

FROM IUBAT TO INDUSTRY

Nafis Rahman's Journey in Engineering and Leadership

A CORRESPONDENT

When Nafis Rahman walked across the stage in 2009 to collect his B.Sc. in Electrical and Electronics Engineering from the International University of Business Agriculture and Technology (IUBAT), he carried more than just a degree; he carried the quiet confidence of someone ready to build, innovate, and lead.

Today, as CEO and Director of Stark Inc. & Astonafa Engineering Ltd., Nafis stands at the helm of a family-run enterprise that delivers MEP and EHS contracting, industrial service solutions, and professional sound systems to both local and international clients.

In this interview, Nafis reflects on his journey from being a student leader at IUBAT to managing a company with international connections. He discusses how his university experiences influenced his approach to leadership, the skills he uses in business, and the role of timing and adaptability in professional growth.

The Daily Star (TDS): Could you please tell us a bit yourself?

Nafis Rahman (N): I graduated from IUBAT in 2009 with a B.Sc. in Electrical and Electronics Engineering. Currently, I serve as CEO and Director at Stark Inc. & Astonafa Engineering Ltd., a family-owned concern specialising in MEP and EHS contracting, building and industrial service solutions, and professional sound systems. I also work as a technical and sourcing lead for both international and local architecture firms, such as Cogent Design and Developments Ltd.

In addition, I represent the Bangladesh office for several multinational brands, including Advanced (UK), FirePro (Cyprus), Weartek (Australia), Safety Joggers (Australia), and Sound Manufacturing Company (Spain & China), along with other IoT-based automation companies and

entities linked to building and industrial solutions.

I am a member of several professional organisations such as IEB (The Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh), IEEEA (Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers – Asia), and NFPA (National Fire Protection Association). I am also affiliated with local business associations including ESSAB (Electronics Safety and Security Association of Bangladesh) and FEBOAB (Fire Equipment Business Owners Association of Bangladesh).

Beyond my professional roles, I am engaged in community service as the Immediate Past President (IPP) of the Rotary Club of Sher-E-Bangla Nagar.

TDS: Could you tell us a bit about your career journey and how you reached your current position?

I remember the friendly campus atmosphere, the supportive faculty, and the camaraderie among classmates. Group study sessions before exams, meeting project deadlines together, and spending countless hours in the EEE labs are experiences I truly cherish. I also served as Vice President of the IUBAT Gold Club and President of the Department of EEE Association, which made my university life even more fulfilling.

N: After graduating, I started my career at Navana Interlinks, a reputed engineering and construction firm, where I worked for about 1.5 years as an Executive Engineer. During that time, I gradually specialised in MEP and EHS systems, working on diverse projects in the power, construction, and safety sectors, both in Bangladesh and in collaboration with international partners. Over the years, I built a strong network of



Nafis Rahman

clients and suppliers, which helped me establish myself as a trusted consultant and technical lead. My career path has been shaped by continuous learning, hands-on experience, and the willingness to take on challenging roles.

TDS: What skills do you rely on most in your current role? How did your university experience help you develop them?

N: My work demands a mix of technical and soft skills—project coordination, technical evaluations, safety compliance assessments, client communication, and international sourcing. Hands-on training from various manufacturers has made me highly capable in installation and commissioning work.

IUBAT played a vital role in building my technical foundation, problem-solving ability, and critical thinking skills. The project work, lab sessions, and presentations during my studies sharpened both my technical expertise and communication abilities, which are indispensable in my field today.

TDS: Looking back on your university years, what are some of your fondest memories?

N: I remember the friendly campus atmosphere, the supportive faculty, and the camaraderie among classmates. Group study sessions before exams, meeting project deadlines together, and spending countless hours in the EEE labs are experiences I truly cherish. I also served as Vice President of the IUBAT Gold Club and President of the Department of EEE Association, which made my university life even more fulfilling. IUBAT was more than a place of learning; it was where lifelong friendships were formed.

TDS: In what ways did your time at IUBAT shape who you are today?

N: My time at IUBAT helped me develop discipline, resilience, and confidence. It taught me how to balance academics with real-life responsibilities and take ownership of my own growth. The diversity within the classroom and exposure to multidisciplinary perspectives broadened my understanding of engineering and its role in society.

TDS: Were you involved in extra-curricular activities during your studies? How did they contribute to your growth?

N: Yes, I actively participated in technical seminars, industrial visits, and student forums, especially as the President of the EEE Association student body. I also helped organise departmental events and group projects. These activities honed my leadership, event management, and teamwork skills—abilities I apply daily in my career. They made me a more confident communicator and effective collaborator.

TDS: Beyond academics, what important lessons did you learn at IUBAT?

N: IUBAT taught me the value of time management, integrity, and continuous self-improvement. I learned that no goal is too big if you remain committed and keep learning. I also came to appreciate diversity and teamwork—qualities that are vital in any professional setting.

TDS: What advice would you give to current IUBAT students pursuing big ambitions?

N: Stay focused, but remain curious. Build a strong technical foundation, but don't underestimate the value of communication, networking, and hands-on experience. Don't hesitate to explore different career paths early on; you may discover your true passion that way.

Above all, remain humble, keep asking questions, and never stop learning. Dreams are real, but they require daily effort to become reality.

I believe success rests on two pillars: luck and labour. You can work tirelessly and still not see immediate results because hard work (labour) is in your hands, but results (luck) come only when the timing is right. So, work hard but be patient. Trust that every achievement has its season.

Always be grateful to your parents; their blessings are silent prayers that can move mountains. If you honour them, your success will shine brighter. And never forget to seek guidance from the Almighty. His wisdom never fails those who ask sincerely.

Faisal Kabir's first steps in UIU led him to the world of AI and healthcare

SYEDA AFRIN TARANNUM

In the early 2000s, United International University (UIU) was new — a campus finding its identity, a community still taking shape. Among the students who walked through its doors as part of the one of the very first batches in the Department of Computer Science and Engineering (CSE) was Md Faisal Kabir.

For Kabir, those first years at UIU were more than just an academic experience; they were the foundation of a journey that would take him from late-night coding sessions in Dhaka to a tenure-track faculty position in the United States, and now to leading a project funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH), a part of the US Department of Health and Human Services, to harness Artificial Intelligence (AI) for improving healthcare access.

Kabir earned his BSc in CSE from UIU in 2005. Six years later, he completed his MSc in CSE at the same university, part of which was conducted at the University of Bradford, UK, under the European Union's eLink Scholarship in 2010.

He recalls the problem-solving skills and up-to-date curriculum at UIU as being pivotal, not only in supporting his later research but also in helping him complete his Ph.D. in Computer Science from North Dakota State University (NDSU) in 2020.

His memories of those early UIU days are still vivid: group projects that required collaboration and creativity, coding through the night, the camaraderie of friends learning together, and experiences outside the classroom — sports events, study tours, and promotional programs that showcased UIU to a wider audience.

One aspect that stood out to him was the strong connection between students and faculty. It was a relationship that would



Faisal Kabir

shape how he approached teaching later in life.

While computer science was evolving rapidly, it was an undergraduate thesis in AI, supervised by Dr Chowdhury Mofizur Rahman that proved decisive for Kabir's future.

AI research was still emerging in Bangladesh at the time, but under Dr Rahman's mentorship, Kabir developed a solid understanding of core concepts and research methods. This early exposure was instrumental in steering his career toward AI and machine learning (ML), areas that now define his research portfolio.

The connection between that thesis and his present work is direct. The NIH grant he leads today, to establish an AI health research lab, builds on knowledge first developed in those formative UIU years.

After completing his undergraduate degree, Kabir joined UIU as a lecturer in the CSE department in 2006 and later became an assistant professor, serving until 2014.

Those eight years allowed him to carry forward the student-centered environment he had once benefited from. His approach to teaching emphasised mentorship, accessibility, and the same collaborative spirit that had shaped his own education.

Kabir's time at UIU wasn't

confined to the classroom. He was one of the founders of the UIU Computer Club, an initiative that grew into one of the university's most active student organisations. Later, he served as its moderator, guiding its technical and academic programs.

His involvement extended to the UIU Social Services Club, where he helped organise outreach activities such as winter clothing drives for underserved communities. One particularly memorable effort took him to northern Bangladesh to distribute warm clothes — a moment that blended teamwork with social impact.

Kabir also took part in awareness campaigns like smoking cessation drives, which strengthened his leadership, communication, and organisational skills. His commitment to public health advocacy earned him the Young Leadership Award at the World Conference on Tobacco or Health in Taiwan in 2007, followed by participation in the summer program at Johns Hopkins University's Bloomberg School of Public Health in 2009.

These experiences created a pattern of engagement and service that continued in later stages of his life. During his Ph.D. studies at NDSU, he served as a Global Outreach Ambassador and Graduate School Senator in the student government. Today, he continues this commitment as Chair of the IEEE Susquehanna Section's Computer Society Chapter.

Kabir sees his degree in computer science as something that extends far beyond his professional role. The analytical thinking and problem-solving skills developed at UIU have proven useful in everyday life and community work. They have also given him the confidence to contribute meaningfully to social initiatives.

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