

Ilish fiesta

It was already cloudy when we started early in the morning for a launch ride over the mighty Padma. The unpredictable weather was an impending threat, and our only concern was whether a Kalboishakhi will brew out of nowhere and throw a damper on our day out.

It was some 18 odd years ago, but I still remember my excitement. Unlike most of my fellow passengers on the launch that day, I loved rough waters and gripping boat rides on them; it gave me a total exhilarating freedom that come what may, either I live or I drown, I would savour the moment.

I have gone for such rides in the Bay of Bengal too, but those are stories for another day.

For now, I will cut short the bumpy, rough waves and heavy current of Padma in the month of Baishakh and take you straight through the confluence of canals and small rivers, to the safety of the Ichamati River where, after our exciting



ride, we had our lunch on small dinghy boats.

Needless to say, lunch was fresh hilsa or ilish in Bengali, fried in mustard oil, and piping steamed rice. That was surreal for city folk like me, and till date, my best ilish experience.

We Bengalis love our ilish to the point



of worshipping. My trusted fishmonger of some 24 years is always selling me the best catch at the best price; at least that is what he believes and I, at times, beg to differ. He did prove me wrong and gave me two pairs of big, fat ilish recently. I was over the moon and instantly decided to share my good fortune with my girlfriends and asked just two of them (for reasons of social distancing) over to lunch, and for the first time, tried my hand at making my first ilish polao.

I know it's odd that I have never tried to cook ilish polao till date, thinking it was very difficult, a dish with elaborate procedure, and that only mothers could cook it best. Anyway, I called mum and took her recipe and followed it to the tee for once, and voila!

The ilish polao was good, and certified

by my friend who is very hard to please, and a harsh critic when it comes to our traditional Bengali dishes.

Ilish is an oily fish stuffed with omega-3 goodies and there are some 50 odd ways to cook the fish, according to Wikipedia. However, there are a few ilish preparations that are very popular in our country; ilish paturi for one — where the fish steak is rubbed only in mustard oil and a hint of turmeric and chilli powder, and mixed in onions and slit green chilli and baked or steamed in young banana leaves. Besides the curry sauces prepared with mustard seed paste, curd, or eggplant are all out of this world.

By the way, ilish roe is also popular as a side dish. At Mawa Ghat, you would also find a unique bhorta of the fish head and gills — nothing of the fish is left out.



In many Bengali Hindu families, a pair of ilish fishes are bought on auspicious days, for example, for special prayers or puja days like for the Hindu Goddess Durga, without which the Puja is sometimes thought to be incomplete. Thanks to stringent measures taken by the government, the supply of hilsa in the market has been overflowing, allowing the once expensive fish to be well within people's reach.

So, during this puja, let us celebrate our Bengali heritage with our national love, the ilish, and at the same time, saying no to catching the young ilish or the jatkas and giving them time to mature.

— RBR

Photo: LS Archive/ Sazzad Ibne Sayed

HOROSCOPE



ARIES (MAR. 21-APR. 20)

Ask your friends for assistance. Arrange your thoughts. Take precautions while traveling. Your lucky day this week will be Tuesday.



TAURUS (APR. 21-MAY 21)

Discuss your future plans. Avoid situations that can hamper your reputation. Channel your energy into physical work. Your lucky day this week will be Thursday.



GEMINI (MAY 22-JUN. 21)

Think twice before entering a costly venture. Control your temper. Avoid making promises. Your lucky day this week will be Friday.



CANCER (JUN. 22-JUL. 22)

Only take on what you can handle. Avoid spending on luxuries. Restrictions can prove to be difficult. Your lucky day this week will be Sunday.



LEO (JUL. 23-AUG. 22)

Enlist co-workers to finish pending projects. Help those less fortunate. Your feelings will be all over the place. Your lucky day this week will be Monday.



VIRGO (AUG. 23-SEP. 23)

Your partner can get on your nerves. Don't let situations get out of hand. Don't overextend yourself. Your lucky day this week will be Wednesday.



LIBRA (SEP. 24-OCT. 23)

Get involved in groups. Your boss can be pushy. Business trips will be productive. Your lucky day this week will be Saturday.



SCORPIO (OCT. 24-NOV. 21)

Make money on creative ventures. Use your charm to get your own way. Consider all options before deciding. Your lucky day this week will be Thursday.



SAGITTARIUS (NOV. 22-DEC. 21)

Make changes at home. Find work to take care of excess energy. Communication will be your best bet. Your lucky day this week will be Sunday.



CAPRICORN (DEC. 22-JAN. 20)

You will make new friends this week. Abrupt changes at work are likely. Avoid getting into other people's problems. Your lucky day this week will be Saturday.



AQUARIUS (JAN. 21-FEB. 19)

Find time for friends. Self-improvement could bring amazing results. Stand by your partner. Your lucky day this week will be Sunday.



PISCES (FEB. 20-MAR. 20)

Observe more and meddle less. Put all your cards on the table. Career changes will be favourable. Your lucky day this week will be Saturday.