

Of Circuits and Gadgets

NAZIBA BASHER

Abrar Jawad and Safwan Rahman, aged 9 and 11 respectively, may look like young playful little boys from the outside, but these two little geniuses went on to becoming two of the most talked about youngsters in the country. One of the highlights of this year's TEDx Dhaka was when Abrar and Safwan took on the stage and dazzled the audience with their knowledge in engineering.

Studying hardware and software engineering at The Tech School, Abrar and Safwan were both avid video gamers. "I was always a game freak. I came across coding, and that's when I decided that I wanted to learn all about it," says Abrar. "I thought of applying to an art school, near where I live. There, I saw another institution above it called WNES (World's Next Education System), which was later named The Tech School, and realised that I could learn all that I wanted over there." Abrar has been a student there for a

year now.

Safwan, however, says that his sister, a student at the Art school, told him about the Tech School. "She thought it was the perfect place for me," says Safwan. As interested as he was in gaming, Safwan was also very keen on building and creating. Starting off with just legos, he went on to grow his interest in gaming controls of consoles such as Xbox.

Abrar has been focusing on processing, programming, circuits and graphic design. One of his own projects was to make a DX Ball Game. Meanwhile Safwan's interests lie not only in the area of coding, circuits and graphics, but also making gadgets.

The duo is involved in a new project where they will be designing a hybrid car. They are also involved in many complicated projects like making their own GPS trackers, gaming gadgets and more.

The Tech School, situated in Niketon, was founded two years ago by Shams and Nelay, who



were both students of Engineering at BRAC University. The school encourages students to think and produce ideas, thereby finding a way to transform these ideas into realities.

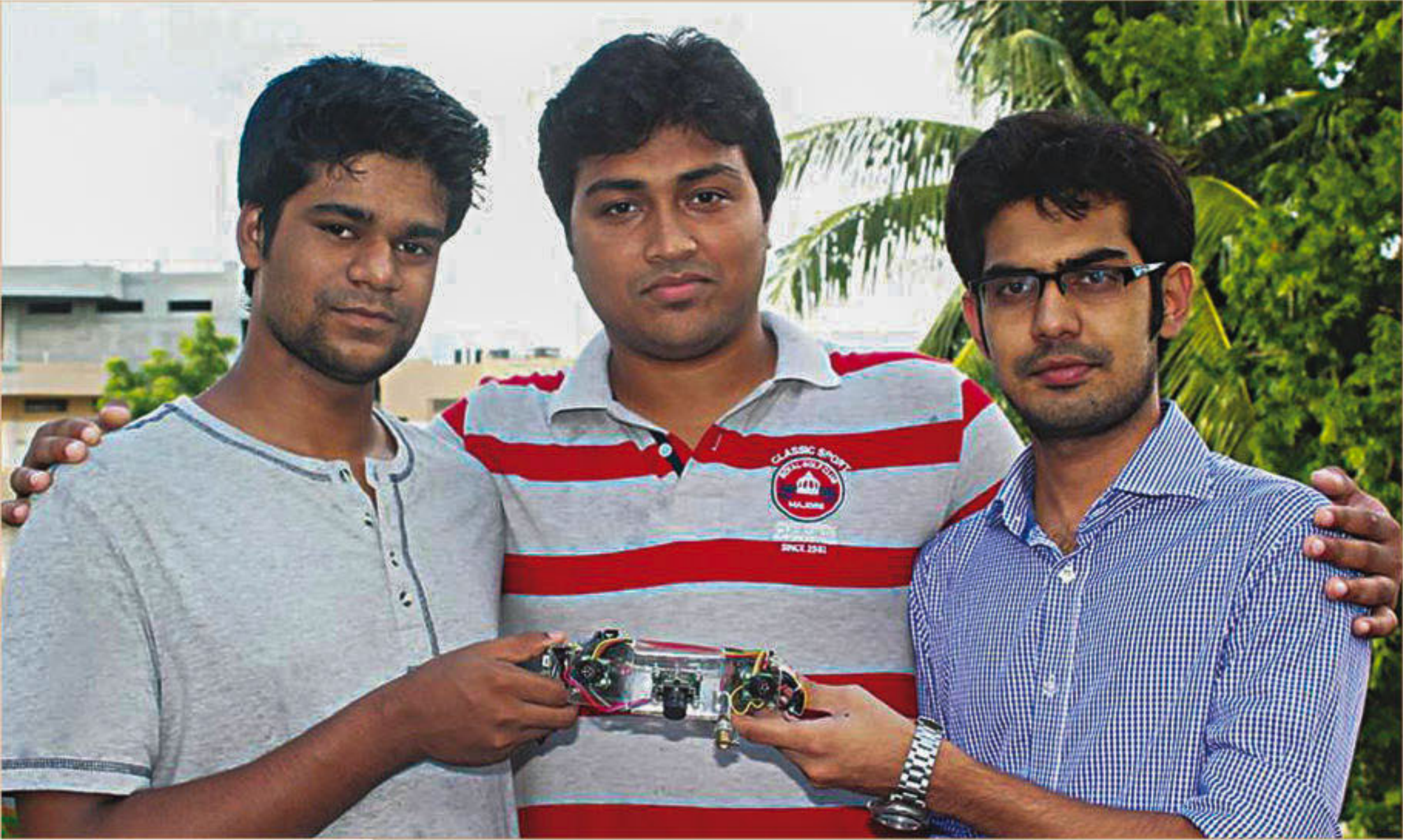
"There is no way that you can learn engineering from memorising pages from a book," says Nelay.

Shams nominated both Abrar and Safwan to speak at the TEDx Dhaka this year. During their session, they spoke about the perks of engineering

and of being a part of The Tech School. Listening to such young souls talk so passionately about such a complicated subject left the audience in awe and inspired by their drive and motivation.

The boys know exactly what they want to do when they grow up. "I want to work with some of the biggest gaming companies like EA Sports, and go on to make them even bigger!" says Abrar. On the other hand, Safwan says, "I want to work with Abrar!"

Watching the boys brainstorming, creating and taking up difficult challenges with such confidence, we can hope, even more than ever before, for this country to flourish in the future.



Through the Eyes of Technology

APURBA JAHANGIR

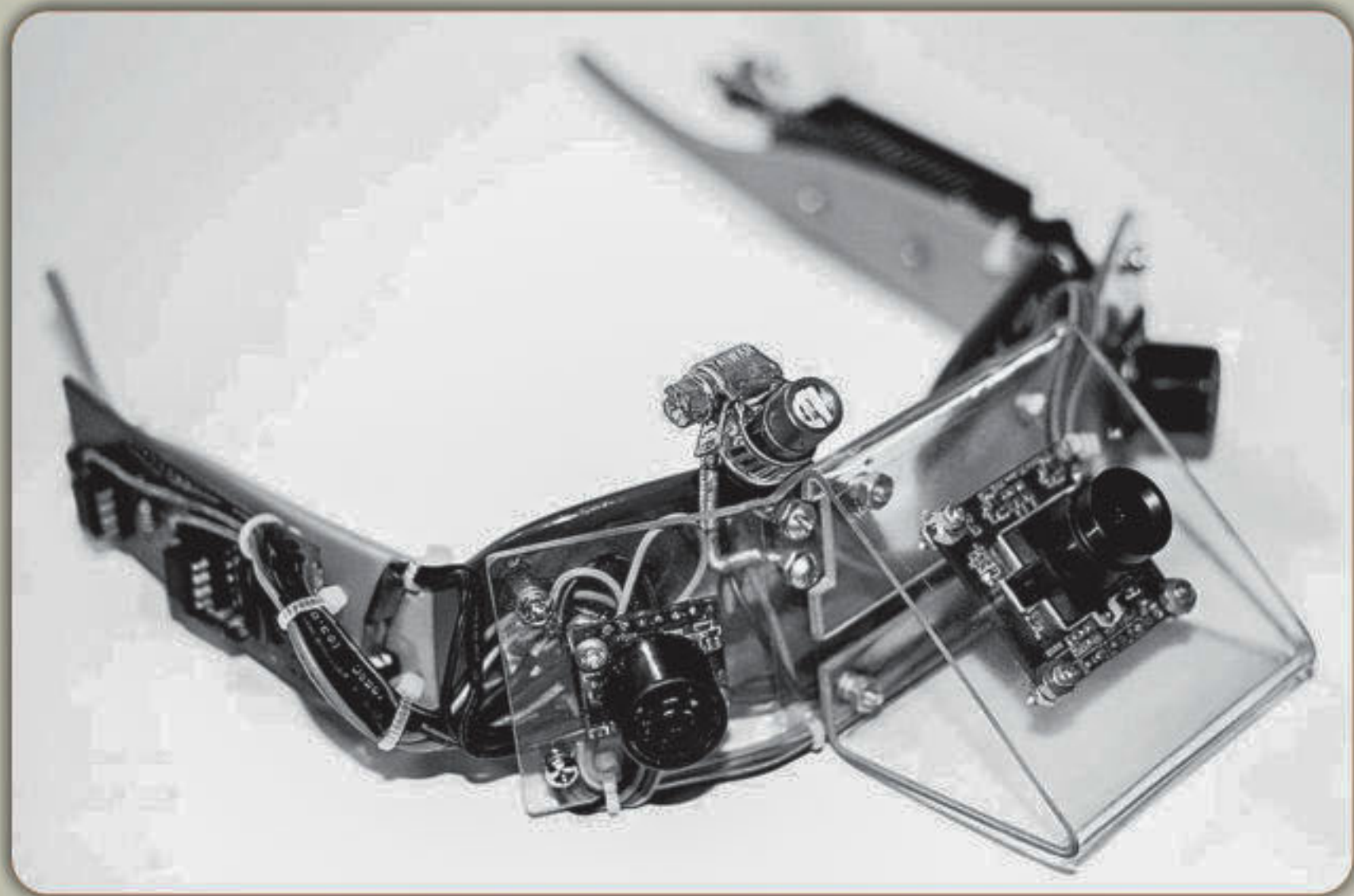
Over the years, many gadgets have been made to help people who are visually impaired, changing lives for the better. For the first time in Bangladesh three students from Khulna University of Engineering and Technology (KUET) designed a pair of glasses especially for the blind. The students behind this project are Abu Ibne Bayazid, Md Mostafa Kamal and Nazmul Hasan. What started off as a thesis project became one of the most talked about inventions from KUET.

"We actually started this project a year ago, says Abu Ibne Bayazid. "For various reasons we couldn't implement what we had in mind." They spent a year fixing glitches and making the glasses more user-friendly. "Finally we presented our implementation to our academic thesis and needless to say we had the happiest faces on campus when it got approved!" says Bayazid.

The glasses work in two ways-- a sensor detects obstacles around the user while another sensor detects surface smoothness, an attribute which was added later on. A smart phone is used to guide the user through voice instruction and also update the weather condition, time and date. The glasses are run by simple mobile batteries which could be used for 12 to 15 hours once it's fully charged. They also have backup battery power connected to the user's smart phone.

"What we really want to do was to solve a social problem," say the inventors. "The response, after the invention went viral, was amazing. For this we have to thank our media platforms and our fellow students."

At present, the young inventors are looking for ways and platforms to make the glasses commercially available to everyone. Many have shown interest; they hope the glasses will be available to the mass, very soon.



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A LITERARY INSPIRATION

ANIKA HOSSAIN

Dr Fakrul Alam is a renowned academic, writer, literary critic, editor and translator. He began his schooling at Little Jewels Kindergarten, in 1956 and later attended St Joseph's School where he completed his O'Levels. "St. Joseph's was wonderful," says Alam, "That is where I got into sports. I played basketball, football and cricket and made great friends."

Dr Alam spent his college years at Notre Dame College and went on to complete his BA and MA degrees from Dhaka University (DU). "I always liked Economics and wanted to study it," he tells us, "But as I was not good at Math, English Literature seemed like the logical choice because one thing I had done in my life was read and read," he continues. "I read anything and everything, starting with comics to thrillers like Sherlock Holmes to westerns. Then I graduated to the more serious stuff," he recalls, "When I went to college I started reading Hemmingway, Kafka, and D.H. Lawrence etc. I also read a bit of Bangla fiction." When asked about his favourite authors he says, "My favourites have constantly changed over the years, but I am pretty convinced Melville is my favourite writer; I wrote my first dissertation on him. Later, I became interested in poetry. I loved reading Jibanananda Das and translated his works."

A published writer, Dr Alam has published innumerable essays in books and journals and edited countless publications. Among his upcoming publications are a translation of Beeshad Sindhu (Ocean of Blood) by Mir Mosharaf Hossain, a translation of the poems of Rabindranath Tagore's English Gitanjali and a volume of new and published essays on reading postcolonially in Bangladesh.

After Dhaka University, Dr Alam started to teach. He earned a second Masters Degree from Simon Fraser University and achieved his PhD from the University of British Columbia in Vancouver. He then returned to Bangladesh in '84 to teach, but in '89, he left for the USA as a Fulbright Scholar to teach at Clemson University in South Carolina for two years, on leave from DU.

"There was never a question with me of ever wanting to stay abroad permanently," says Alam, "I always wanted to be in Bangladesh," and so he returned once more in '91 to resume his associate teaching position at DU. "Teaching is wonderful, it's brilliant," he shares. "As Cowper wrote, 'I am the monarch of all I survey'- that is the feeling I have when I walk into a classroom, where everyone's attention is focused on me and I get a chance to interact with my students and influence their minds."

Dr Alam has participated in literary festivals, namely the famous one in Jaipur. He has also judged books for literary prizes such as the Commonwealth Prize or the South



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Asian Literature Prize, and attended academic conferences and workshops in places such as Kitakishu in Japan.

Dr Alam has also been a visiting professor at Jadavpur University in West Bengal. He is currently, the Editor of Six Seasons Review and a Member of the Editorial Board of 'Jamini.' Among his many publications and presentations are books on Daniel Defoe, Bharati Mukherjee and the volumes Imperial Entanglements and Literature in English and Rabindranath Tagore and Identity Formation in Bangladesh: Essays and Reviews; translations of Jibanananda Das's poems, 'Sheikh Mujibur Rahman: The Unfinished Memoirs.' (Translated from Bangla) and The Essential Tagore which he co-edited with Radha Chakravarti.

In the future, Dr Alam would like to catch up on his reading and pursue other creative interests that inspire him. "I am tired of checking scripts and would like to spend more time with my favourite poets and novelists and catch up with recent work in theory and my field. And for sure, write a lot more!"