



An-Najah National University

Faculty of Engineering and Information Technology

Department of Computer Engineering

Hardware Graduation Project

Graduation Project 2

SolarX Robot

Prepared by:

Hala Maree

Wafa Namroti

Supervised by:

Dr. Aladdin Masri

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Disclaimer Statement

This report was prepared by students Hala Maree and Wafa Namroti in the Department of Computer Engineering , Faculty of Engineering, An-Najah National University. It has not been altered or corrected, other than editorial corrections, as a result of assessment and it may contain language as well as content errors. It may contain linguistic and content errors. The opinions expressed herein, as well as any findings and recommendations, are solely those of the students. An-Najah National University assumes no responsibility for the consequences of using this report for a purpose other than that for which it was prepared.

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Abstract

The increasing dependence on solar energy systems has highlighted the importance of maintaining solar panels in clean operating conditions to maximize energy production and system efficiency. Dust accumulation, dirt, and environmental contaminants significantly reduce solar panel performance, making regular cleaning essential. However, manual cleaning methods require considerable time, effort, water consumption, and human intervention.

This project presents SolarX Robot, an intelligent autonomous solar panel cleaning robot designed to automate the cleaning process of solar panel arrays. The robot is capable of operating in both manual and automatic modes through a mobile application developed using Flutter. The system utilizes multiple sensors, including IR sensors for edge detection, ultrasonic sensors for water level monitoring and panel detection, an MPU6050 sensor for orientation monitoring, and a DS3231 Real-Time Clock module for scheduling operations.

The robot employs DC motors for movement, brush rotation, and brush lifting mechanisms, while a water pump assists in removing dust and debris from solar panel surfaces. The ESP32 module enables wireless communication between the robot and the mobile application, allowing users to monitor the cleaning process, schedule cleaning operations, and track the robot's current position within the solar panel array.

To improve operational flexibility, the system stores its current operating state using the Arduino EEPROM. This allows the robot to pause its cleaning task and later resume operation from the same point without restarting the entire cleaning process. The developed prototype demonstrated accurate movement, reliable edge detection, effective cleaning performance, and successful autonomous operation according to predefined schedules.

SolarX Robot provides a practical, low-cost, and efficient solution for maintaining solar panel installations while reducing human effort and improving the overall efficiency of solar energy systems.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 General Background

Renewable energy has become one of the most important solutions for addressing the increasing global demand for energy while reducing environmental pollution. Among various renewable energy sources, solar energy is considered one of the most widely adopted and environmentally friendly technologies. Solar panels are extensively used in residential, commercial, and industrial sectors to convert sunlight into electrical energy.

Despite their advantages, solar panels are continuously exposed to outdoor environmental conditions such as dust, dirt, bird droppings, and other contaminants. The accumulation of these materials on the panel surface reduces the amount of sunlight reaching the photovoltaic cells, leading to a significant decrease in power generation efficiency. Therefore, regular cleaning and maintenance of solar panels are essential to ensure optimal performance and maximize energy production.

Traditional cleaning methods often rely on manual labor, which can be time-consuming, costly, and potentially dangerous, especially in large-scale solar installations. As a result, automated cleaning solutions have gained increasing attention in recent years. Robotics and embedded systems technologies provide an effective approach to automate the cleaning process while minimizing human intervention.

This project presents SolarX Robot, an intelligent solar panel cleaning robot designed to automatically clean solar panel arrays using a combination of sensors, actuators, wireless communication, and a mobile application.

1.2 Objectives

The main goal of our project is to design and implement an intelligent robotic system capable of cleaning solar panels efficiently and autonomously.

The specific objectives of the project are:

- To implement both manual and automatic operating modes.
- To detect solar panel edges and prevent accidental falls using infrared sensors.
- To monitor water levels before starting the cleaning process.
- To identify the existence of adjacent solar panels during operation.
- To provide a scheduling feature that allows automatic cleaning at predefined times.
- To develop a mobile application for monitoring and controlling the robot remotely.
- To display the robot's current position during the cleaning process.
- To save the robot's current operational state using EEPROM memory, allowing the cleaning process to be paused and resumed from the last saved point.

1.3 Significance of the project

Solar panel efficiency directly affects the amount of electrical energy generated by photovoltaic systems. Dust accumulation can significantly reduce system performance, especially in regions characterized by dry climates and frequent dust exposure.

The SolarX Robot project contributes to solving this problem by providing an automated cleaning solution that reduces dependence on manual labor while maintaining solar panel efficiency. The robot offers remote monitoring, automatic scheduling, and real-time status tracking through a mobile application.

The project also demonstrates the practical integration of embedded systems, wireless communication, sensor technologies, mobile

application development, and automation techniques within the renewable energy sector. Furthermore, the proposed system can be adapted and expanded for larger solar installations in the future.

1.4 Organization of the Report

This report is organized into six chapters.

Chapter One introduces the project, including the background, objectives, significance, and report organization.

Chapter Two presents the theoretical background and reviews previous work related to solar panel cleaning systems, autonomous robots, and smart monitoring technologies.

Chapter Three describes the methodology used in designing and implementing the SolarX Robot, including hardware components, software architecture, communication systems, and operational procedures.

Chapter Four presents the experimental results and performance analysis obtained during system testing.

Chapter Five discusses the results, evaluates the effectiveness of the proposed solution, and identifies the strengths and limitations of the system.

Finally, Chapter Six summarizes the project conclusions and provides recommendations and future improvements for further development.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Background and Previous Work

2.1 Solar Energy System

Solar energy is one of the most important renewable energy sources available today. It is generated by converting sunlight into electrical energy using photovoltaic (PV) panels. Due to increasing environmental concerns and the growing demand for clean energy, solar power systems have become widely used in residential, commercial, and industrial applications.

Photovoltaic panels consist of multiple solar cells that convert solar radiation into electrical energy through the photovoltaic effect. The efficiency of these panels depends on several factors, including solar irradiance, temperature, panel orientation, and cleanliness of the panel surface. Maintaining clean solar panels is essential for achieving maximum energy production and system efficiency [1].

2.2 Effect of Dust Accumulation on Solar Panels

Solar panels are continuously exposed to environmental conditions such as dust, sand, pollen, bird droppings, and other contaminants. Over time, these materials accumulate on the panel surface and create a layer that reduces the amount of sunlight reaching the photovoltaic cells [2].

The reduction in received solar radiation directly affects the electrical output of the panel. In regions with dry climates and frequent dust storms, energy losses can become significant if regular cleaning is not performed. Therefore, maintaining panel cleanliness is considered one of the most important factors in preserving the efficiency and reliability of solar energy systems.

Traditional cleaning methods usually involve manual labor, which may require considerable time and maintenance costs. In large solar farms, manual cleaning becomes even more difficult and less practical.

2.3 Solar Panel Cleaning Technologies

Several methods have been developed to clean solar panels and restore their efficiency. These methods can generally be classified into manual cleaning systems and automated cleaning systems.

Manual cleaning is the most common approach and typically involves workers using water, brushes, or cleaning tools to remove dirt from the panel surface. Although effective, this method requires human effort and regular maintenance schedules.

Automated cleaning systems have gained increasing attention due to their ability to reduce labor requirements and improve cleaning consistency. These systems utilize motors, brushes, water pumps, and intelligent controllers to perform cleaning operations automatically. Some advanced systems are capable of operating without human intervention and can follow predefined schedules or respond to environmental conditions.

The growing adoption of automation technologies has encouraged researchers and engineers to develop robotic solutions capable of cleaning solar panels efficiently while minimizing operational costs.

2.4 Previous Work

Numerous researchers have proposed robotic solutions for solar panel cleaning. Most existing systems focus on reducing manual labor while maintaining panel efficiency.

Some cleaning robots use rail-guided mechanisms that move along predefined tracks installed beside solar panels. Although these systems provide reliable movement, they often require additional installation costs and limited flexibility.

Other systems utilize autonomous wheeled robots equipped with brushes and water spraying mechanisms. These robots can move freely across panel surfaces and perform cleaning operations automatically. However, many existing solutions lack advanced monitoring capabilities or require frequent human supervision.

Compared with existing solutions, the proposed SolarX Robot combines autonomous cleaning, wireless monitoring, scheduling functionality, panel edge detection, water level monitoring, position tracking, and EEPROM-based state retention within a single integrated platform. This allows the robot to resume cleaning from its previously saved state whenever required. Furthermore, the system provides a practical and cost-effective solution for solar panel maintenance while reducing human intervention and operational effort.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 System Overview

The SolarX Robot was designed as an intelligent autonomous system for cleaning solar panel arrays with minimal human intervention. The system combines embedded hardware, sensors, motor control units, wireless communication, and a mobile application to provide an efficient solar panel cleaning solution.

The robot supports two operating modes: Manual Mode and Automatic Mode. In Manual Mode, the user can directly control the robot through the mobile application. In Automatic Mode, the user enters the dimensions of the solar panels and the number of panels to be cleaned, and the robot automatically performs the cleaning process while continuously monitoring its position and operational status.

The system also includes a scheduling feature that allows cleaning operations to start automatically at predefined times. To improve operational flexibility, the robot stores critical operational data in the Arduino EEPROM, allowing the cleaning process to be paused and later resumed from the last saved state without restarting the entire operation.

3.2 Hardware Design

The hardware architecture consists of several modules responsible for sensing, control, communication, movement, and cleaning operations.

3.2.1 System Architecture Overview

The robot frame is constructed from lightweight aluminum to ensure a strong yet lightweight structure that can easily move across solar panels without adding unnecessary load to the system. Aluminum was selected due to its high durability, resistance to corrosion, and ability to withstand exposure to water during the cleaning process, making it suitable for outdoor environments.

We used white colored aluminium to minimize heat absorption from sunlight and reduce thermal effects during operation on solar panel surfaces. This helps maintain system stability and improves overall performance in high-temperature conditions.

In addition, the mechanical design follows a closed-body structure, where all internal components such as wiring, controllers, and power distribution systems are enclosed inside the frame. This design choice protects the electronic components from dust, water splashes, and external damage, while also improving the overall appearance of the robot and keeping the wiring organized and hidden.

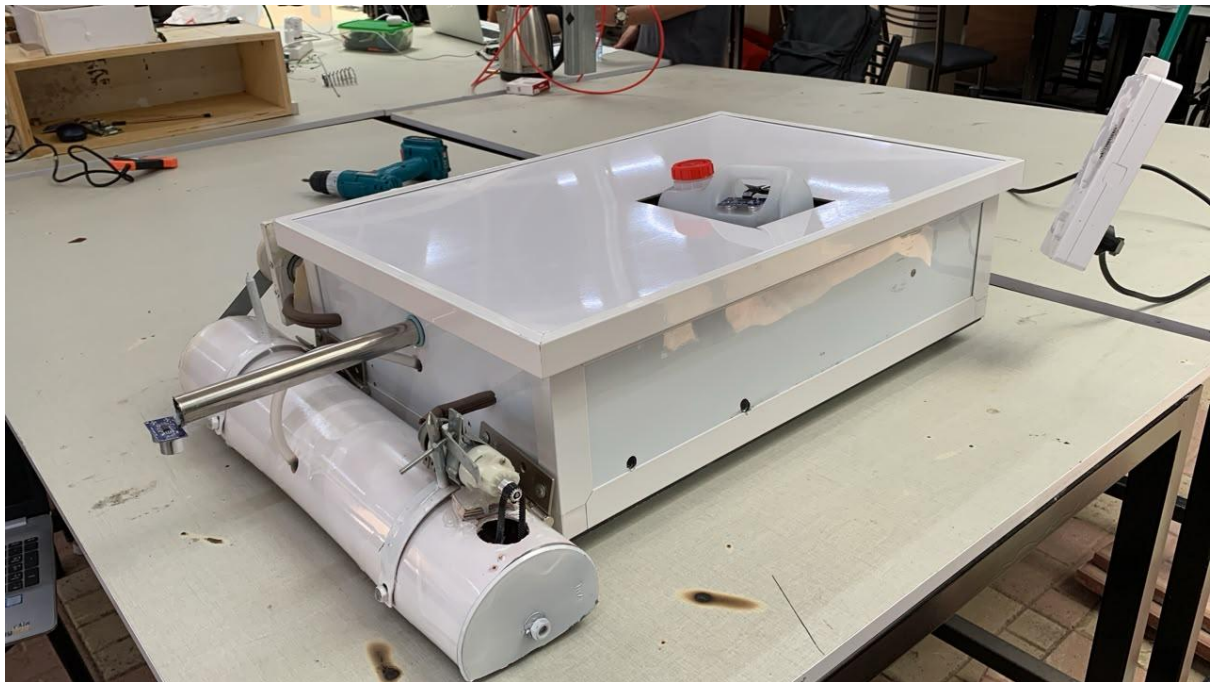


Figure 1 SolarX Body

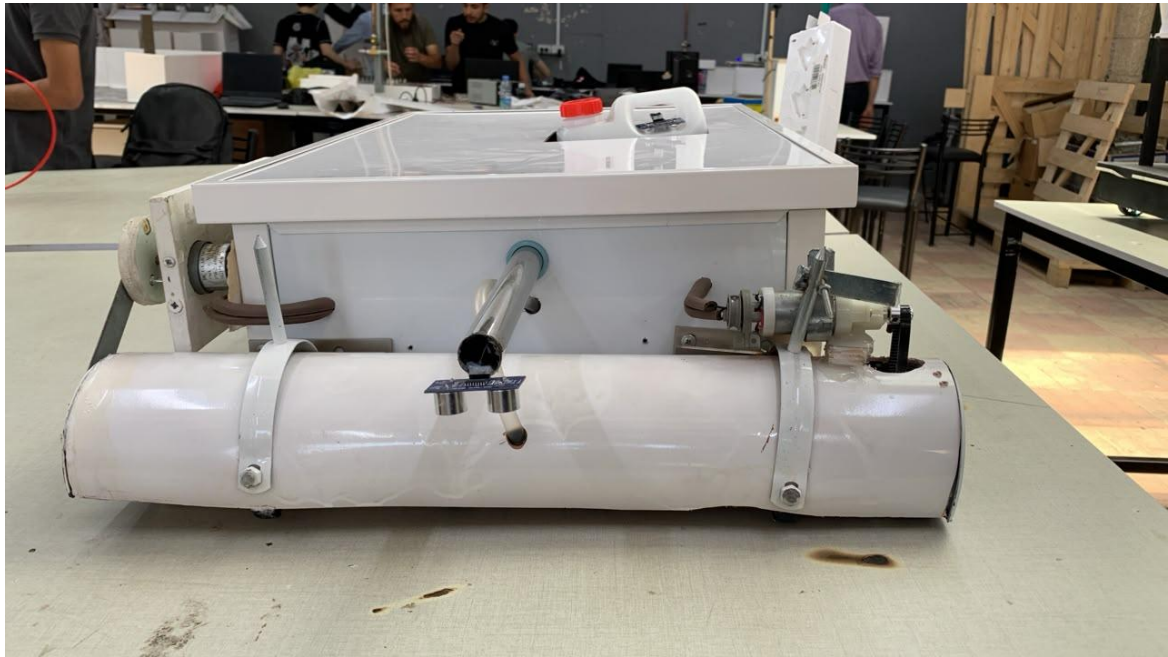


Figure 2 Front Side

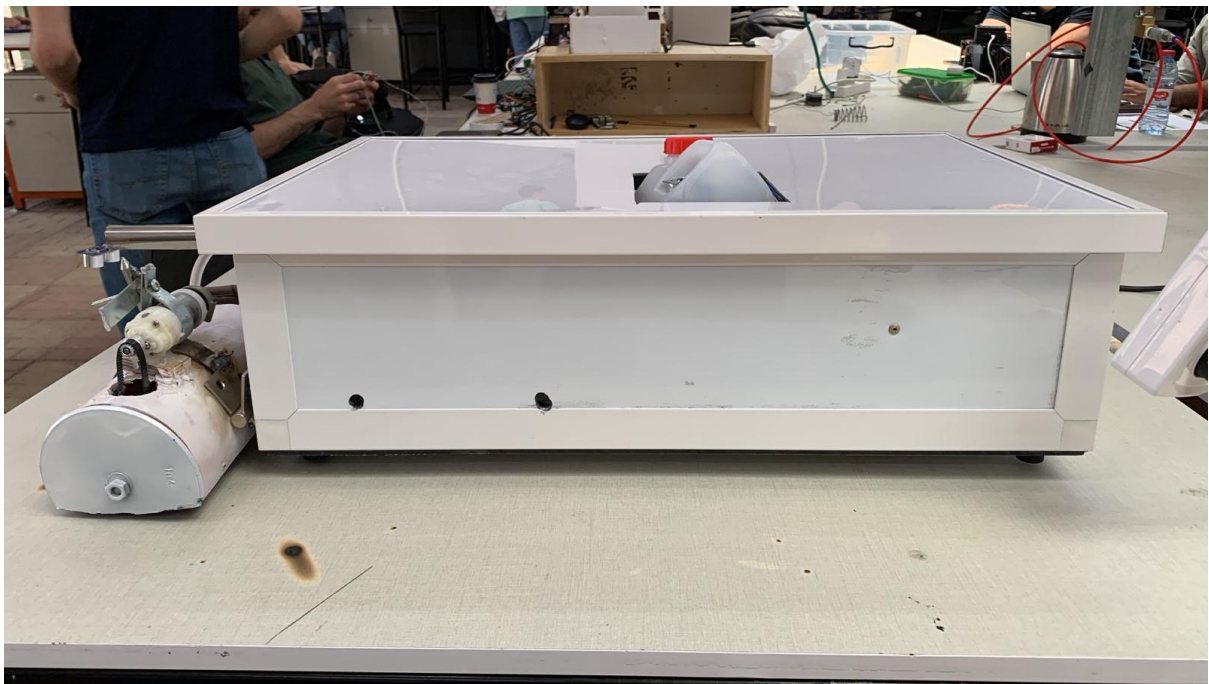


Figure 3 Right Side



Figure 4 Back Side

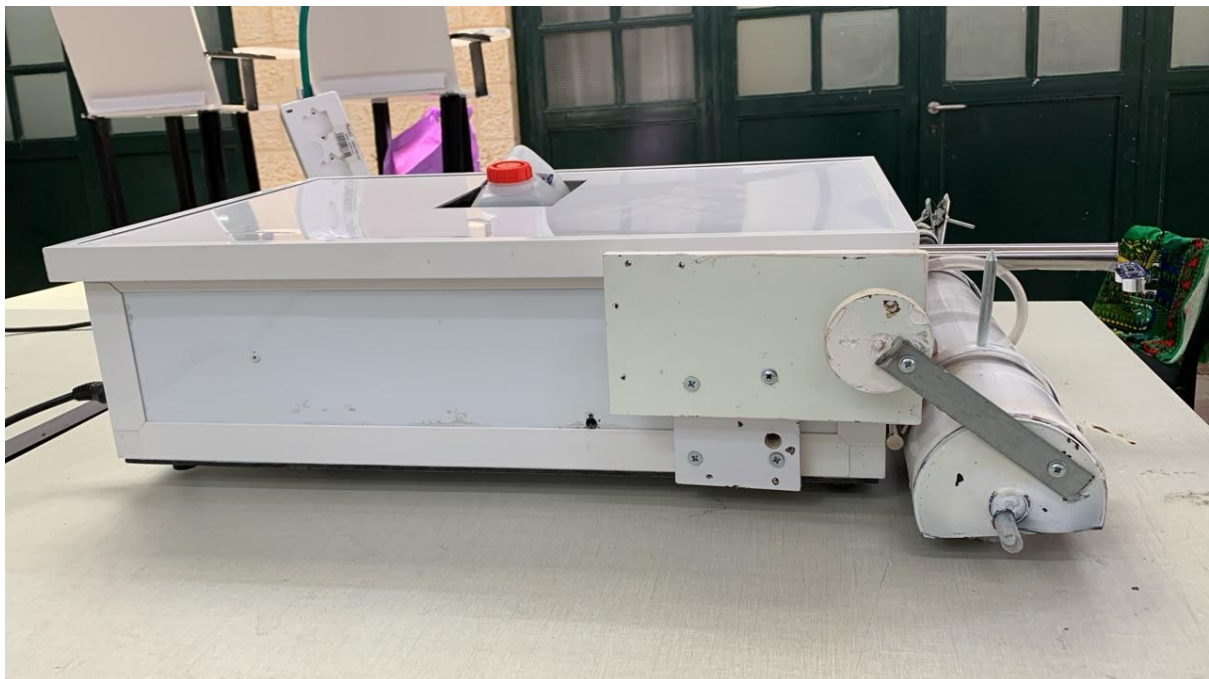


Figure 5 Left Side

3.2.1.1 Mobility System

The mobility system is responsible for moving the robot across solar panel surfaces in a controlled and stable manner. It is based on **four DC**

gear motors connected to **wheels**, and connected to **drivers** allowing the robot to perform forward, backward, and turning movements.

This configuration provides good traction and stability while ensuring smooth navigation across solar panel rows. The use of gear motors increases torque, which is necessary for movement on slightly inclined or uneven surfaces.

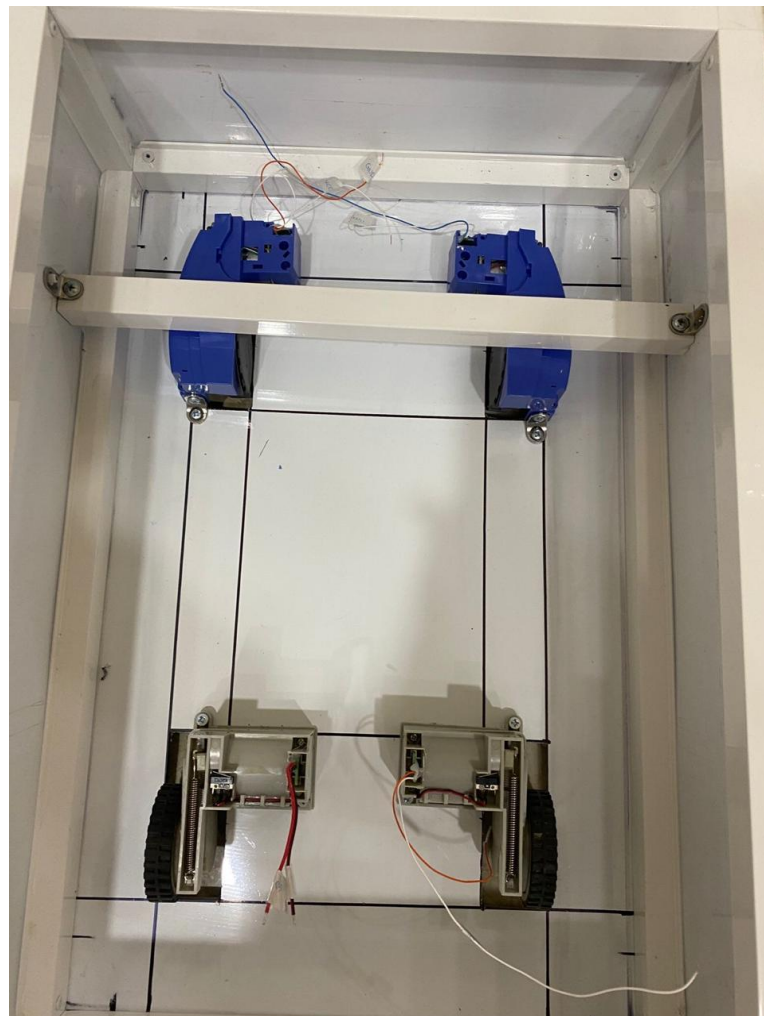


Figure 6 Motors and Wheels

3.2.1.2 Brush System

The brush system is the main cleaning mechanism of the robot and is designed to remove dust and dirt from solar panel surfaces efficiently.

It consists of **two paint rollers** used as cleaning brushes to ensure wide surface coverage. A **DC motor** is used for brush rotation, providing continuous cleaning motion during operation. **Another motor** is used for lifting and lowering the brush, allowing controlled contact with the solar panels depending on the cleaning stage.

A **relay module** is used to control the operation of the brush system, enabling safe switching of the motor and ensuring proper power management during operation.



Figure 7 Brush System

3.2.1.3 Water System

The water system supports the cleaning process by supplying water during operation to improve dust removal efficiency.

It consists of a **water pump** connected to a **tubing system** that is connected to **car windshield nozzles** that distributes water across the cleaning area. A **relay module** is used to control the pump operation, while a diode is added for protection against reverse current, ensuring the safety of the electrical circuit.

This system enhances the overall cleaning performance by allowing wet cleaning instead of dry brushing only.

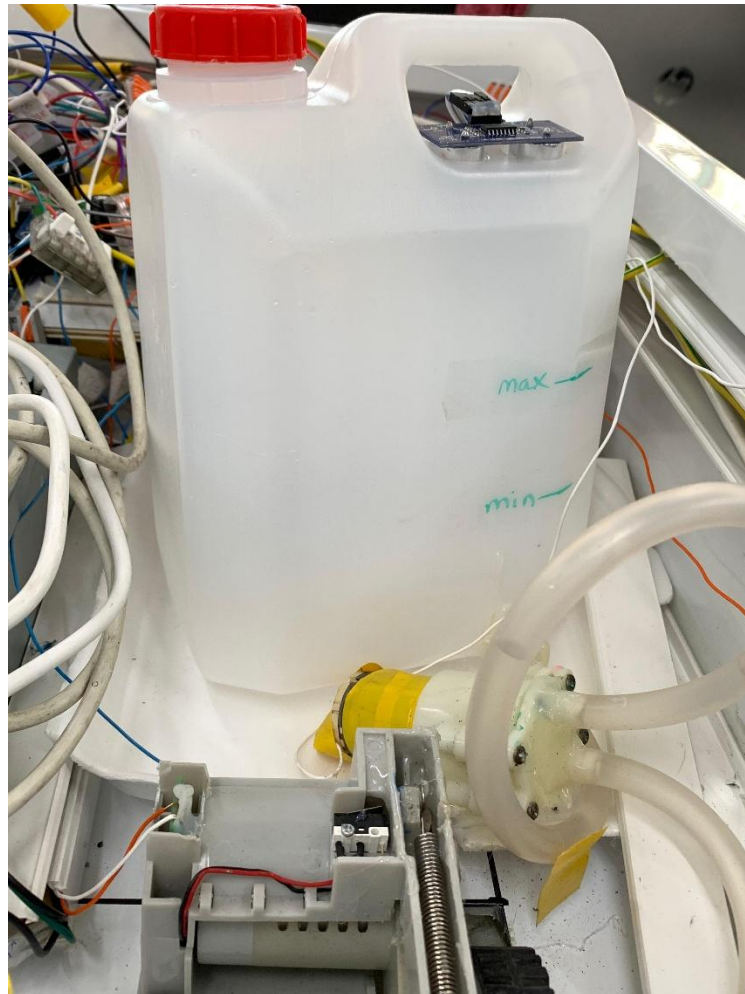


Figure 8 Water Tank With Pump

3.2.2 Controllers

The system uses two main controllers that manage all operations and communication between subsystems.

3.2.2.1 Arduino Mega 2560

The Arduino Mega acts as the main controller of the robot. It is responsible for reading sensor data, controlling motors, executing cleaning algorithms, and managing system logic for both manual and

automatic modes. It also handles real-time decision-making based on sensor inputs.



Figure 9 Arduino Mega 2560

3.2.2.2 ESP32

The ESP32 is used as a communication module that connects the robot to the mobile application. It enables wireless control, monitoring, and data exchange, allowing the user to interact with the robot remotely through the Flutter application.

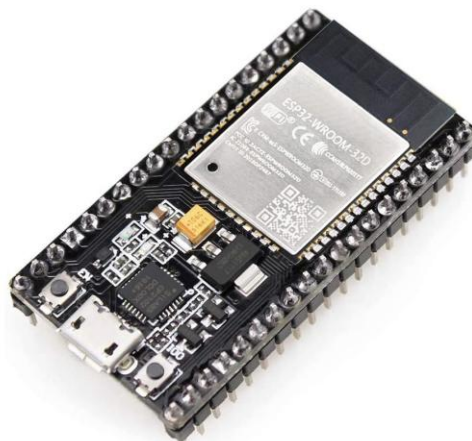


Figure 10 ESP32

3.2.3 Motor Drivers & Actuators

Motor drivers are essential for controlling high-power components safely and efficiently.

3.2.3.1 BTS7960 Driver

The system uses BTS7960 motor drivers to control the four DC gear motors responsible for robot movement. These drivers provide high current handling capability and allow precise control of motor direction and speed.

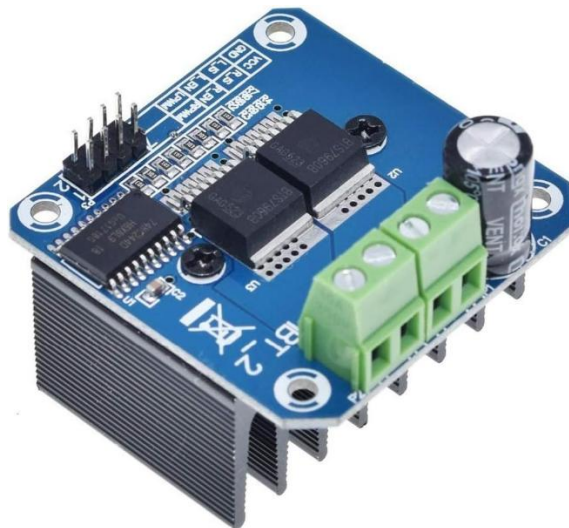


Figure 11 BTS7960 Driver

3.2.3.2 H-Bridge Module

An H-Bridge module is used to control additional motors involved in the cleaning mechanism.

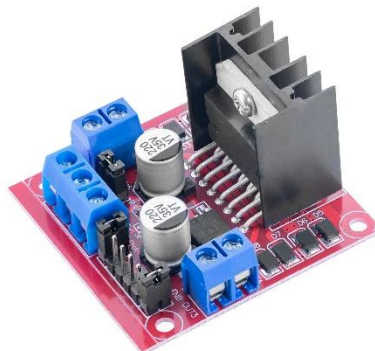


Figure 12 H-Bridge Module

3.2.3.3 DC Gear Motors with Wheels

Four 12V DC gear motors with wheels for mobility



Figure 13 DC Gear Motors with Wheels

3.2.3.4 DC Motor for brush rotation

Used with 2 pulleys and timing belt to help the brush to rotate.



Figure 14 Brush Rotation Motor

3.2.3.5 DC Gear Motor for lifting and lowering the brush

Used to lifting the prush up and lowering it down.

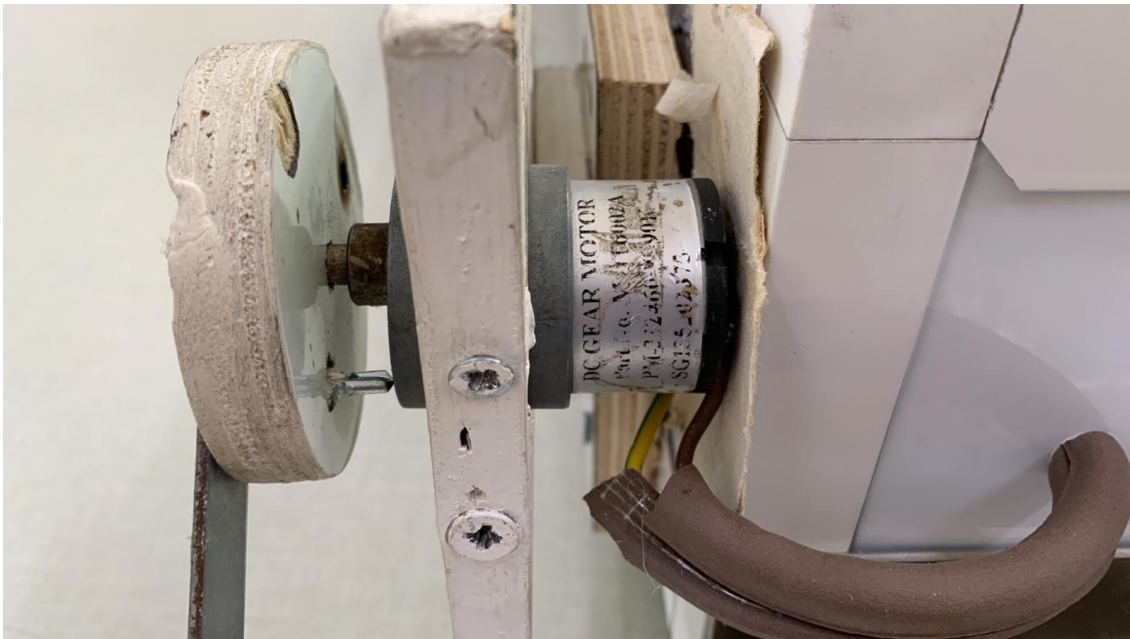


Figure 15 Brush Lifting Up Motor

3.2.3.6 DC water pump for water distribution

Used to absorb water from the tank and distribute it through the tubing system onto the solar panel surface.



Figure 16 Water Pump

3.2.4 Sensors

The robot integrates multiple sensors to ensure accurate navigation, safety, and system reliability.

3.2.4.1 IR Sensors (x4)

Used for edge detection and positioning on solar panel surfaces. These sensors help the robot stay within the boundaries of the panels and maintain proper alignment.

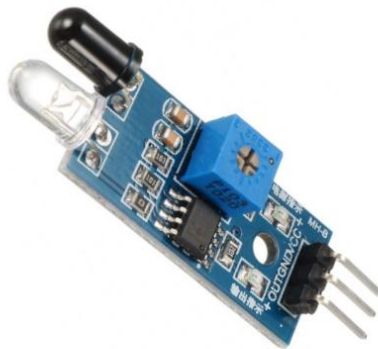


Figure 17 IR Sensor

3.2.4.2 Ultrasonic Sensors (x2)

Used for secone panel detection and water level measurement, ensuring safe movement and proper system operation.



Figure 18 Ultrasonic Sensor

3.2.4.3 MPU6050 Sensor

Used to help robot with angular motion to turn 90°.

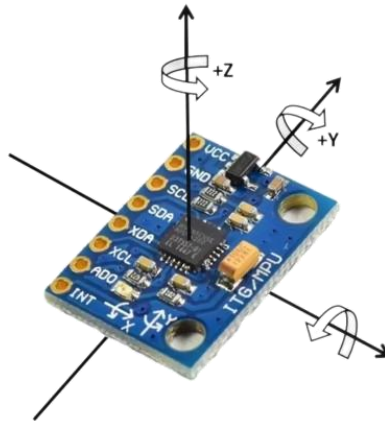


Figure 19 MPU6050

3.2.4.4 DS3231 Real Time Clock Module

Used for real-time clock functionality, enabling scheduled cleaning operations at predefined times.

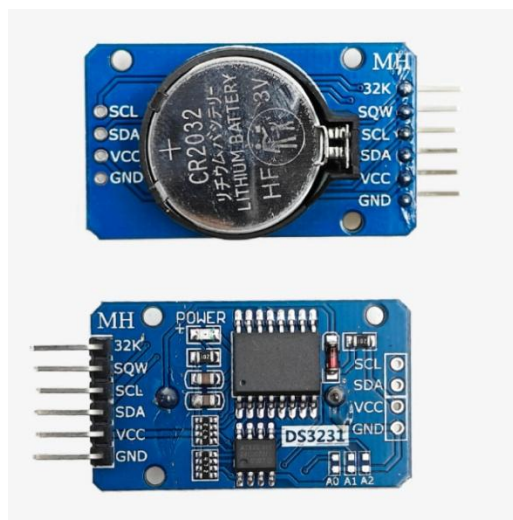


Figure 20 DS3231 RTC Module

3.2.4.5 4-Channel Relay Module

Used to control the brush motor, the brush lifting motor, and the water pump. This allows safe and reliable operation of the cleaning mechanism

while ensuring proper power management for each component during different operation stages.

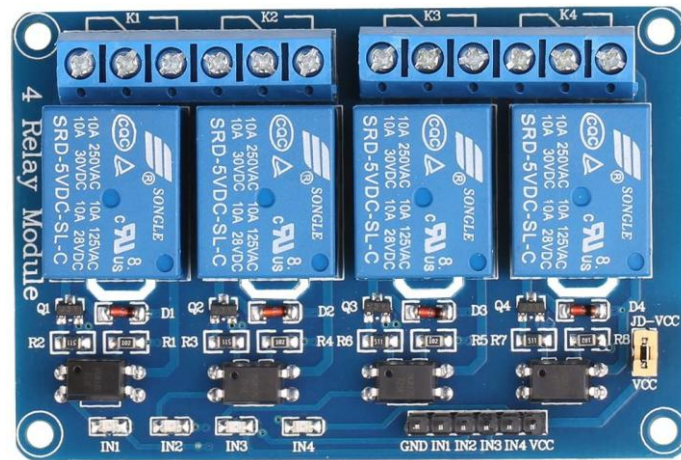


Figure 21 Relay Module

3.2.5 Power System

The power system provides stable energy distribution for all components of the robot.

3.2.5.1 PC Power Supply

A PC power supply unit is used as the main source of power for the most of components such as motors, drivers, and sensors.



Figure 22 PC Power Supply

3.2.5.2 Power Bank (x2)

Two separate power banks are used to supply lower-power modules:

- One power bank for Arduino Mega
- One power bank for ESP32



Figure 23 Power Bank

3.2.5.3 Level Shifter

A voltage level shifter is used to ensure compatibility between 3.3V and 5V logic levels between Arduino and MPU6050.

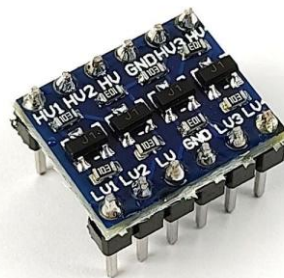


Figure 24 Level Shifter

3.2.5.4 Diode

A diode is connected with the water pump to protect the circuit from reverse current and electrical damage.



Figure 25 Diode

3.2.6 Mechanical Components

The mechanical structure of the robot consists of an aluminum frame designed to provide strength while maintaining a lightweight structure. Aluminum was selected due to its durability, corrosion resistance, and suitability for outdoor environments where water exposure is expected.

The robot uses a closed-body design where all internal components such as wiring, controllers, and power systems are fully enclosed inside the frame. This improves protection against dust, moisture, and external damage while maintaining a clean and organized internal layout.

White-colored aluminum was used to reduce heat absorption from sunlight, which helps minimize thermal effects during operation and improves system stability.

3.2.7 Additional Components

The system includes several supporting components that assist in assembly, wiring, and system stability.

3.2.7.1 Jumper Wires

We used Male to Male, Male to Female, Female to Female jumper wires.

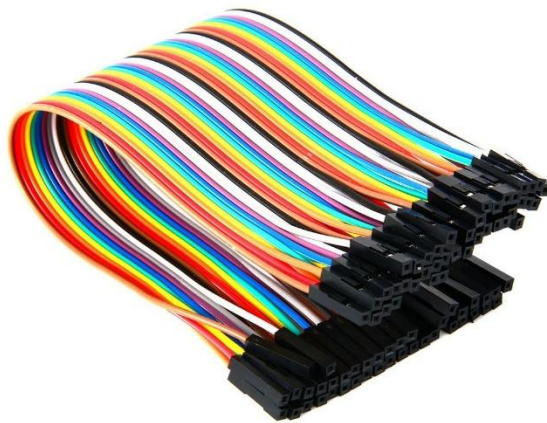


Figure 26 Female to Female Jumper Wires

3.2.7.2 Intercom cables

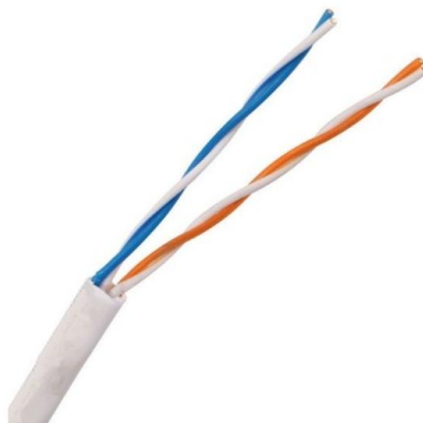


Figure 27 Intercom Cables

3.2.7.3 Connectors



Figure 28 Connectors

3.2.7.4 Soldering Iron



Figure 29 Soldering Iron

3.2.7.5 Metal Ball Caster Wheel (x2)



Figure 30 Metal Ball Caster Wheel

3.2.7.6 UPVC Pipe

Used as a structural cover for the brush system to support and protect the cleaning mechanism. It helps in holding the brush assembly in place and ensures proper alignment during operation. The pipe also contributes to the stability of the brush system while allowing smooth interaction with the solar panel surface during cleaning.



Figure 31 UPVC Pipe

3.2.7.7 Door Hinges

Used as part of the brush lifting mechanism to provide controlled rotational movement for raising and lowering the cleaning brush.



Figure 32 Door Hinges

3.2.7.8 Pulley and Timing Belt

Used to transfer rotational motion from the motor to the cleaning brush.



Figure 34 Pulley



Figure 33 Timing Belt

3.2.7.9 Paint Roller (x2)

Connected by a rail and used as a brush.



Figure 35 Paint Roller

3.3 Mobile Application

The mobile application is an essential part of the proposed system, as it provides a user-friendly interface to monitor and control the solar-powered robot remotely. The application aims to simplify interaction with the system by allowing users to send commands, view real-time status, and track the robot's performance without needing direct physical interaction.

Application Pages Description

3.3.1 Control Page

3.3.1.1 Manual Mode

Used to control the robot manually by sending commands: F, B, L, R, S.

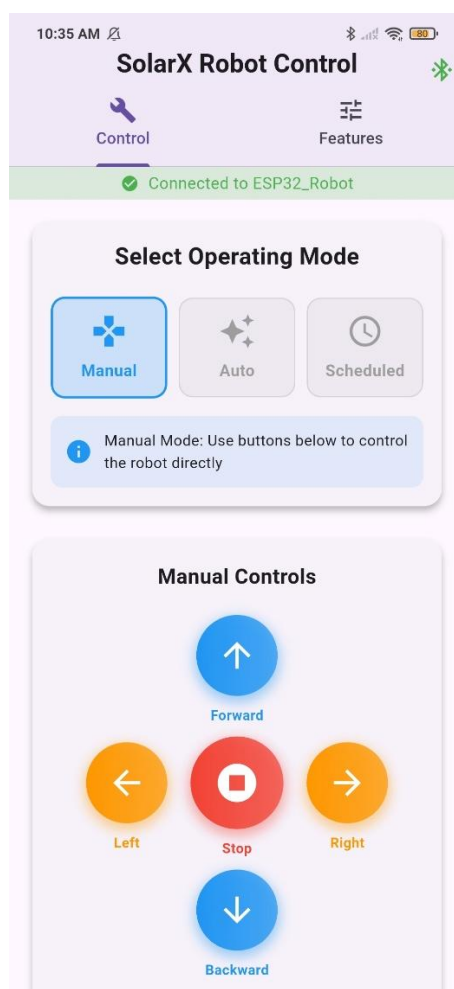


Figure 36 Manual Mode

3.3.1.2 Auto Mode

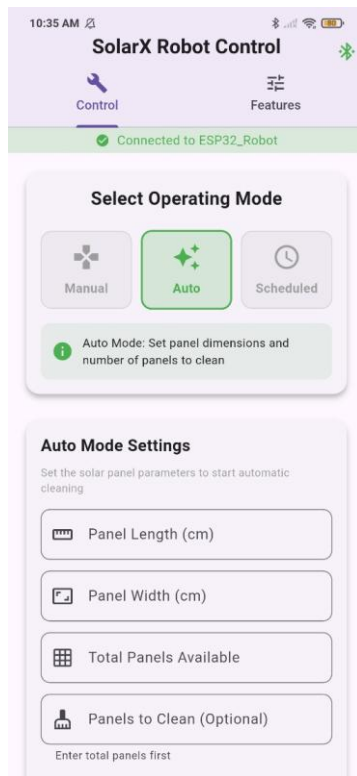


Figure 37 Auto Mode Before Filling Data

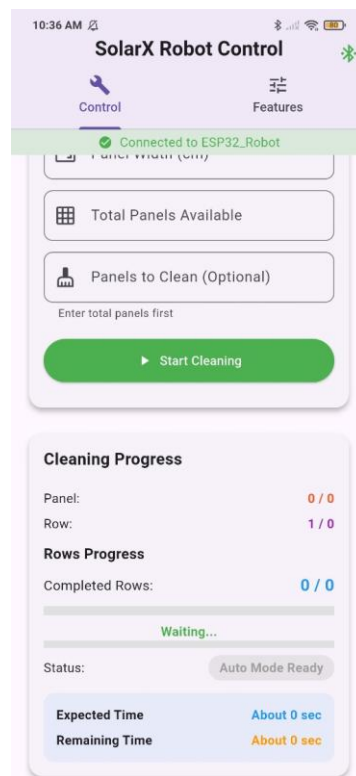


Figure 38 Cleaning Progress Before Filling Data

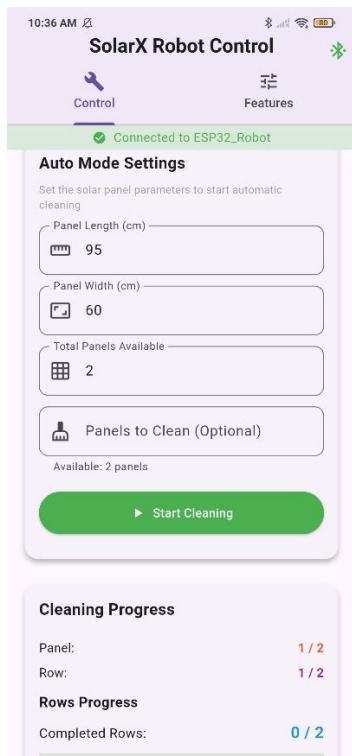


Figure 39 Cleaning Progress After Filling Data

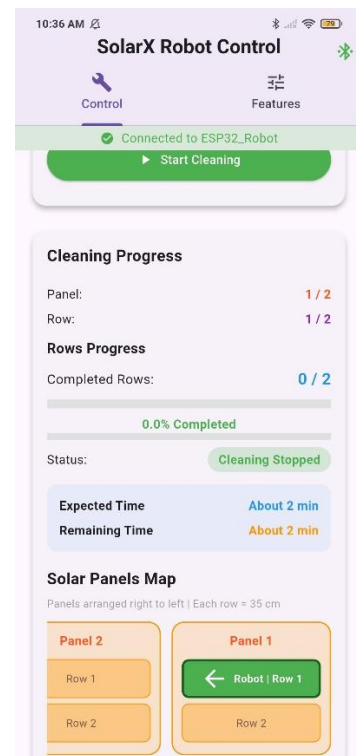


Figure 40 Auto Mode After Filling Data

3.3.1.3 Scheduled Mode

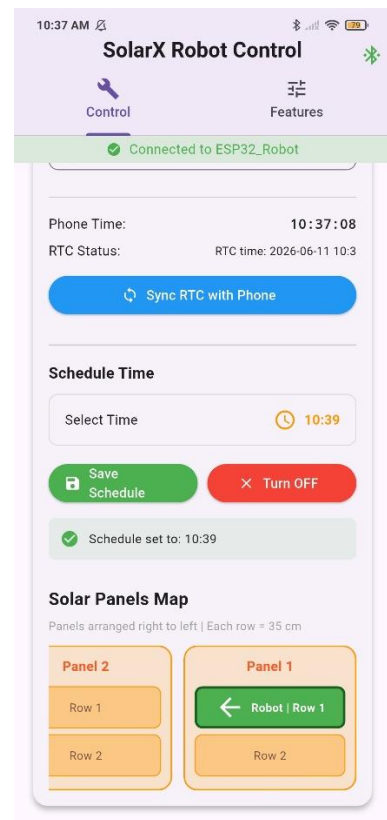
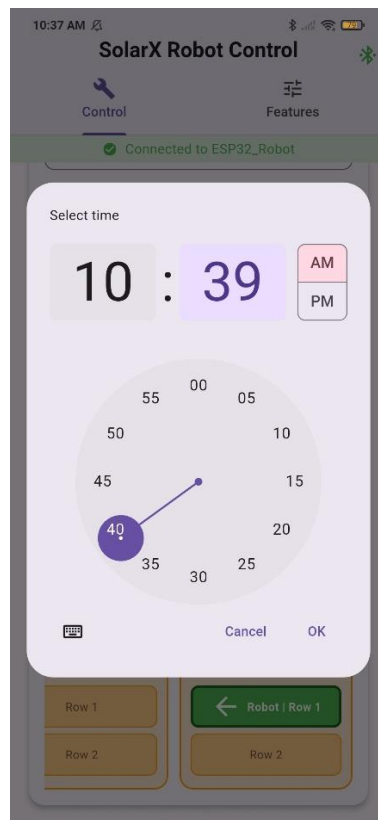
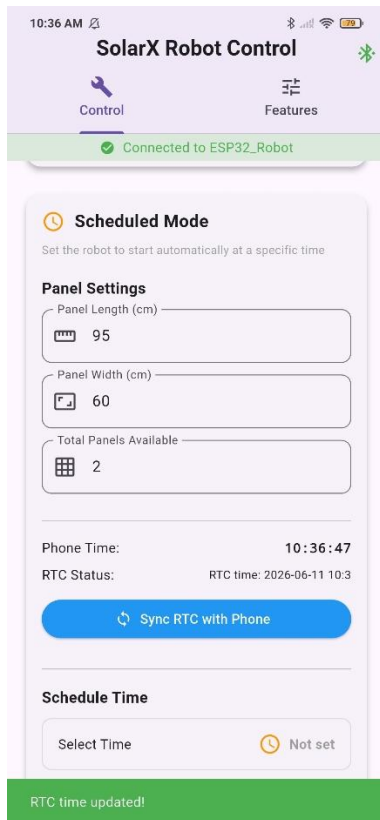


Figure 41 Sync RTC with Phone

Figure 42 Select Schedule Time

Figure 43 Save Schedule

3.3.2 Features Page

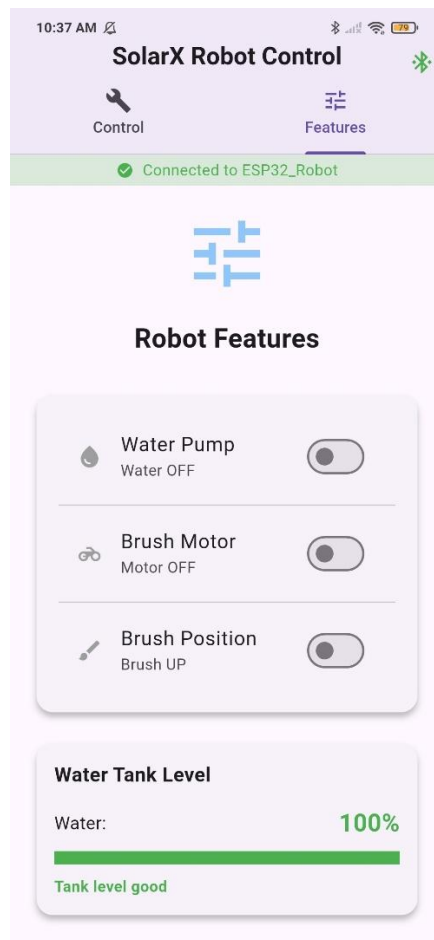


Figure 44 Features Off

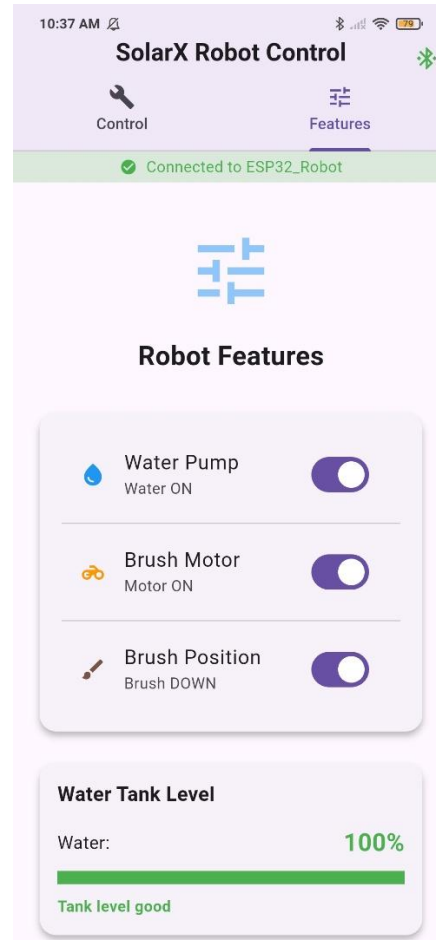


Figure 45 Features On

3.4 Standards and Specifications

During the development of SolarX Robot, several communication protocols and software technologies were utilized to ensure proper system operation.

Bluetooth Low Energy (BLE) was used as the primary wireless communication method between the ESP32 module and the mobile application. BLE was selected because of its low power consumption and reliable communication for short-range control and monitoring.

The I2C communication protocol was used to interface with modules such as the MPU6050 sensor and the DS3231 Real-Time Clock module.

Serial communication (UART) was used for data exchange between the Arduino Mega and the ESP32 module.

PWM signals were used to control motor speed and improve movement accuracy during operation.

The software was developed using Arduino IDE, Visual Studio Code, and Flutter, which provided the required tools for embedded programming, communication management, and mobile application development.

3.5 Constraints

Several challenges and limitations were encountered during the implementation of the SolarX Robot project.

One of the main challenges was the sensitivity of the IR sensors to sunlight. Since the robot operates outdoors, changes in sunlight intensity affected sensor readings and required several calibration attempts before obtaining stable performance.

Another challenge involved the MPU6050 sensor, as multiple modules were damaged during testing and development, which increased the time required for debugging and system integration.

The project was also developed under a limited budget, which required selecting affordable components that were locally available.

In addition, the robot was designed to operate in outdoor environments where dust, heat, and direct sunlight could affect the performance of some electronic components and sensors.

Despite these challenges, the final system was successfully implemented and demonstrated satisfactory performance during testing.

Chapter 4: Results and Analysis

This chapter presents the testing process, obtained results, and the challenges encountered during the development of the solar panel cleaning robot. Several tests were conducted to evaluate the performance of both the manual and automatic operating modes and to ensure proper integration between the mechanical, electrical, and control subsystems.

4.1 Manual Mode Testing

The initial testing phase was performed using the manual mode. The robot responded correctly to user commands, and all major functions, including movement worked as expected. These tests confirmed that the basic hardware and control system were functioning properly before moving to the automatic mode.

4.2 Automatic Mode Testing

After validating the manual mode, the automatic mode was implemented and tested. During the initial trials, the robot was able to move correctly and follow the intended cleaning path. However, after additional components and weight were added to the robot, its movement performance began to deteriorate.

The added weight increased the load on the wheels, causing instability and reducing the effectiveness of the robot's movement. To address this issue, several mechanical modifications were attempted. First, support wheels similar to bicycle training wheels were added to improve stability. However, this solution did not provide satisfactory results.

A caster wheel was then introduced and integrated into the robot structure. This modification significantly improved stability and mobility, successfully solving the movement problem. After installing the caster wheel, the robot was able to move more smoothly and maintain better balance during operation.

4.3 Final System Testing

Following the mechanical and electrical improvements, a series of final tests were conducted. These tests involved operating the movement system, brush mechanism, lifting mechanism, and water pump simultaneously under normal operating conditions.

The results demonstrated that all subsystems were functioning correctly and could operate together without significant issues. The robot successfully completed its intended tasks, including movement, water distribution, and cleaning operations. The implemented modifications improved both system stability and overall reliability, resulting in a functional prototype capable of performing the required solar panel cleaning process.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The main objective of this project was to develop an intelligent robotic system capable of cleaning solar panels while reducing the need for manual intervention. Based on the obtained results, the developed SolarX Robot successfully achieved the majority of the project objectives.

The robot was able to operate in both manual and automatic modes. The automatic mode allowed users to enter the panel dimensions and the number of panels to be cleaned, enabling the robot to perform the cleaning process with minimal user interaction. The scheduling feature also allowed cleaning operations to be performed automatically at predefined times.

The integration of sensors improved the overall reliability of the system. The IR sensors provided edge detection capabilities that helped prevent the robot from moving beyond the panel boundaries. The ultrasonic sensors assisted in water level monitoring and panel detection, while the MPU6050 provided orientation information during operation.

The mobile application improved user interaction with the robot by providing real-time monitoring and control functions. The use of Bluetooth Low Energy (BLE) communication enabled reliable wireless communication between the application and the robot.

One limitation encountered during the project was the sensitivity of the IR sensors to changes in sunlight intensity. Several calibration attempts were required to obtain stable readings under outdoor conditions. In addition, hardware issues related to the MPU6050 sensor increased development and testing time.

Despite these challenges, the final prototype demonstrated satisfactory movement accuracy and cleaning performance. The project successfully combined embedded systems, mobile application development, wireless communication, and automation technologies into a single integrated solution.

The developed system can be considered a practical and low-cost approach for solar panel maintenance. Future improvements may further enhance the efficiency, reliability, and scalability of the robot for larger solar panel installations

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Future Work

6.1 Conclusion

This project presented the design and implementation of SolarX Robot, an intelligent robotic system for cleaning solar panels. The system combined embedded hardware, sensors, motor control mechanisms, Bluetooth communication, and a Flutter-based mobile application to automate the cleaning process.

The developed robot successfully supported both manual and automatic operating modes. It was capable of monitoring its position, detecting panel edges, checking water levels, scheduling cleaning operations, and storing important operational data using EEPROM memory.

The obtained results demonstrated that the robot was able to move with acceptable accuracy and perform cleaning operations effectively. The mobile application provided a convenient interface for controlling and monitoring the system. Overall, the project achieved its primary objectives and demonstrated the feasibility of using autonomous robotic systems for solar panel maintenance.

6.2 Recommendation

Several improvements can be considered in future versions of the project:

- Improve the edge detection system by using sensors that are less sensitive to sunlight.
- Design a more robust mechanical structure suitable for large-scale solar farms.
- Improve the navigation algorithm to increase movement accuracy.
- Optimize power consumption to extend operating time.

6.2 Future Work

Future development of the SolarX Robot may include:

- Integration of GPS-based tracking and navigation systems.
- Development of advanced path-planning algorithms.
- Addition of solar charging capabilities for the robot.
- Cloud-based monitoring and data logging.
- Implementation of artificial intelligence techniques to optimize cleaning schedules and navigation decisions.
- Adaptation of the robot for larger solar panel installations and commercial solar farms.

Chapter 7: References

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