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NAVIGATING UNIVERSITY ADMISSIONS TESTS

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS



MOVIES

TONY

A coming-of-age film through the lens of a biopic

SHARAR CHOWDHURY

**This review contains spoilers*

I went into *Tony* knowing very little about Anthony Bourdain. I knew he was loved in the food world, that his television shows took him all over the planet, and that he once shared a plastic-stool dinner with a US president, Barack Obama, in Hanoi. I also knew about his death in 2018 and how hard it hit people far beyond the kitchen. That turned out to be the right amount to know, because *Tony* is not interested in any of it.

Directed by Matt Johnson, the film takes a few pages of *Kitchen Confidential,* Bourdain's 2000 memoir, and stretches them into a single summer in 1975. Anyone expecting a kitchen drama in the mould of *The Bear*, all brigades and shouting, will not find it here. Instead, it is about a 19-year-old who does not yet know who he is.

That 19-year-old, played by Dominic Sessa, wants to be a writer, and the film opens with him pitching himself for a fellowship that would take him to New York. He is arrogant about it and certain he has won. He has not. Rather than tell anyone, he lies to his family and follows a girl, played by Emilia Jones, to Provincetown, only to find she already has a boyfriend. So, he drinks, picks fights, and lives entirely in the moment, which is how he gets himself thrown out of a seafood restaurant by its chef.

That chef, named Ciro, played by Antonio Banderas, becomes



the first of two men who shape the rest of Tony's summer. He is principled and devout, takes Tony to Mass, and teaches him the old-fashioned way, with buckets of cold water and the worst jobs in the kitchen.

The second is Sal, a cook played by Leo Woodall. Ciro calls him a "sin eater", which was my favourite line in the film. In old folk tradition in Wales and the English border counties, a sin eater was usually a poor man who paid a few coins to eat bread and drink ale over a coffin, taking the dead person's sins onto himself so their soul could rest. The community needed him and shunned him for it. Sal is the kitchen's version, the one who soaks up everyone else's worst habits, and he strings Tony along with him.

Between them, Ciro and Sal offer Tony two directions, and the film does not explicitly tell you the right one. Nobody in it is purely good or purely bad. Ciro is kind but hard, Sal is fun until he is dangerous, and Tony himself lies, fights, and makes as many poor decisions as good ones. They are simply the people who happened to be around him during the summer that decided who he would become.

That is why *Tony* works better as a coming-of-age film than as a biopic. Take away the famous name and it is a story most of us will recognise: heading somewhere unfamiliar, wanting nothing more than to be loved, telling your family things are going better than they are, and coming out the other side knowing a little more about who you are and what you want to do. By the end, Tony has chosen the kitchen and is taking his first real steps towards becoming a chef.

Most people know what came after: years in New York kitchens, the books, the shows, and the fame. *Tony* is about the summer before any of that was certain. I came out wanting to know how that 19-year-old became the man on the plastic stool in Hanoi, and his books seem like the place to start.

Sharar Chowdhury is learning how to be a manager and believes "I'm confused" is not a complete sentence. Send him emails at: sharar672@gmail.com.

OPPORTUNITIES

Fung Global Fellows Program PRINCETON

Princeton University - Fung Global Fellows Programme 2027-28

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Fellowships will be awarded to candidates who have already demonstrated outstanding scholarly achievement and exhibit unusual intellectual promise but are still at the beginning of their careers.

Criteria for the fellowship include the strength of the candidate's research projects, the relationship of those projects to the programme's theme, the candidate's previous scholarly work, etc.

Visit funggfp.princeton.edu to learn more

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HOW GLENRICH INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL PREPARES STUDENTS FOR LIFE

Good grades matter. So do examination results, certificates and university offers. But for students preparing to enter an increasingly competitive world, these are only a part of the bigger picture.

University and professional life require more than academic knowledge. To succeed, students also need to be independent thinkers, good team players, responsible, resilient, and proactive. These are skills that take time to develop. They cannot be built in the final year of school simply by adding more activities.

Teaching and training students in these skills is at the core of Glenrich International School's teaching philosophy. Instead of treating university applications as an afterthought, Glenrich treats them as the goal, and attempts to place students in the top-ranked universities of the world.

At Glenrich, alongside academics, students can begin working on their profiles as early as Grade 8 through the Profile Building Club. The programme encourages them to understand their strengths, explore their interests, take on leadership roles and gradually build experiences that reflect who they are.

"We teach our students that preparing for higher education and life isn't about frantically filling up a portfolio in Grade 12. It's about starting early, understanding yourself, exploring your interests and finding meaningful ways to contribute," said Nafia Akter Tonni, Economics Teacher of Upper-Secondary and Coordinator for Grade 11.

That preparation extends beyond academics. Glenrich has the following clubs: STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Mathematics), Coding & Graphics, Economics-Accounting-Business Summit, Start Up, Model United Nations (MUN), Girl Up, Foreign Language, Community, Newspaper, Literature & Library, Environmental Society, Student Council, and Well-Being. They can also participate in research projects under the guidance of the teachers and compete in international Olympiads after training in Olympiad clubs. Competitive sports include basketball, swimming, skating, volleyball, handball, cricket, football, table tennis, chess, and gymnastics. Students also learn guitar, drums, keyboard, piano, and violin, along with vocal training. Art teachers teach sketching, illustrating, painting, and even sculpting occasionally. Dance teachers teach a diverse range of dance styles, dance dramas, and forms.

For some Glenrich students, these experiences have gone hand in hand with strong academic results.

Farhan Shahid secured admission to the London School of Economics (LSE). In the latest QS World University Rankings by Subject, LSE ranks #6 globally for Economics and Econometrics. At Glenrich, he served as Deputy Head Boy, was Vice President of the Eco-Acc-Biz Club and earned medals in both Table Tennis and Chess.

Afra Ibnat Mizan led Glenrich Uttara's STEAM Club as President, expanding its membership to 135 students. Her exceptional profile earned her offers from leading universities across the UK, USA, and Canada, including University College London (UCL), where she is pursuing Neuroscience. UCL is ranked joint 8th in the QS World University Rankings 2027. Afra is also a very talented dancer with lots of prizes in dance competitions.

Nishat Tamanna also actively contributed to student life through STEAM and Student Council initiatives. Her outstanding profile earned her admission to Peking University, ranked 13th in the QS World University Rankings 2027, with a fully funded Chinese Government Scholarship for seven years.

"Seeing our graduates advance to top institutions in China, Germany, Japan, USA, Canada, Australia, and the UK reinforces our approach to education. Students truly benefit when strong academic foundations are complemented by opportunities to pursue their interests, take ownership, and mature as individuals," said Ms Shegufta Hasan Khan, Head of Upper-Secondary at Glenrich Uttara.

For Glenrich, preparing students for the future therefore starts well before they begin filling out university applications. It is part of the school experience itself; giving students the academic foundation, experiences and confidence they need to take their next step and make their own way in the world.





EDUCATION

Admission preparation combinations for public uni aspirants



ILLUSTRATION: **SABA ALI HAFIZ**

SHEIKH FABIHA AMREEN

The one thing that is predictable about a student's admission life is how unpredictable it can be. No matter how much effort and time you devote, misfortune can still strike in the gruelling examination halls. As such, it's always a good idea to leave room for alterative options. These are some favourable combinations aspirants can go for based on their main targets.

INSTITUTE OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION (IBA), DHAKA UNIVERSITY (DU)

If you are mainly preparing for IBA – DU, then you will naturally be focusing on English along with mathematics and analytical abilities for your admission preparation. This will be more than enough to cover IBA, Jahangirnagar University (JU), and Army IBA (AIBA) as well.

For IBA, Rajshahi University (RU), it differs from student to student based on what your track in HSC was. You will have to go through the basics of science, business, or humanities accordingly, besides the usual English and aptitude tests.

The Faculty of Business Studies (FBS) of Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP) is also quite similar to it, aside from the fact that it includes a general knowledge portion in its admission test covering mostly the history of Bangladesh and some business-related questions.

The DU C Unit works as a backup if you want to study BBA, but it requires more extensive preparation, as you need to cover several extra subjects depending on your HSC track.

C UNIT (BUSINESS STUDIES UNIT), DHAKA UNIVERSITY

People from all backgrounds can apply for the C Unit; only the subjects differ from track to track. The common subjects to be answered by every track are English and Bangla.

For non-business-background students, their common subject alongside the other two is Information and Communication Technology (ICT). On top of that, you will have to answer higher mathematics if you're from science, and economics if you're from humanities.

For NCTB commerce students, you have to answer questions relating to accounting, fundamentals of business, and finance or marketing. For English-medium students, you have to answer English, advanced English, and a choice of two from accounting, fundamentals of business, economics, and mathematics.

As for backups, there are plenty of business seats outside DU: JU E Unit, Jagannath University (JnU) C Unit, RU B Unit, Chittagong University (CU) C Unit, and the General, Science & Technology (GST) cluster's C Unit all let you continue in business studies.

Since the C Unit already has you preparing for English and Bangla, the most natural combination is the C Unit with the B Unit. The only major extra workload is general knowledge.

ENGINEERING

Engineering aspirants will mainly focus on the core science subjects: physics, chemistry, and higher mathematics. Architecture aspirants, alongside these, will have to master the freehand drawing test.

For engineering aspirants, right after Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET), it goes: Rajshahi University of Engineering and Technology (RUET), Chittagong University of Engineering and Technology (CUET), Khulna University of Engineering and Technology (KUET), and Shahjalal University of Science and Technology (SUST), in no particular order, as subject preference and distance will start to factor into choosing one over the other.

If remaining near Dhaka is a priority, then Islamic University of Technology (IUT), Bangladesh University of Textiles (BUTEX), and Military Institute of Science and Technology (MIST) are fantastic options, where students will only need to study English as an extra workload. This way, they can also cover the DU A Unit exam, as they can skip their fourth subject (in this case, biology) and answer English or Bangla instead.

A lot of people take on extra biology preparation so they can also sit for medical and other biology-based units. Those who do can sit for the cluster examination for agricultural universities as well, without any additional studies.

MEDICINE

Medicine is, in my opinion, the most cutthroat track one can pick for their admission journey, as there aren't many backup plans if you want to study at a public university. If they want to stay on course to become doctors, medical aspirants can mainly rely on the dental college test, which shares the same admission test, and on the Armed Forces Medical College (AFMC), Army Medical Colleges (AMC), and Navy Medical College, Chattogram (NMCC), which admit students through AFMC's own process.

But if they want to remain in the science stream, they can go for the DU A Unit and other universities' science units. They will have already studied biology, chemistry, and physics, so they would only need extra preparation in English or Bangla instead of higher mathematics.

But if they do decide to study higher mathematics as well, they can sit for a cluster examination for agricultural universities.

The other respite medical aspirants have is the ability to sit for their admission test once more the following year as second-timers.

A UNIT (SCIENCE UNIT), DHAKA UNIVERSITY

Those who want to study pure science must master the core subjects: physics and chemistry. But DU A Unit offers some breathing room in the form of a fourth subject choice, where students can forgo their optional subject and answer English or Bangla instead. This swap applies only to higher mathematics or biology, depending on which was your optional subject in HSC.

JU makes this even easier by dividing the sciences into the Faculty of Mathematical and Physical Sciences and the Faculty of Biological Sciences right at the admission test, into an A Unit and a D Unit, respectively. A Unit focuses on physics and higher mathematics, while the D Unit focuses on botany and zoology. The same goes for Khulna University (KU) A and B Units.

The agriculture cluster needs both higher mathematics and biology, so this only holds if the student has prepared both rather than swapping one for English or Bangla. Some universities may have compulsory ICT questions, but these can be overcome with a light brush-up of the HSC-level ICT subject.

B UNIT (ARTS, LAW, AND SOCIAL SCIENCES UNIT), DHAKA UNIVERSITY

For people who want to change their track to the humanities, they can go for B Unit, but not all universities let students from other tracks sit for the examinations. For everyone, though, the subjects to study remain the same: English, Bangla, and general knowledge. If you are from an English-medium background, you would answer advanced English instead of Bangla.

The good news is that this one preparation carries you through a large number of exams. RU A Unit and the GST cluster's B Unit (21 universities) follow the same pattern of Bangla, English, and general knowledge. The CU B Unit and KU C Unit use the same subjects, though with different mark distributions. The same goes for BUP's Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS) and Faculty of Security and Strategic Studies (FSSS).

However, it does not remain the same everywhere. Several universities include a mathematics or reasoning section that catches humanities students off guard. For example, the JU B Unit, JnU D Unit, SUST B Unit, and CU D Unit all include a mathematics or analytical portion, which can be overcome with just basic arithmetic and IQ-style mathematics practice.

A few universities also add a subject-based portion. JU C Unit and Comilla University B Unit both have a 40-mark section on subjects related to the departments or your stream, so check the syllabus before you assume your preparation is complete.

Whatever path you may choose, may the odds be ever in your favour.

All information has been collected from the 2025-2026 admission circulars.



PHOTO: **ORCHID CHAKMA**

EDUCATION

How to stay sane during ADMISSION SEASON

IRFAN HOSSAIN

They say the three most important phases of life are birth, marriage, and death. But ask an average Bangladeshi kid, and they will add a fourth: admission season, or at least it feels that way.

You have just finished HSC. You are supposed to relax. Instead, all of a sudden, everybody asks the same questions: Which subjects are you preparing for? Which coaching centres are you going to? Will you go to Dhaka? No matter which answer you give, relatives already have a bunch of advice ready. It seems as though they are more concerned about your academic future than you yourself are. After all, the prevailing belief is that the next three or four months will decide the shape of your entire life.

However, I am here to tell you otherwise. They will not.

As such, here is some advice from a person who has somehow survived this rat race.

FOLLOW YOUR PASSION, ALWAYS

Most students forget this advice. Do not reach for the safe option before you have even asked yourself what you want. Where do you see yourself in 10 years? Does the preparation you are about to start lead you there?

Talk to seniors. Look up what professionals who are already in that field have to say. Then take a deep breath and choose. Do not run toward engineering or medicine simply because that is the race everyone else is running. If you do not love what you study, the regret that awaits you later is heavier than anything admission season can throw at you now.

KNOW YOUR STRENGTHS (AND WEAKNESSES)

Socrates said it best: know thyself. If you have not developed the basics of STEM during HSC, Udvash classes will make that clear within a week. If you do not have the patience to memorise hundreds of facts from a page of a biology book, you will give up medical preparation midway.

See what you are good at, and more importantly, what you are not good at. Prepare for the discipline that suits you best.

CONSISTENCY BEATS EVERYTHING

Not everyone starts from the same place. There will be classmates who have already started counting the ranks they will target in the admission exams. It may seem like you have already lost before it began. Trust me, most people are in the same place as you.

Start with your weakest subject. Make a schedule. Follow it honestly. The only person who can carry you through this is you. The competition may seem overwhelming, but most people will not commit fully until the end. If you go all in, you will be just fine.

SIT FOR PRACTICE EXAMS

This holds true no matter what you are preparing for. In the end, everything narrows down to 90 minutes or two hours in that one room. So, sit for as many exams as you can find. Simulate the pressure before the main exam. Write down every mistake, and make an exam-hall strategy.

Do not get frustrated about your rank in the first few exams. If you are improving, then you are on the right track.

FOLLOW THE PARETO PRINCIPLE

Remember: 80 percent of the exam covers about 20 percent of the syllabus. Study previous years' questions. Find the pattern. Master the most important topics, then move to what you are weak at.

KEEP A PLAN B

This one is an absolute must. The exam you prepared hardest for might still slip away from you. Luck plays its part whether you invite it or not. So, have a backup plan to fall back on. Apply to as many universities as you reasonably can.

Getting into one university will increase your confidence a lot for the upcoming examinations. And in the moments when everything feels uncertain, that confidence is worth more than anything.

REACH OUT FOR HELP

In the moments that frustrate you the most, reach out to the people around you: seniors, friends, and parents. It is the simplest way to hold onto your sanity when everything else feels like it is slipping away.

I owe not losing my sanity to a handful of people who never once made me feel small for needing them: friends who sat through hours of my ranting without asking me to stop, seniors who answered questions I was almost embarrassed to ask, and parents who kept telling me, every single step of the way, that I was going to be fine.

They were right. If their words are anything to go by, you will be fine too.

Irfan spends his time writing, travelling, doomscrolling — and occasionally attending class for a degree he believes will be useful someday. Send him cat reels at: irfan.ink63@gmail.com.

EDUCATION

Public university units: Explained

CAMPUS DESK

Most public universities in Bangladesh admit undergraduates through unit-based tests, where related faculties are grouped under a single exam. Here is how six of them organise their units.

DHAKA UNIVERSITY

Dhaka University (DU) holds its undergraduate admission tests under five units, each tied to a stream of faculties or an institute.

Unit A (Ka) — Science
Built mainly for science students, this unit covers the Faculty of Science (Physics, Chemistry, Mathematics, Statistics and others) and the Faculty of Biological Sciences (Botany, Zoology, Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, Microbiology, Psychology and others). It also includes the Faculty of Pharmacy (Clinical Pharmacy and Pharmacology, Pharmaceutical Chemistry and others), the Faculty of Earth and Environmental Sciences (Geography and Environment, Geology, Oceanography, Disaster Science and Management, Meteorology) and the Faculty of Engineering and Technology (Applied Chemistry and Chemical Engineering, Computer Science and Engineering, Electrical and Electronic Engineering and others).

Unit B (Kha) — Arts, Law and Social Sciences
This unit brings the humanities, social sciences and law together. The Faculty of Arts contributes Bangla, English, History, Philosophy, Arabic, Islamic Studies, Islamic History and Culture, Linguistics, Theatre and Performance Studies, Music, World Religions and Culture, Dance and more. The Faculty of Law adds the Department of Law. The Faculty of Social Sciences covers Economics, Political Science, International Relations, Sociology, Mass Communication and Journalism, Public Administration, Anthropology, Population Sciences, Peace and Conflict Studies, Women and Gender Studies, Development Studies, Criminology and others.

Unit C (Ga) — Business Studies
Aimed at students from a business or commerce background, though eligibility can vary with each year's admission circular. It covers the Faculty of Business Studies: Accounting and Information Systems, Finance, Marketing, Management, Banking and Insurance, Management Information Systems, Tourism and Hospitality Management, International Business, and Organization Strategy and Leadership.

Fine Arts Unit
Focused on creative and visual arts, this unit covers only the Faculty of Fine Art: Drawing and Painting, Graphic Design, Oriental Art, Sculpture, Printmaking, Ceramic, Crafts and History of Art.

Institute of Business Administration (IBA) – DU
The Institute of Business Administration (IBA) admits students through its own unit. Like the Fine Arts unit, its test is held in Dhaka only.

JAHANGIRNAGAR UNIVERSITY

Jahangirnagar University (JU) runs its admission tests under seven units: A, B, C, C1, D, E and IBA-JU.

Unit A — Mathematical and Physical Sciences
Designed mainly for science students, this unit covers the Faculty of Mathematical and Physical Sciences (Computer Science and Engineering, Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Statistics and Data Science, Geological Sciences and Environmental Sciences) and the Institute of Information Technology (IIT).

Unit B — Social Sciences
Focused on the social sciences and regional planning, this unit covers the Faculty of Social Sciences: Economics, Government and Politics, Public Administration, Anthropology, Geography and Environment, and Urban and Regional Planning.



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

Unit C — Arts, Humanities and Law
This unit combines the humanities, law and communication disciplines. It covers the Faculty of Arts and Humanities (Bangla, English, History, Philosophy, Archaeology, International Relations, Journalism and Media Studies), the Faculty of Law (Law and Justice) and the Institute of Comparative Literature and Culture.

Unit C1 — Drama and Fine Arts
A specialised unit for the performing and visual arts, covering only Drama and Dramatics and Fine Arts under the Faculty of Arts and Humanities.

Unit D — Biological Sciences
Tailored for the life sciences, health and medical research, this unit covers the Faculty of Biological Sciences: Pharmacy, Microbiology, Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, Biotechnology and Genetic Engineering, Botany, Zoology, and Public Health and Informatics.

Unit E — Business Studies
For students pursuing core business disciplines, this unit covers the Faculty of Business Studies: Accounting and Information Systems, Finance and Banking, Marketing, and Management Studies.

IBA-JU
The Institute of Business Administration at JU admits its BBA students through a separate unit.

JAGANNATH UNIVERSITY

Jagannath University (JnU) organises its admission tests under five units.

Unit A — Science and Life and Earth Sciences
Tailored for science students, this unit covers the Faculty of Science (Physics, Chemistry, Mathematics, Statistics, CSE) and the Faculty of Life and Earth Sciences (Pharmacy, Microbiology, Biochemistry, Biotechnology, Botany, Zoology, Geography and Psychology).

Unit B — Arts and Law
Focused on the humanities, languages and law, this unit covers the Faculty of Arts and the Faculty of Law.

Unit C — Business Studies
Designed for business administration disciplines, this unit covers the Faculty of Business Studies: Accounting, Finance, Marketing and Management.

Unit D — Social Sciences
Covering the behavioural, political and social sciences, this unit takes in the Faculty of Social Sciences: Economics, Political Science, Sociology, Social Work, Mass Communication, Public Administration and Anthropology.

Unit E — Fine Arts
Dedicated to the visual, creative and performing arts, this unit covers the Faculty of Fine Arts, including its Music and Drama departments.

RAJSHAHI UNIVERSITY

The University of Rajshahi (RU) organises its admission tests under three broad units.

Unit A — Humanities, Arts, Law and Social Sciences
This unit covers the Faculties of Arts, Law, Social Sciences and Fine Arts, along with the Institute of Education and Research.

Unit B — Business Studies
Tailored for commerce and business disciplines, this unit covers the Faculty of Business Studies and the Institute of Business Administration (IBA-RU).

Unit C — Science
Designed for science students, this unit brings together the Faculties of Science, Engineering, Biological Sciences, Agriculture, Geosciences, Fisheries, and Veterinary and Animal Sciences.

KHULNA UNIVERSITY

Khulna University (KU) admits students through four units, each corresponding to one or more of its schools.

Unit A — Science, Engineering and Technology
For engineering, the pure sciences and planning, this unit covers the School of Science, Engineering and Technology, including CSE, Architecture, Urban and Rural Planning, Electronics and Communication Engineering, Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry and Statistics.

Unit B — Life Science
Focused on agricultural, biological and pharmaceutical sciences, this unit covers the Life Science School, including Pharmacy, Biotechnology and Genetic Engineering, Agrotechnology, Environmental Science, Fisheries and Marine Resource Technology, Forestry and Wood Technology, and Soil, Water and Environment.

U**nit C — Arts, Humanities, Social Sciences, Law, Education and Fine Arts**
A multidisciplinary track covering the Schools of Arts and Humanities, Social Science, Law, Education and Fine Arts.

Unit D — Management and Business Administration
Dedicated to commerce and corporate leadership, this unit covers the School of Management and Business Administration.

BARISHAL UNIVERSITY

The Barishal University (BU) admits students through three units under the GST (General, Science and Technology) cluster system.

Unit A — Science and Bio-Sciences
Designed mainly for science students, this unit covers the Faculty of Science and Engineering (Computer Science and Engineering, Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Geology and Mining, Statistics and Data Science) and the Faculty of Bio-Sciences (Biochemistry and Biotechnology, Botany, Soil and Environmental Sciences, Coastal Studies and Disaster Management).

Unit B — Humanities, Social Sciences and Law
This unit combines humanistic, social and legal disciplines. It covers the Faculty of Arts and Humanities (Bangla, English, Philosophy, History), the Faculty of Social Sciences (Economics, Political Science, Public Administration, Sociology, Mass Communication and Journalism) and the Faculty of Law.

Unit C — Business Studies
For students pursuing core business disciplines, this unit covers the Faculty of Business Studies: Accounting and Information Systems, Finance and Banking, Marketing, and Management Studies.

EDUCATION

SHOULD YOU TAKE ENGINEERING AND IBA PREPARATION AT THE SAME TIME?

FAIZA ZARIN ZAARA

Every year, when admission season rolls around, students are faced with the difficult decision of selecting which stream of higher education they wish to pursue. Each field, be it STEM, arts and humanities, or business studies, requires a completely different approach, mindset, and preparation strategy.

That being said, preparing for multiple fields or academic tracks is a common strategy among students. A notable trend here is seen among science background students who usually target engineering programmes as their primary objective but keep business degrees, particularly at Dhaka University's (DU) Institute of Business Administration (IBA), as an alternative option.

Two years ago, I was in the same boat. My main goal was to get into the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET), so I poured most of my time into engineering preparation while simultaneously preparing for IBA. Looking back, I can tell you that juggling two of the most competitive exams in the country is not for everyone.

THE DUALITY OF THE EXAMS

The first thing you need to understand is just how different the engineering and IBA admission tests are. Engineering admission



PHOTO: **SYED MAHIN IRTEZA**

tests require you to be quick and precise with your problem-solving. You need a deep understanding of HSC-level physics, chemistry, and higher mathematics, and the ability to solve complex equations with significant time constraints. You have to develop a muscle memory for problem types over months of drilling.

On the other hand, IBA is more of an aptitude test which assesses your basic mathematics, English proficiency, and analytical ability. The admission test for DU-IBA also features a "Communication Test" in the second stage, where candidates must answer questions about themselves under pressure.

These are two fundamentally different paths, and most candidates will struggle to constantly switch between them. In my case, my foundation in mathematics, English, and other science subjects was strong, which worked in my favour. But not everyone shares the same starting point.

For Mohammed Tarifur Rahman, who ranked 353rd in BUET and 18th in DU-IBA in the 2025 admission tests, IBA started as little more than a side quest. "In college, my English was pretty good, so I asked myself: how hard could the IBA admission test be?" he recalls. "I bought a few books on English and analytical reasoning and started going through them."



PHOTO: **AL ARAF**

However, once he actually started preparing for the IBA, Tarifur quickly realised how challenging it would be.

"I was confident about my English and mathematics before starting my IBA preparations," he says. "But going through the past IBA admission questions diminished my confidence."

THE STRESS OF THE EXAM TIMELINES

Engineering and the IBA admission tests tend to fall in a very compressed window of time, giving you very little breathing room, usually around 30-40 days.

While candidates pursuing any one of the two tracks can dedicate their time to intensive revising, dual-track candidates have to keep switching between the two, meaning neither preparation gets the push it needs.

In my own experience, I managed to keep my focus intact during the first few months, cracking a few engineering admission tests early. I then shifted my focus to IBA in the month before the admission test and, due to my prior preparation, managed to get through it.

Unfortunately for me, getting into IBA shifted my attention in a way I had not anticipated. I could never fully shift my focus to engineering preparation afterwards, and by the time my BUET admission test came around, I was unable to do the very important last-minute revision it demanded.

Moreover, success or failure in any one of the exams will drastically affect your focus for the next one. Tarifur experienced this first-hand as the transition between the two exams was one of the hardest parts of the journey. "The period between the IBA and BUET admission tests gave me a great deal of pain," he recalls. "After I was almost sure I bombed my IBA exam, I lost all interest in studying."

DIVIDING YOUR TIME

Both engineering and IBA preparation are individually demanding enough to consume your entire day on their own. Engineering preparation is relentless – marathon classes, weekly exams, and solving question banks with thousands of problems. Practising your timing and accuracy is crucial, and it easily eats up most of your day.

IBA preparation also has its own non-negotiables: acquiring English grammar proficiency, quick hand calculation skills (as using calculators is prohibited in the exam), and analytical instinct. These are not skills you can develop in the last minute.

You will need to sit down with yourself, find out your weaknesses and strengths and prioritise your time accordingly. Between the two, I always felt more confident in my aptitude for the IBA admission test. Since I felt that my English and analytical skills were solid, I utilised my time to get better at hand calculations. On the other hand, I identified some big gaps in my chemistry and physics preparation, so the bulk of my day went towards practising equations and physics diagrams.

Zarin Ashraf Moon, who ranked 1072nd in BUET, 19th in BUET Architecture, and 107th in DU IBA admission tests in 2024, does not recommend dual preparation, but for those who will attempt it anyway, she offers a practical framework: "I suggest the 80-20 method. Put 80 percent of your time into engineering preparation and the rest for the IBA preparation."

FINANCIAL COST

Something that easily gets overlooked is the financial commitment of preparing for two admission tests. Most admission candidates will enrol in a single coaching programme, hire a private tutor, or both. The expenses start to add up with the cost of books, question banks, and mock tests. Engineering and IBA coaching classes aren't cheap.

For many families, the admission season is a significant financial burden. Taking the dual route can make the burden heavier, especially if the other option is only being kept as a safety net. So, this is a conversation worth having before taking the double route.

WHAT DO YOU ACTUALLY WANT?

It may feel reassuring to prepare for both engineering and IBA just for the sake of having a safety net. But you have to ask yourself whether you are genuinely interested in pursuing both paths or if you are simply reacting out of societal or family pressure. Aiming for IBA merely because it sounds prestigious when your passion lies in engineering will lead to misplaced effort. The same is true the other way around.

Zarin is direct on this point. "Not only are both admission tests incredibly difficult, but they are also completely different in nature," she says. "Moreover, there is a luck factor in every admission test. In my opinion, it is truly not worth it to prepare for two of the hardest and most competitive exams simultaneously."

If you are truly interested in pursuing either business or engineering as a career, the dual preparation approach might be worth attempting. You, however, need to go in with a clear primary target and know which exam you would rather ace, ensuring that your preparation reflects that. You should also be prepared to drop one track if it no longer feels sustainable.

Faiza Zarin Zaara is probably watching her 3rd movie of the day. Suggest her something niche to hyperfixate on at: faiza.zarin.zaara.317@gmail.com



OPINION

HOW MUCH OF GETTING A JOB COMES DOWN TO LUCK?

ILLUSTRATION: **ABIR HOSSAIN**

SHARAR CHOWDHURY

The process of getting a job, on paper, seems quite simple. Apply every day, tailor your CV, and write a cover letter that ticks every requirement, and a job should follow. However, most of the time, it does not. There are far more applicants than openings, and doing everything right only gets you into the running.

A lot of what decides the rest is luck, and that luck starts the day you are born.

Italian researchers once tried to put numbers on this with a computer model that followed a thousand simulated careers over 40 working years. The most successful person in it was barely more talented than average, and the most talented finished with less than they started with. It is a simple model, but it matches a lot of what I have seen.

Take the family you are born into. Some families have the money to invest in you early. Others have the know-how, knowing that Olympiads, competitions and extracurriculars exist and how to steer a child towards them. A study of 1.2 million inventors in the United States found that children from the richest one percent of families were ten times as likely to become inventors as those from families below the median income. Even children who topped their maths class in primary school were far more likely to invent if their families were well off. The researchers put much of the gap down to exposure: the mentors, information and networks a child grows up around.

Then there is the lottery of where you are born. If you are Bangladeshi and want to work abroad, you need money, a strong profile, and an employer willing to sponsor your visa. A French or German graduate can take a job anywhere in the European Union without a visa or a sponsor. Professor Branko Milanovic, a former World Bank economist, calls the advantage of being born in a richer country the "citizenship premium", and his research suggests more than half of the income differences between people worldwide come down to the country they live in. Staying home does not remove the odds either, as Bangladesh had around 885,000 unemployed university graduates in 2024, according to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), so every opening draws a crowd.

Timing plays its part too. A role goes up at 11 PM, and whether you apply depends on whether you happened to be looking. Then there is knowing someone who knows someone. A contact builds rapport before you have even applied, so your application gets a second look instead of sinking into the pile. Experiments on 20 million LinkedIn users found that acquaintances, people you share a few mutual connections with but rarely speak to, did more to move people into new jobs than close friends did.

I count myself among the lucky ones, although it did not feel that way at the time. After my engineering degree in the UK, I went back home to figure things out, which felt like stepping off the expected route into a UK job. That detour turned out to be where the luck kicked in. I worked my way through networks, landed internships in banking and finance, and went into each one with an open mind. Those internships pushed me towards an MSc in Management, and the master's led to a full-time role. It worked like a butterfly effect. If any one of those links had been missing, or if I had started applying for full-time jobs straight after my engineering degree, I doubt I would have found one. None of it would have happened without a family that could send me abroad to study, which is luck I did nothing to earn.

You cannot choose where you were born or when a role goes live. What you can work on is noticing the chance when it appears. Professor Richard Wiseman, a psychologist who spent years studying self-described lucky and unlucky people, once asked volunteers to count the photographs in a newspaper. Half of the second page was a message saying there were 43 photographs and they could stop counting. The unlucky group took about two minutes. The lucky group took seconds because they saw the message. Wiseman found that lucky people tended to be more relaxed and aware of their environment, so they spotted chances that others walked straight past. That part is within your control. Say yes to things before you feel ready. Go to the event, reply to the message, take the internship that does not fit the plan, and weigh what saying no would cost you. Do not let a run of rejections talk you into staying in. Things rarely work out the way you imagined, but it only takes one good opportunity going your way, and you never know when it will turn up. Mine came out of a year I spent convinced I had fallen behind.

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Sharar Chowdhury is learning how to be a manager and believes "I'm confused" is not a complete sentence. Send him emails at: sharar672@gmail.com