to note that this is a race in which all Bangladeshi universities must be united. We are not competitors but brand ambassadors for the country's higher education sector.

An accurate forecast of global warming made 112 years ago



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An August 14, 1912 article in the New Zealand newspaper *The Rodney & Otamaeta Times* contained a story about how burning coal might cause global warming by adding carbon dioxide to the atmosphere. The story reads, "The furnaces of the world are now burning about 2,000,000,000 tons of coal a year. When this is burned, uniting with oxygen, it adds about 7,000,000,000 tons of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere yearly. This tends to make the air a more effective blanket for the Earth and to raise its temperature. The effect may be considerable in a few centuries."

The effect of carbon dioxide, the major greenhouse gas (GHG), is no longer "considerable." It is out of control; it has thrown us into a feedback loop from which there is no exit. So we won't have to wait a "few centuries" for the Earth to become a furnace. Indeed, the prediction made more than 112 years ago essentially validates the seemingly bleak future that we are staring at with trepidation.

The concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, which serves as the

most dependable measure of the global community's advancement towards a secure future, experienced the most significant annual rise from 421.1 ppm in 2023 to 424.6 ppm in 2024. The record increase in 2024 was fuelled by a variety of factors, including record high GHG emissions, diminished carbon absorption by natural sinks like tropical forests, and the release of vast quantities of carbon dioxide due to wildfires.

The annual rate of increase over the past 60 years is nearly 100 times more rapid than previous natural increases that happened at the end of the last Ice Age, around 11,000 to 17,000 years ago. The concentration now exceeds 50 percent of the levels recorded before the Industrial Revolution in the 18th century, meaning the amount of carbon dioxide is now 150 percent of its value in 1750. For the first time, the global average concentration of carbon dioxide surpassed 430 ppm in May this year, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The last time the planet had such high levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere was probably

more than 30 million years ago, well before humans inhabited the Earth and during an era characterised by a significantly different climate.

The buildup of carbon dioxide and other GHGs—methane, nitrous oxide, and fluorinated gases—in the atmosphere has already elevated global temperatures to perilously high levels. The current global mean is around 15 degrees Celsius, encompassing the range from the coldest poles to the hottest deserts. The most relevant reference for the current warming trend is the more recent Pliocene Epoch, which spanned from 5.3 million to 2.6 million years ago. During the mid-Pliocene, atmospheric carbon dioxide levels were comparable to those of today, resulting in heat retention and an increase in global temperatures, about two to three degrees warmer than today.

In 2024, temperatures exceeded those of 2023, making it the hottest year on record. The ten warmest years on record since 1850 have all occurred in the last ten years. Thus, extreme weather events, elevated sea levels, intensified droughts, out-of-control wildfires, deadly storms, and devastating floods, along with detrimental effects on wildlife and critical natural ecosystems, reached unprecedented levels, highlighting the escalating risks of climate change. Besides, warmer temperatures are allowing invasive species and pests to spread, while putting pressure on animals that need a colder climate. Also, the ocean has absorbed enough carbon dioxide to reduce its pH by 0.1 units, resulting in a 30 percent rise in acidity.

An increasing number of climate scientists now believe that achieving the 1.5 degree Celsius target by the end of this century, as specified in the 2015 Paris Agreement, is unattainable because of escalating carbon dioxide emissions. To provide a context, the temperature has already increased by at least 1.1 degrees Celsius since 1880.

The World Meteorological Organization predicts that the global mean surface temperature for each year from 2025 to 2029 will range from 1.2 to 1.9 degrees above the pre-industrial average. Researchers at the Irish Climate Analysis and Research Unit expect the probability of passing 1.5 degrees on a sustained basis by the late 2020s or early 2030s to reach 100 percent in the next two to three years.

A recent study published in *Earth's Future*, a transdisciplinary open-access journal, warns that a major effect of a projected rise of 1.5 degrees in global temperature, even temporarily, will be an irreversible shift in global rainfall patterns, potentially affecting nearly two billion people across equatorial regions. Some areas may become deluged while others, particularly Southeast Asia, Northeast Brazil, and parts of Africa, could see dramatic declines in rainfall. As a consequence, people who live in areas that rely on seasonal rainfall for hydroelectric power, drinking water, and farming will be at systemic danger. Delicate ecosystems that depend on regular seasonal moisture cycles, such as savannas and rainforests, are also at risk from the changes.

Ocean and atmospheric systems respond

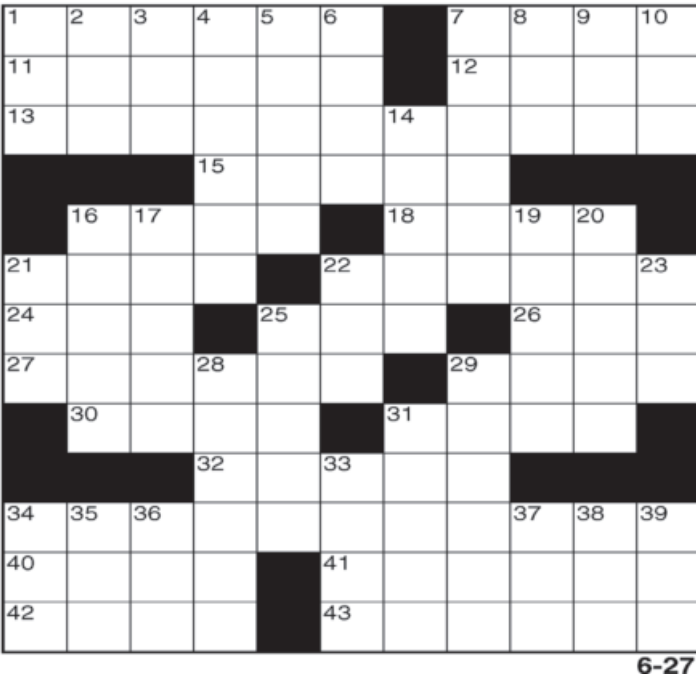
slowly, even in the event of a drop in global temperatures, opening the door to permanent changes. Agriculture, freshwater resources, and food security are increasingly at risk as rainfall becomes unpredictable and uneven across regions. This is a cascade situation that will impact the global food chain, public health, migration, and the energy supply. These systems are unlikely to recover once they are disturbed.

It is now a truism that global warming begets more warming. Hence, the effects of climate change will worsen with every fraction of a degree of warming. In fact, the rapid progression of climate change is driving our planet towards the edge of becoming uninhabitable. As a result, the challenges presented are varied, formidable, and interrelated, ranging from extreme heat to rising sea levels and increased storm surges along the coastal regions. Yet, instead of confronting the challenges posed by climate change, the majority of national governments, international organisations, private sector entities, and non-profit organisations are choosing to ignore the situation.

So, what does our future look like? If we want to keep our planet inhabitable, the most straightforward approach is to significantly reduce GHG emissions immediately, thereby averting the Earth's transition into a new climatic state that would have catastrophic effects on humanity. Otherwise, we will soon have a true glimpse of our overheated future—a world in which no one would want to live.

CROSSWORD BY
THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS
1 Fish in the sky
7 Chick sound
11 Set straight
12 Shrek, for one
13 Vehicle in a procession
15 Flower part
16 Monopoly card
18 Use foul language
21 Flex
22 Phone typer
24 Fitting
25 Diamond club
26 Ewe's mate
27 Kramden's pal
29 Dyeing tubs
30 Beginner
31 Openings
32 Friend of d'Artagnan
34 Where dishes may pile up
40 Fix a story
41 Flowery shrub
42 Departs
43 Mrs. Madison
DOWN
1 Catchy music
2 Radio's Glass
3 Knight's address
4 Put a stop to
5 Put a stop to
6 Dance move
7 Castor's twin
8 Sense of self
9 Pitching stat
10 Sulky state
14 Diamond side
16 Bus terminal
17 Contest form
19 Gown part
20 Theater units
21 Outlaw
22 Sandy color
23 Apt. ad abbr.
25 Diner choice
28 Plots of land
29 Lowly worker
31 Muppet with a large nose
33 Noggin
34 Frat party item
35 Chapel promise
36 Make a bow in
37 Unwell
38 Maiden name label
39 Arthur's stepbrother



THURSDAY'S ANSWERS

O	B	A	M	A		G	L	A	S	S
R	A	D	A	R		R	A	D	I	I
E	N	S	U	E		E	X	A	L	T
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B	A	R	I	S	T	A	S			
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N	A	D	I	A		A	N	N	A	L
G	R	O	U	N	D		G	O	T	A
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S	A	P		I	M	U	P			
C	L	A	N	G		M	O	T	E	L
A	D	I	E	U		P	R	O	V	E
M	A	N	T	A		S	E	W	E	D

WRITE FOR US. SEND US YOUR
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