

Four unforgettable *Banijjo Mela* feelings

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A sea of people and waves of dust, a booming voice over the PA system that keeps reminding you of the impenetrability of Alimama Doors, or maybe it's a random couple arguing over which way a certain pavilion is. The Dhaka International Trade Fair (DITF) induces many different memories in people, but here are some experiences at DITF that I think unites the unfortunate beings that call Dhaka their home.

Getting lost

There's always an overwhelming crowd in DITF, everyone's wearing similar looking winter-clothing, and the shops often have some very distracting products on display, so it's easy to get lost. I remember the toy stores that had cricket supplies on display just outside the store and that is usually enough to separate me from any group. I'm not saying this happened to me but one might end up following their mother for over an hour until they were too tired and wanted to go home, only to realise the person they were following wasn't their mother but just some lady in the same off-white shawl. Seriously, it could happen to anyone.

Buying too much biscuit, chocolate, and chocolate biscuit

I don't know about other people but the food pavilions are THE major attraction for me at DITF. Some of these pavilions will sell stuff you don't usually find at your local convenience store, and although it's clear within a week why that's the case, impulse



PHOTO: STAR

buying is a dangerous beast. You will seldom feel the inclination to buy multiple tins of assorted biscuits other than when you're at DITF.

Same things at different stores

I'm sure no one does this but imagine if someone decided to learn about the cultures of the world from the various international pavilions at DITF: I mean, is Delhi a place where they mass produce intricate-ish looking aluminium products? If so, how is

it different from the Thai variety? Is it just a *Banijjo Mela* thing or do Pakistani, Iranian, and Turkish goods have a lot in common? Did I see this Kashmiri shawl in New Market a month ago?

Having overpriced unhealthy food

When I was young, I used to think that when I'd get older, I'd just grab all of my money, go to the field where DITF takes place, walk around all the entrances without going into the actual venue, and spend all

my money on deep fried shrimp heads. A bigger fantasy was that I'd walk into one of the many "traditional" biriyani houses and have half a plate for 500 bucks. I'm older now, and I've given up on only one of these fantasies.

To be fair, DITF, like most things in Dhaka, is a thing that happens that's not particularly good, but we let Stockholm syndrome get the best of us and pretend to like it anyway. At least it'll be over soon.

If you get lost, go stand by the big tower. They'll know where to find you. • Bring your best walking shoes. And a spare.

Unconventional Subjects in a Conventional Society

FAIZA ADIL

Disapproving glances and doubtful frowns follow the not-so-average student in their despicable journey to higher education. Because the student, in this instance is one that has made the horrible decision of taking "easy" subjects. Where will the arts, humanities and languages ever get you?

Picture this, you have a talent—maybe you're more than just good—you might have a good chance pursuing it for your future, right? Well according to everyone you come across: *wrong*. Because if you don't know already, you will be reminded at every step of the way that there are literally *zero* successful career options for these subjects and they should really just stay as hobbies. Do not forget that you will get absolutely nowhere with your creative "hobbies". It's not like successful artists, musicians and authors get paid gigantic sums of money for their work.

All your uncles and aunts will confidently predict that you're on a fool's road and the industries aren't worth a lot, which could be pretty insulting if you're studying the arts. You need to understand that these aren't "real" degrees and options. They're the easy, fun ones that you *absolutely* don't spend sleepless nights over. How hard can writing, painting, designing even get? It's just a hobby.

If you're studying History, Sociology or Environmental Sciences, I hate to break it to you but you are not a "woke person". In fact, there's a good chance

you will be made fun of. Because, "What's there to know about this?" and "You probably took it because it's an 'easy' option. You should challenge yourself more, you won't get anywhere with these." God forbid you ever mention that you enjoy your subjects and want a career you love because nobody will ever take you seriously after that. Hopes and dreams? Don't be naive; grow up.

The point is, people are ignorant. A society filled to the brim with people that study and do the same things is more unrealistic than what your uncles and aunts predict about your hopes and dreams. Your "hobbies" never have to stay just hobbies. Your passion for the humanities, for design and architecture and everything frowned upon still has a long way to go. And if you can hopefully make it past the unbearable bias around you, there are a million opportunities and career prospects waiting for you. People pursuing the liberal arts and humanities do make it to great places and so can you.

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ILLUSTRATION: NOOR US SAFA ANIK

From friends to business partners

SYEDA ERUM NOOR

Whether we've ever successfully started a money-making machine of a business, we've either tried it or thought of trying it. Initially, an idea hits you out of nowhere. You can be in the middle of a mundane conversation and suddenly, you're struck by a brilliant idea that you and your friend are convinced could be the next big thing.

Sometimes, however, if and when this group of friends *does* decide to take the initiative to turn this dream into a reality, it doesn't exactly turn out the way they want. This doesn't mean it can't be the next Apple. You could be sitting on the world's greatest idea with your friends and fear taking the next step.

So let this article be an insight into what it may be like when your friends become your business partners.

The biggest thing that holds most of us back is the fear of effects that starting and running a business may have on our relationships. We discuss this very effect with the founders of TutorsInc, an online educational platform that was initially started by two friends Mahmudul Hasan and Razi Uddin Ahmed. They were joined shortly after by a third childhood friend, Adib Ahnaf Aroz.

"The dynamics of our friendship definitely changed ever since we decided to start working on this start-up," says Mahmudul Hasan, Director of TutorsInc.

After all, this can be expected, considering your friendship will no longer be about going on weekend trips and going out for weekly lunches. Now it will become about working day and night together, putting your heart and soul into the work, and having disagreements that you will have to deal with. It then becomes about the livelihood that you're working towards and some of the challenges end up playing a part in the friendship.

"We definitely came out of it stronger," explains Sheikh Warda Mariam, co-founder of a café that she and her friends had started at her school. "We had our ups and downs, but I think that's what makes or breaks both the friendship and the business."

Regardless of what it's like dealing with the possible effects, there are other obstacles that you may find along the way. With age, things only get more complicated. It's not all fun and games when it actually comes to walking the walk. Talking to some of these people with the experience, we



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

learned about the few issues we may not have considered existed.

Tasneem Batool, a recent computer science and engineering graduate from Brac University, started a business as a pilot project with a group of her friends during a competition. She mentions, "The biggest problem we faced was that since we were friends, we all had the same amount of experience or lack thereof.

We would often find ourselves lost or confused about how to handle certain decisions and it seemed like the blind leading the blind. It was a struggle without someone who could maybe have guided us."

Being friends usually means you share the same circle of mutual friends with common interests. This results in tunnel vision, skewed perspective and incomplete knowledge. Without the diversity in all of that, it can at times become difficult.

"Another problem," Mahmudul reminds us, "Is trying to maintain the balance of our professional and personal lives. There's a very different set of expectations that we're trying to constantly reach."

"Professionalism is difficult to maintain all the time, which can lead to a variety of issues," Adib agrees.

Listing the problems that come along with working with friends seems hardly fair, because in the end, it's how you decide to deal with it. Friends help us get through too much too easily when deciding to embark on a very different journey in life. Hence, we now get to hear all the advantages that we are offered when working alongside our buddies.

The most common response in everyone we talked to was about support. Undoubtedly, no matter how bad things get, everyone agreed that they never felt alone throughout the rather strenuous job of setting up a business.

"These people are my friends in the end," says Razi. "They know me better than anyone and they always look out for me whenever I need it."

Warda mentions, "They understand the personal drawbacks I may have to face. It's more compassionate and genuine than it could ever be in a normal office environment."

Trust and reliability is always a gamble in the world of business. When it comes to your friends, that risk is out of the way. You know exactly how reliable and trustworthy your friends are, and that in your time of need like they'll always be there.

Tasneem adds, "Our philosophies and values are the same. I never had to worry about the intentions behind any decision nor was I worried about the clarity of the reason behind the existence of our business. Our goals were always in sync."

Friends are an essential part of life. They hold a major role in the people we grow up to be and in almost every small and big decisions

we take to shape our lives. Without them, a lot of us would be a lot lost than we'd ever care to admit.

When stepping into the part of life where it's time to make something of yourself in a world with endless, unforgiving and ruthless competition, it helps to have a familiar face by your side.

For the pathway to stability is a lot harder than any one of us can imagine.

Then again, everything has its downsides.

Even working with friends as you may have gathered by now. However, one must look at the positives and not rule out the potential that could lead to better things.

Nibrash Kazi Subah, who very recently launched an ad firm, mentions, "Because of all the trouble and conflicts one gets into, they have to figure out a way to get along, work together and finally build a good understanding."

Whether you can power through all the hardships to reach success is the real test. The purpose of this article isn't that you start second guessing that business you've been wanting to plan. It's about letting you know of the twist and turns of the way there. It's to inform you so you can be better prepared going into it and come out of it stronger.

So what are you waiting for? Go and do what you've been thinking about. Only good things can come out of starting a business. For with failure comes experience and with experience comes success.

Happy planning!

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