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Lunar robot readied for Nasa contest

BRAC University students make the WiFi-controlled device

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Brac University students have made the nation's first lunar robot which will compete with robots made by famous universities across the world for Nasa's Annual Lunabotics Mining Competition, 2011.

The students are giving the final touches to BRACU Chondrobot, a lunar excavation robot made of recycled car parts, tin, alloy and rubber.

Nasa through this competition is looking for clever ideas and solutions which it can use later for lunar excavation. The robotics design to win the first prize would be used in future Nasa expeditions.

“This is the first time the competition invited international participants and we are delighted to represent Bangladesh in the competition,” said Khalilur Rahman, faculty adviser to the project, while speaking at a demonstration programme at the university yesterday.

“But the competition will be fierce,” said Khalilur, also an assistant professor at the department of computer science and engineering. “The competition will have entries from 46 nations, including Harvard University, Virginia Tech, University of Illinois, McGill University, among others.”

An eight-member team of Brac University, led by Shiblee Imtiaz Hasan and Jonayet Hossain designed BRACU Chondrobot.

The remote-controlled robot, weighing 75kg, is designed to travel on rough lunar surface, collect soil samples and carry them to lunar shuttles for examination.

“We have analysed past successes and failures to see what works and what does not, and this is the result,” said Shiblee Imtiaz Hasan.

“It is controlled via WiFi and has a simple, yet efficient and reliable, tele-robotic design that will be useful for lunar excavation,” Shiblee told The Daily Star.

It is not space-ready yet and the prices of the parts used for making the robot add up to Tk 35,000, he said.

Speaking as chief guest, Brac Chairperson Sir Fazle Hasan Abed congratulated the students and urged them not to get disheartened if they do not win the first prize.

“This is about participating. Come back and celebrate even if you do not win the first prize,” he said.

Brac University Vice-Chancellor Prof Ainun Nishat chaired the programme.