

Eid away from home is always difficult, to be honest. Apart from the Eid prayer, everything seems to be normal just like any other day. Most of the time we remain busy in training and I can remember we even played a game on Eid. When away from home, oftentimes there is no special food to celebrate Eid for most of the players.

Habibul Bashar



Restrictions due to Covid-19 had led to muted festivities on Eid across the country in the last two years. However, this time around, Eid-ul-Fitr is expected to be marked with full festivity as the country is all set to celebrate the occasion with a long holiday. How are the athletes planning to celebrate Eid this year? The Daily Star Sports talked with different sports personalities and during the candid chats, their childhood memories, feelings surrounding the festival and regrets for having to spend many Eids miles away from their families came up.



The many shades of Eid

MAZHAR UDDIN

The Bangladesh national cricket team members will enjoy the Eid vacation this year with their family members. In a time when cricketers remain extremely busy throughout the year with home or away tours and global events, getting to enjoy Eid festivities with near and dear ones are increasingly rare.

Even if at home, not in the midst of a gruelling series, Eid has changed its nature for cricketers, like most other professional sporting individuals. Habibul Bashar, former captain of the national team and currently a selector, finds it extremely difficult celebrating Eid away from home, with no special food on the menu adding to his agony.

"Eid means spending time with family and friends, wearing new clothes and having all sorts of special food on that day. The celebration of Eid during the childhood days was different, but things have changed as we have grown older. I didn't get the opportunity to celebrate Eid when on tours abroad during my playing days. Same happens these days too, now that I'm a selector and often tour with the team," Bashar told The Daily Star.

However, the 49-year-old also shared a funny memory of Eid while touring with the Bangladesh team as a selector during the ICC World Cup campaign in 2019.

"It was during the 2019 World Cup in England and the team was supposed to offer Eid prayers. The media personnel were curious to know which mosque the team was going to go to, but we were



reluctant to reveal that. Luckily there were four Eid jamaats taking place at four separate locations in London, and we bluffed the media successfully. It was like a hide and seek game, which we won in the end," Bashar recalled.

While the times may have changed for everyone, but one thing that has remained the same for pacer Taskin Ahmed is collecting Eid salami.

"We all used to wait for the Eid days to get salami from the elders," Taskin said. "The festive mood and the joy of Eid is something very special to all of us. I am a father now yet I don't miss the opportunity to receive my Eid salami from my parents." Although Taskin is happy to be spending this Eid with his family and friends, the 27-year-old feels celebrating Eid away from home and with the members of the national team is not that bad either.

"Last Eid, we were in Zimbabwe and Mahmudullah Riyad bhai led us in the Eid prayers at our hotel. It is a different feeling celebrating Eid with teammates. My team is my second family and we all have fond memories of celebrating Eid away from home," Taskin said.

Left-arm spinner Taijul Islam, on the other hand, revealed his fond memories of buying new clothes for Eid and also his love for shemai.

"Nowadays things have changed much compared to how we used to celebrate Eid in the past. I remember in my childhood days, I used to be fascinated by new clothes. I wouldn't show my new clothes to anyone and only revealed them on Eid day. I even used to change clothes almost every hour on that day. Remembering those days makes me laugh," Taijul said. "I love having shemai on Eid days and this is something I never miss, whether I am at home or abroad."

'Everyone becomes a cricket expert during Eid'



2015 was the first time when I was away from my family during Eid. I saw my seniors were enjoying the occasion but I was very sad. The night before Eid, I didn't feel like going anywhere but I reminded myself that this sacrifice is part of my job.



ASHFAQ UL MUSHFIQ

Eid is a festival that bestows many a welcome break from their everyday hustle and bustle as they immerse themselves in celebrating the occasion with their loved ones. The experience is no different for the captain of the Bangladesh women's cricket team although, on a lighter note, the in-depth analysis of the game doesn't fail to surround Nigar Sultana Joty even during the Eid days.

"From family members to relatives, everyone becomes a cricket expert during Eid!" Joty could not help but laugh as she began sharing her Eid related experiences with The Daily Star.

"Ever since my elder sister got married, I had a lot of household duties to fulfil. During Eid, I usually wake up early to help my father and brother prepare for their prayer. Then I try to cook some dishes with my mother and serve the guests when they visit our home.

"Many relatives from Dhaka and my hometown gather at our place and, when I'm home, the discussion is all about cricket. Everyone throws their opinions and suggestions at me like serious cricket analysts!"

Having led the Tigresses through an impressive maiden World Cup campaign in New Zealand recently this year, the cricketer from Mymensingh is thoroughly stoked at the prospect of celebrating Eid properly after two years as the Covid-19 pandemic situation has improved considerably.

"I think this year, I can celebrate Eid wholeheartedly with my entire family. The last two years were very difficult as my relatives couldn't gather together due to lockdown protocols. Also, this Eid is very special for me because I could shop for the whole family from abroad," a delighted Bangladesh skipper said.

Being a professional cricketer, Joty had to spend Eid vacation away from her

family on multiple occasions. The 24-year-old recollected the bittersweet memories overseas and was grateful to her teammates for having made those occasions memorable.

"2015 was the first time when I was away from my family during Eid. I saw my seniors were enjoying the occasion but I was very sad. The night before Eid, I didn't feel like going anywhere but I reminded myself that this sacrifice is part of my job.

"But [Fargana Hoque] Pinky apa and Ritu Moni stood by me and tried to uplift my mood since I was very young at that time. The next morning they got up really early and bought a rice cooker from somewhere and cooked

Shemai [a traditional dessert, also known as Vermicelli] and noodles for me.

When I woke up, I was very surprised upon seeing their gesture," she recalled.

The skipper also mentioned that the cricket board president had sent 'Salami' to all female cricketers during Eid ul Adha of 2019 while they were playing away from home.

Joty considers Eid's excitement during childhood to be a lot different as preparations for the festival used to begin three or four days ahead. However, spending good times with her family and friends is what she would prioritise this time. "I haven't made any special plans yet for this Eid. I used to listen to music and watch television shows all day back in the past. I think I will go out with my friends in the evening, although I don't like crowded places much."



'My Eid starts soon after I reach home'

ANISUR RAHMAN

"Having offered prayer at the mosque in the morning, I could not have sweetmeats like semai, payes or firni. Instead, I had usual breakfast at the hotel," Bangladesh national football team striker Nabib Newaj Jibon recalled with anguish the memories of the Eid that he had to spend away from home while on tour to Laos for the first leg of the 2022 FIFA World Cup and 2023 AFC Asian Cup Preliminary Joint Qualification in June 2019.

Jibon later came to know that a couple of his teammates had the opportunity to have those sweetmeats at the mosque after the prayer and that only deepened his grief.

The lanky forward had also craved the closeness of friends and family in Laos and could relate to the gloom and despair of the expatriate Bangladeshis who have to celebrate Eid away from home and family. However, Jibon would soon forget everything when Bangladesh beat Laos 1-0 the day after.

"I talked with my family members after the Eid prayer but I still felt lonely. As professional footballers, we were all focused on the training on Eid and the crucial match against Laos. And the win over Laos the next day helped me forget about it all," said Jibon.

Jibon, even before he made a name for himself as a professional footballer, was well-known in his neighbourhood. And the striker, unlike many athletes, cherishes the part of Eid when he is

adored by the fans.

"I always got respect from neighbours but since I have been playing for the national team and Abahani, the scenario has changed slightly. Now, I am being captured by fans' selfies after Eid namaz. The people are also showing more respect than before and it makes me really happy. I enjoy these moments during Eid," said the 31-year-old footballer.

Jibon, who hails from Shibganj in Bogura, also hopes to have a longer Eid vacation.

"To be honest, my Eid starts soon after I reach home from Dhaka," Jibon said.

"It is a totally different world for me in my village because there I have no need for scheduled training, having routine meals, or playing competitive matches. So, to me, Eid has always been like an opportunity to get together with my family members, relatives, friends and fans."

But even spending Eid in the country is not all fun and games for Jibon. After a miserable experience in 2019, this time the striker will take the train from Dhaka to Syedpur and then travel another 130 kilometers to reach his hometown Bogura.

"In 2019, I initially bought bus tickets but it was delayed for a few hours and I had to hire a private car to travel to Bogura from Dhaka. But that journey was really miserable as it took nearly 24 hours to reach home due to the heavy traffic," Jibon said as he wondered when such long tailback on highways will come to an end during Eid.

Minds on duty, hearts left at home

SABBIR HOSSAIN

More often than not, the professional commitment denies Bangladesh athletes the possibility to savour the festive occasions with their family or beloved ones. Although the national cricketers are assumed to be the ones who mostly have to spend Eid away from home, it is not uncommon for the players from other disciplines as well. Weightlifter Mabia Akter Simanta and archer Diya Siddique have experienced staying abroad on Eid, and both of them had a tough time in recollecting any fond memories on such occasions.

"I was out of Bangladesh in 2018, but Eid did not feel like Eid. I took a new dress to put on for the occasion but did not feel like it as I missed my father. Then I realized the importance of being with family members," recollected Mabia, with whom archer Diya resonates.

"Last year, I had to partake in the Tokyo Olympics during Eid, and it was pretty much colourless as everybody went there to play. Over video call, I got in touch with my family members, and that was it," Diya said. Mabia, a gold medal winner in 2016 South Asian Games, went through hardships in her early days, after which the success had transformed her life's landscape.

"When I was a kid, I was content with what my father had bought for me, but now I can buy almost anything I want. Still, I miss going to market with my father before Eid during Ramadan," Mabia said as she moved on to share

an Eid-related anecdote that she finds amusing. "I don't know whether it can be described as a funny experience or not, that I have to buy clothes at higher prices during Eid festivals. The shopkeepers are like, 'Apu, you have the ability, so why won't you give us?'"

"For example, I end up buying a dress with 2500 taka, which can be bought for 2000 taka," added Mabia, who has been



practising hard of late to regain fitness since coronavirus-induced lockdowns had seized much time away from her.

On the bright side, the pandemic brought some positives for the weightlifter as she could be with her family during Eid.

"I got to prepare well enough before Eid and during lockdowns because ever since my career started 12 years back, I never had that much scope to be with my family. Now, I am in the camp for the Commonwealth Games, starting next July, and focusing more on my training,"

she informed.

Diya, who became an Olympian in 2021 in Tokyo, also concentrates more on training, than planning for Eid, as she is scheduled to head for Iraq to participate in a tournament in next month's first week. "I won't be able to go home to celebrate the occasion with my family members. I have a trial just before Eid and will leave Bangladesh for Iraq to take



part in the 2022 Asia Cup World Ranking Tournament Stage 2."

Diya tries her best to keep her chin up when tours happen to overlap festivals. However, she is one of many who reckon that Eid's charm is not quite the same as it was during childhood.

"I try to entertain myself and stay happy and smiling while away. But Eid in childhood was too much fun, and those moments cannot be replaced by any other means," said the teenager, who clinched silver in the Archery World Cup last year to create history for Bangladesh.