



Bidya Sinha Saha Mim



Sushama Sarker



Bappy Chowdhury



Tamalika Karmakar

PHOTOS: COLLECTED

## Devotion, reflection and lost childhood: Stars share Durga Puja plans

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SHAH ALAM SHAZU

On the auspicious occasion of this year's Sharadiya Durga Puja, the biggest religious festival of the Hindu community brings not only the usual excitement and joy but also moments of reflection, nostalgia, and celebration with loved ones. As celebrities prepare for the festivities, many are taking a step back to reminisce about cherished memories, while others are embracing quieter celebrations.

Popular actress Bidya Sinha Saha Mim, who usually travels during the Puja holidays, is staying in Dhaka this year. “I'll be in Dhaka during the Puja break this year, spending time with my family,” Mim said.

Durga Puja holds a special place in her heart. “Honestly, Durga Puja is always something I look forward to. Like everyone, I wait for it all year. And now, here it is again. Wishing everyone a happy Puja. May joy and happiness come into everyone's lives.”

Adorning herself in new styles is an essential part of Mim's Puja celebration, and this year is no different. “For Puja, I

always wear sharees. This year, I received many pieces of sharees as gifts. I'll definitely be wearing one, maybe two.”

Reflecting on last year, Mim shared, “I went to Cumilla and celebrated the holidays with my in-laws. We had a wonderful time.” However, when it comes to childhood Puja memories, her heart belongs to her hometown of Rajshahi. “Both my paternal and maternal homes are in Rajshahi. The real joy of Puja was always there. Those memories are unmatched. Every Puja, they come rushing back to me,” she said.

Another popular actress, Tamalika Karmakar, who has been living in the United States for several years, admits that she misses the festive spirit of Puja in Bangladesh. The award-winning actress has a deep connection to Durga Puja.

“Puja is synonymous with joy. It's always something special. And if it's Durga Puja, the excitement is even greater. I'm thrilled about the upcoming celebrations,” she shared from across the globe.

However, distance has made her

reflect on what she misses most. “During Puja, I think of my family, friends, and all the loved ones I left behind in my home country. I miss celebrating Puja in Bangladesh, and I miss my family,” Tamalika shared.

When asked what she wishes for during Puja, Tamalika responded warmly: “My only wish is for everyone to have a happy and prosperous life. I hope all the negativity in life disappears.” Her childhood memories of Puja mirror many others'. “The best memories of Puja are from my childhood. Back then, there were no worries, just pure joy. My parents would buy me new clothes, and I would wear them and run around the neighbourhood. Those were carefree times,” she reminisced.

“I just want everyone to be able to celebrate Puja joyfully. That's my only wish,” she added with a smile.

Actor Bappy Chowdhury, known for his joyous participation in Puja each year, is facing a different kind of celebration this time. It will be his first Durga Puja without his mother. “Puja has always been about joy for me. But this year, my heart is heavy. I'll miss my

mother terribly,” Bappy said, reflecting on her absence.

“The first Durga Puja without my mother... It's hard to believe she's no longer with me. I miss her every day, but during Puja, the feeling is much more intense. It's as if I'm constantly thinking about her,” Bappy shared emotionally.

In past years, Bappy's Puja celebrations were always filled with family memories. This year, though, it will feel different. “I'll still be celebrating with my family, but it will be a very different experience without her.” Bappy plans to visit Narsingdi, his hometown, on Nabami to spend time with his relatives. “My mother's relatives live there, and I know I'll miss her even more when I'm there.”

On Dashami, he will be in Narayanganj, where he grew up. “That's where my home is. I'll be spending time with my family and the local community during the celebrations,” Bappy added.

Sushama Sarker, who recently completed shooting *Protima*, a one-hour drama for Durga Puja that will air on BTV, is also spending her holidays

in Dhaka this year. “I played the lead role in *Protima*. It's a Puja special drama, and the story is really good. I thoroughly enjoyed working on it,” she shared, excited about her new project.

For Sushama, Puja is a time of great joy, though there is a bittersweet note this year as her daughter is currently abroad. “Puja is always a joyful time, especially Durga Puja. I expect it to be wonderful this year too, but it would have been even better if my daughter were here with me.”

Like many others, her childhood memories are filled with the thrill of Puja. “My home is in Dhamrai, and my maternal home is in Mirzapur, Tangail. As a child, I used to visit my maternal home during the Puja holidays. We'd take a boat to visit the Puja pandals, and those memories are still vivid today. We had so much fun,” the actress recalled.

As Puja approaches, Sushama, like many others, finds herself searching for the nostalgia of lost childhoods. “Durga Puja only comes once a year, and I still find myself waiting for it eagerly. I'm always looking for those childhood days of carefree joy.”

## NEWS

### A community scourged by child marriage

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happening to my body. I was so scared.” She recalls the trauma of such an early pregnancy and the complications during delivery.

“My little boy Shaown is struggling with a severe fever and persistent cough. I feel trapped; I can't take him to the hospital because people judge us and yell at us in public. Due to the ignorance, fear of public exposure and questionable safety of our children, they suffer from serious health issues, and we're left without proper treatment. The financial burden only deepens our pain.”

The economic realities for Shiba's family are stark. Her husband, Bimal, 30, is an auto-rickshaw driver, earning a meagre Tk 200 per day.

“He believes it's time to find a bride for our son Shadhin,” Shiba said, pointing to the harsh reality of child marriage within the community.

Shiba's mother explains that her daughter's early marriage was the only way out: “With no land, food, or a stable income, how could we survive?”

“We all live together because we lack adequate housing. With few opportunities for employment, begging becomes our only means of survival and that too is uncertain. Marrying off the girls while they are young is seen as the best way to shield them from gender-based violence.”

Echoing Shiba's experiences is 25-year-old Jayanti Mondol, who was married off at 11.

A mother of two, Jayanti highlighted the dual threats of harassment both at home and outside. She spoke about how her body, after the birth of her first child, was broken down and she was faced with menstrual issues and pain in her reproductive area.

“We face dangers from both within our community and outside of it. As outsiders abuse us, early marriages are often justified as a means of protection.”

Jayanti, too, is now confronted with the pressure of arranging a marriage for her eight-year-old daughter.

Shiba and Jayanti's families live

together.

In one small house, 11 family members share a space barely large enough for a few. Privacy is a luxury these families cannot afford, leaving young girls vulnerable to abuse.

“Social stigma, extreme poverty, and a lack of education perpetuates child marriage in our community,” Jayanti said, adding that boys are pushed into early employment and subsequently, into marriage as a rite of passage, which in turn precipitates the marriage of young girls.

Bhaduri Mondol, 35, has experienced another dark side of the crisis. Married as a child bride – so young she can only remember playing in frocks – Bhaduri became a widow and was quickly married off again to a 70-year-old man. “It was supposedly for my protection,” she says softly, her eyes downcast.

The cycle continues with each generation.

Chayna Mondol, 45, married at 14, now has a 19-year-old son with his 16-year-old wife and five-year-old child. Her 14-year-old son is already married to a 10-year-old girl.

“When the sons start working, we look for girls within our caste for them to marry.”

The minimum age for girls to marry in Bangladesh – 18 – does not seem to apply to the Kaiputra community.

Breaking the Silence, an NGO working for child rights, reported 126 Kaiputra families with a total population of 594 in Alipur Union, with 143 girls and 154 boys under 18 – many already married off or at risk of early marriage.

Md Sariful Islam, programme manager of the organisation, highlighted that the main livelihood of the community – raising pigs – results in social ostracisation, limiting their access to social events, education, and services.

He said that due to low social acceptance and limited education, many in the community feel pressured to marry off their daughters early, believing that these girls have few opportunities for meaningful employment. This perception

has persisted for over a century, as societal norms reinforce the belief that girls lack a future outside the home.

“Safety concerns and societal insults increase their vulnerability. Economic struggles, limited awareness of government programmes, and a lack of basic facilities leave them marginalised and insecure, leading many to marry off their daughters early out of fear for their future.”

This correspondent interviewed 20 girls and women of the community and found that almost every one of them was married off at 10 or 11.

Fatema Johra, programme officer of the office of the deputy director at the Department of Women Affairs in Satkhira, said, “The lack of interest in education is the most common reason for their early marriage. They aren't aware that as a result of child marriage, becoming a mother at a young age is becoming a burden for them. And because they aren't able to work, their poverty is further increased.”

“We conduct regular awareness programmes for the prevention of child marriage. We recently recommended an initiative to provide rice for 24 months to families who do not engage in child marriage. ...Steps will also be taken to ensure the girls of the community can study regularly in neighbouring schools.”

Md Abdur Rouf, chairman of Alipur Union, said if they get any report, they try their best to stop any incident of child marriage with whatever resources and staffers they have, and with the help of NGOs.

“We continuously try to encourage them to hold marriages after 18 years of age. But they end up going to other unions to secretly conduct the marriage, so it's difficult for us to detect all the cases.”

“Meanwhile, the parents are completely unaware of the physical challenges these young girls face due to child marriage, which further leads the families towards socio-economic damage.”

### 50 down with dengue

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on-campus waterbodies have dried up and become breeding grounds, littered with trash, making the problem worse

“I contracted dengue while staying in the dormitory. Poor waste management and stagnant water around our dorm may be the reason for the rise in dengue cases,” said Mahmudul Hasan, a student of the zoology department and a resident of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Hall.

However, Dr Kabirul Bashar, a professor of zoology and a renowned entomologist, said, “Aedes mosquitoes are the primary carriers of dengue fever. We haven't found Aedes mosquitoes at Jahangirnagar University yet. Most infected students likely contracted dengue in the capital city. We will be speaking with

them to confirm their whereabouts during the time of infection and will also check for the presence of Aedes mosquitoes on campus again.”

Meanwhile, students have complained about the university administration's ineffective measures to control the mosquito problem, saying that the campus remains unclean, with stagnant water in ditches, drainage canals, near bathrooms, and toilets, providing breeding grounds for mosquitoes.

They also said mosquito infestation is worsening due to the irregular spraying of insecticides.

In response, Deputy Registrar Abdur Rahman of the estate department said university staffers were regularly spraying insecticides around drains and dormitories to eliminate mosquito larvae.

### Landowner's son killed

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had entered a contract with the developer company to build the nine-storey building. As per the contract, Sultan is supposed to get five flats.

The company handed over two flats in 2023, but delayed the handover of the remaining units despite having completed the building construction.

He said the developer company recently asked him to carry out the remaining work in a flat on the seventh floor at their own expenses, although the company was supposed to do it. “We started the work yesterday [Wednesday], but a group of staffers of the company barred us from continuing the work.”

Sultan said when the workers resumed the work under the supervision of his son, some 30 men, including staffers of the developer company, beat him up and his son around 10:00am yesterday.

He said that an attacker grabbed his son by the throat.

Tanjeel, who was critically injured in the attack, was rushed to Monowara Hospital, where doctors pronounced him dead later.

“My son was killed in a planned way. I want justice,” Sultan said.

Quoting Sultan, OC Saiful said as per the agreement with the developer

company, Sultan was supposed to get the flat on the seventh floor, but the company handed it over to a deputy director of the Department of Narcotics Control.

He said that engineer Latif hired the goons. Legal action will be taken against those found involved, he added.

Nur-e-Alam, caretaker of the building named Pleasant Jheel Arcade, said there had been a dispute over the ownership of three flats on the seventh floor.

A group of people, including Latif, reached the site on a vehicle around 9:30am yesterday. When the work started inside the flat on the seventh floor, they barred the workers, beat up Tanjeel and his father, and carried out vandalism inside the flat, he said.

Mahmuda Begum Lubna, Tanjeel's aunt, accused the developer company of hiring outsiders to kill him.

The Daily Star could not contact the property developer over the phone for comments.

Morgue sources at the Dhaka Medical College said a fracture in Tanjeel's left leg and injury marks on his hands and head were found during an autopsy.

OC Saiful said the filing of a casewas underway.

### Bangladeshi killed

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Saiful Islam of Shahporir Dwip said six boats were carried to the Myanmar waters due to strong sea currents when fishing in the Bay of Bengal estuary within Bangladeshi waters.

Around 2:30pm on Wednesday, the Myanmar Navy spotted the boats sailing in their territory and opened fire on the fishermen without warning, leaving Osman killed on the spot. Later, they detained over 50 fishermen, he added.

### Song at Ctg puja mandap

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assistant general secretary of Chattogram Puja Ujapan Parishad, for permission to sing some patriotic songs,” he said.

“In good faith, Sajal gave them permission. But they then sang an Islamic song,” he added.

Apurba Jahangir, deputy press secretary to the chief adviser, wrote on Facebook that he arrived at the spot after 8:00pm and saw organisers of the puja announce on stage that Sajal Dutta was expelled from the Puja Ujapan Parishad.

Qadaruddin Shishir, fact check editor at AFP in Bangladesh, wrote on Facebook that people who are saying the viral clip is fake or edited are wrong.

He added that Sajal Dutta invited a local cultural organisation. “A source informed that the organisation is of pro-Jamaat cultural activists.”

A correspondent of this newspaper saw a group of locals chanting slogans denouncing the puja organisers at JM Sen Hall amid heavy presence of law enforcers.

Selim Jaman, president of Chattogram Cultural Academy, told reporters that the singers went there because they were invited by Sajal Dutta. The two songs they performed are about harmony. “Some people are spreading an edited video to circulate misinformation.”

Meanwhile, Sadek Abdullah, publicity secretary of Chhatra Shibir, issued a statement, saying that his organisation had nothing to do with the incident.

“We demand formation of an impartial probe body to find out the real reason behind the incident,” it said.

### No alternative to free, fair elections

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Shaheed Jehad, we must work together to restore democracy and protect the country's independence and sovereignty.”

In his Facebook page, Tarique yesterday shared a message on Durga Puja with a photograph of people from different religious communities.

“One's political affiliation, belief,

or religion is personal, but the state belongs to all, and everyone has the right to security,” he said.

Reflecting on the core ideals of the Liberation War, Tarique said, “The essence of the war was rooted in equality, human dignity, and social justice. Irrespective of religion, ethnicity, or ideology, freedom fighters sacrificed countless lives so that every

citizen could freely enjoy their religious, political, cultural, and social rights. During that time, distinctions between Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, and Christian were irrelevant.”

He also rejected the idea of dividing people into religious or ethnic majorities and minorities, asserting that such distinctions have no place in a free and independent Bangladesh.