

daily sun

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High flies their dream

BRACU team goes to Nasa competition today→

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It was a vision draped in uncertainty — a project the makers of which were not certain about when its foundation was being laid.

With the project the dreamers will fly to the USA today to participate in the 2nd annual Lunabotics Mining Competition (LMC) 2011 at the Kennedy Space Centre in Florida, two days ahead of its start on Monday.

Lunabotics Mining is a university-level competition that awards innovation in lunar excavation concepts resulting in clever ideas and solutions which could be applied to an actual lunar excavation device.

The competition is aimed at generating conceptions in extracting lunar regolith — blanket of soil, broken rocks, dust, and other tiny objects present on the Moon — and building bases on the moon.

It is the first foray of a Bangladeshi university into a Nasa-hosted competition. The project is a brainchild of a five-member team of BRAC University's Computer Science and Engineering (CSE) department that has been recently selected to compete the prestigious robotic competition by Nasa.

The university got the approval of Nasa as the American space agency opened its door to international entries following its first all-American LMC 2010.

It all started in October last year when a student of CSE of BRACU enrolled for the competition apparently in ignorance of others. A five-member team was soon put up; ideas ran in all directions and after sleepless days and nights came 'ChondroBot', their dream product.

"Back then, things were very different and we were quite unprepared. But we picked up quickly and created our own lunabot. All the hard work was rewarded when we got over the selection round," says Dr Md Khalilur Rhaman, the project supervisor and also an assistant professor of CSE.

ChondroBot is a remote-controlled lunar excavation robot made of reused car parts, tin, alloy and rubber. On way of to being picked up by Nasa, it had to fight through a three-round selection process.

ChondroBot will now compete with the lunabotics projects of 45 other 'design teams' from 35 US and 10 international universities to win the crown.

But that will not too easy for the maiden participants.

"It will be a tough fight, we know, especially competing on the same platform with universities like Harvard, Virginia Tech, Illinois, McGill, or Montana State University. But we are ready to face the challenge and hope to be at least in the top three," asserted Kazi Mohammad Razin alias Anik, a 10th semester student of CSE and one of the members of the BRACU design team.

Participating teams will compete in up to five categories and winners will receive first, second, and third place awards of \$5,000, \$2, 5000 and \$1000, respectively in addition to other awards and facilities.

Beginning from 23 May the championship will conclude on 28 May.

Grounded in a hesitant start and through sporadic turn of events, the project of the undaunted team members will carry the dream of the science lovers of the country today.