

Remember the former British wheelchair racer Tanni Grey-Thompson, who received 16 medals in her Paralympics career, along with 13 world championship medals? Or Oscar Pistorius, the South African sprinter, both of whose legs below the knee were amputated at the age of 11 months? Pistorius won a gold medal and a bronze medal in the 2004 Athens Paralympics, three gold medals in the 2008 Beijing Paralympics and two gold medals and a silver medal in the 2012 London Paralympics. These athletes, despite being physically challenged, have made a mark on the world stage, refusing to let their disabilities define them or get in the way of their dreams.

In Bangladesh, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), for the third time, in close cooperation with the Ministry of Youth and Sports (MoYS), Bangladesh Krira Shikkha Protishtan (BKSP) and Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB), has selected 20

his academic excellence is also noteworthy.

Sumon, the son of farmer Chand Ali Biswas, who intended to be a fast bowler himself, believes that ICRC's talent hunt has already enhanced his confidence to a great extent and this platform is a turning point in his life. "Now I am re-energised to fulfil my dream of playing for the Bangladesh Physically Challenged Cricket Team and do

something worthy for my parents, teachers, well-wishers and the country as a whole," he said.

Like Sumon, Md Rinku Ali (18), an intermediate student from Noahata, Rajshahi, talks about the beginning of his journey of cricket. Rinku had a weakness in his right hand since childhood and he would always sit on the sidelines of the playground as his playmates ran around the field with a bat and ball. "Seeing

send a clear message to all those with physical challenges in Bangladesh – that opportunities are being created for them. "We strongly encourage them to participate since being active in sports improves their physical health, and also demonstrates to society at large that persons with disabilities can lead an active life," stated Gerd.

According to Masud Hasan, chief cricket coach of BKSP, these players are extremely passionate about cricket. In the next phase, 10 out of the 20 cricketers will be selected, who will then go on to participate in different training camps organised throughout the year, along with 29 previous members of BCB's Physically Challenged Cricket Team. Apart from these, this year, the team plans to compete abroad, and in early December they will attend a tournament likely to be organised by All India Cricket Association for the Physically Challenged.

In Bangladesh, even though we are not accustomed to seeing physically

OVER THE BOUNDARIES

NILIMA JAHAN



Sports can help reduce the stigma and discrimination so often faced by the disabled.

PHOTO: COURTESY

talented physically challenged cricketers this year for the BCB's Physically Challenged Cricket Team. These 20 individuals were selected out of 250 aspiring candidates throughout the country. The purpose of this talent hunt is to encourage and provide a platform to physically challenged cricketers to showcase their talents.

This opportunity was a dream comes true for 16-year-old Md Sumon Biswas, who hails from a remote village of Ishwardi upazila, Pabna. Sumon was born with a congenital hand deformity. Sumon, through his perseverance and dedication, has become a source of hope and inspiration for cricket enthusiasts in his area and he has received numerous medals, crests, trophies and certificates for his outstanding performance in cricket. He is a 2017 SSC candidate and

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others playing spontaneously or watching the excellent performances by Mashrafe, Tamim, Sabbir and many more, I would feel very disappointed," said Rinku. But this very disappointment, at one point of time, inspired him to start practising cricket in spite of being disabled.

Like Sumon and Rinku, physically challenged cricketers who have been selected in this year's talent hunt have come a long way. Needless to say, their journey was not a smooth one, as in Bangladesh, people with disabilities often face social stigma as their disability evokes negative perceptions and gives rise to discrimination.

Gerd Van de Velde, Physical Rehabilitation Programme Manager of ICRC, says that by organising such events, the ICRC and its partners want to

challenged cricketers, the scenario is changing rapidly and the players are improving drastically. "Within two years, this team has successfully participated in different international cricket tournaments and has even defeated India and England in 2015," stated Rashed Iqbal, head coach of the Physically Challenged Cricket Team of BCB.

It is believed that sports can help reduce the stigma and discrimination so often faced by the disabled, or to put it more aptly, the differently abled. Thanks to individuals like Sumon and Rinku, societal attitudes towards the physically challenged are being transformed as their skills and aptitudes take the centre stage, thereby reducing people's tendency to focus on the disability instead of the individual. ■

PROFILE

In 1929, German mathematician and theoretical physicist Hermann Weyl predicted the existence of a massless quasiparticle that kept physicists puzzled for 86 years. In 2015, a Bangladeshi physicist named Zahid Hasan, a professor of Princeton University, with his team of researchers discovered the elusive massless Weyl fermions particles that act like matter or anti-matter. After Satyendra Nath Bose, whose name has been immortalised by the invention of Bose-Einstein Condensate, Professor Hasan's achievement can be termed as the most significant contribution by a Bangladeshi in the world of physics.

Hasan's journey to the mysterious world of ethereal, ultra-minute particles is no less dramatic than his other discoveries. While studying quantum particles, he developed a way of integrating senses that can help overcome the physical handicap of disabled people who are the inspiration behind his scholarly journey.

Brought up in Dhaka's Dhanmondi neighbourhood, Hasan completed his higher secondary education at Dhaka College. He then got admitted to Dhaka University's (DU) physics department. However, before enrolling at DU, he got a scholarship to study physics in University of Texas at Austin. Later, Hasan completed his master's and doctorate degrees at Stanford University in California. In 2002, Hasan was offered a faculty position at the Princeton University where legendary physicist Albert Einstein was also a researcher in the 1930s.

It is Hasan's philosophy towards life and his insatiable urge to know the nature of truth that enabled him to work in some of the most reputed knowledge centres of the world. Professor Hasan says, "I tend to question nature, whether what we know is the absolute truth. If you look at the Gaussian distribution for biodiversity, it is evident that there are some people who are born with less than six senses and there are probably some people who are born with more than six senses. To them, the world is a different place and their definition of truth is different from what we perceive with our regular senses."

"This understanding of mine drove me to choose the path of science because it gives me the opportunity to explore the nature of truth in a quantitative manner which is more visible and easier to understand," he adds.

However, Hasan's endeavour to analyse the truth led him to ponder over other, perhaps more complex, questions which influenced him to explore the world of particles. He began to wonder: "What is the origin of life and what is its destiny?" Hasan explains, "The human body is actually a collection of trillions of particles. Let's assume, we write down all the equations of all the particles and we solve the equations. The solutions to

the equations certainly exist; otherwise you or I would not exist. So, by the principle of physics, we can find the origin, evolutionary process and the destiny of one's life just as if we know the position, direction and velocity of a car we can find out where it started travelling from and can predict where it will be after three hours. And, we also know that all particles are actually

his extraordinary teaching prowess. "During my college life, I think I found some way to manipulate my brain in a way to integrate all my six senses to study, think and explore. This is the approach I also advise my students. I try to train them to integrate all their senses to focus on the research topic which will then help them develop perhaps a "seventh" sense like the

integrating senses can be more systematically developed it would be possible to enhance the lost or reduced senses of the disabled people which can give them a discrimination-free life. Hasan supports several initiatives in Bangladesh like Physically Challenged Development Foundation which have been working for the welfare and rehabilitation of the disabled.

Hasan also dreams of progressing scientific research in Bangladesh. He recently visited Dhaka to discuss the possibility of establishing a "Centre for Advanced Research" in some of the

ZAHID HASAN PHYSICIST, PHILOSOPHER, PHILANTHROPIST

MD SHAHNAWAZ KHAN CHANDAN

indestructible, they only transform or transition from one stage to another. So, you would think you will live forever in a sense."

"The most mysterious thing in this framework of thinking however is death. The equations of all the particles and their solutions remain more or less the same when you are dead yet there is a dramatic difference between life and death. These equations of the particles say that you exist but at the same time we are seeing that you as a conscious person actually don't exist in this world. So, where have you gone and what is that destiny?" questions Hasan.

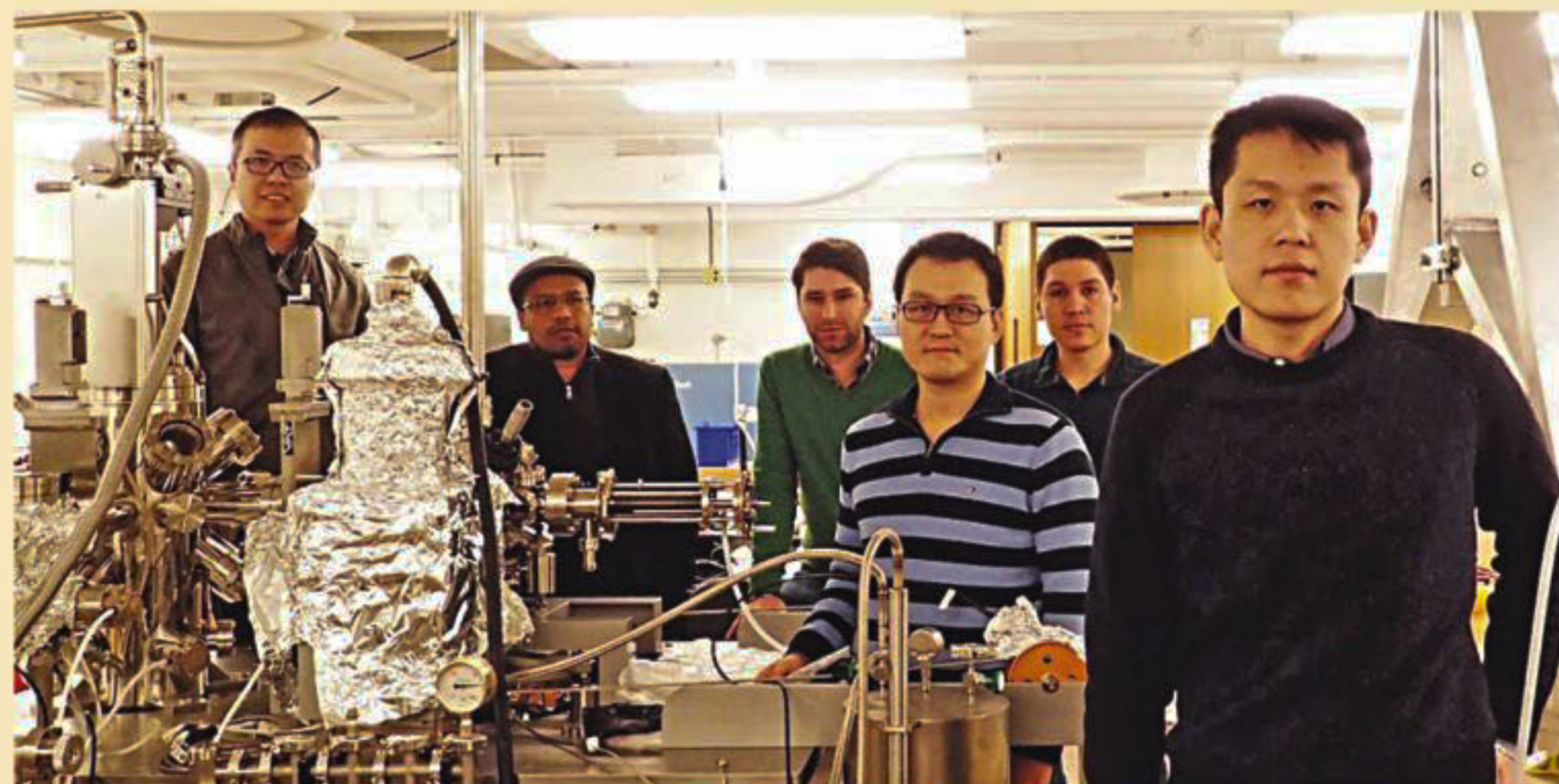
Hasan has been devoting much of his time to research and find an answer to this eternal question. Maybe his new research on quantum particles including matter and anti-matter will shed light to the existence and origin of consciousness delineating the difference between life and death.

His unique way of questioning the existing truth and his exceptional style



PHOTOS: COURTESY

Zahid Hasan



of exploring knowledge frontiers made him one of the most successful teacher-mentors of physics in the world. Only at the age of 45, he has produced a large number of doctoral students many of whom are conducting research at some of the top universities of the world. He revealed the secret of

people who are born with extraordinary abilities. This way, my students, by researching the existing knowledge base, develop their own perceptions and add different values to push the limits of knowledge," says Hasan.

Hasan believes that if this process of

most reputed universities of the country. With the necessary facilities and support, Hasan dreams of establishing these research centres to initiate fundamental scientific research in Bangladesh. According to Hasan, "For the country to benefit from higher education, there is no alternative to conducting advanced, multi-disciplinary academic research that will bring about solutions to the existing problems of society and humanity at large as well."

Thanks to his groundbreaking research, Hasan has become a source of pride for not only Bangladesh but also of some of the most renowned universities in the world. Hopefully, one day his dream initiative of establishing research centres in Bangladesh will materialise, because there is no doubt that it can bring about a radical positive change in the country's higher education sector. ■