



BOISHAKH
BY SHAH KAT OSMAN

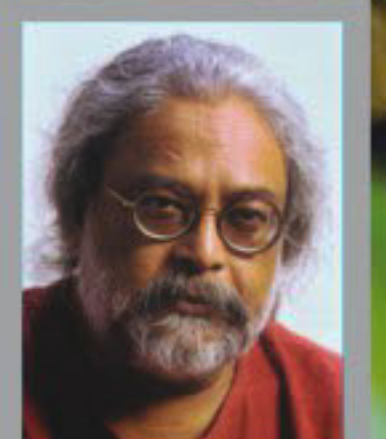
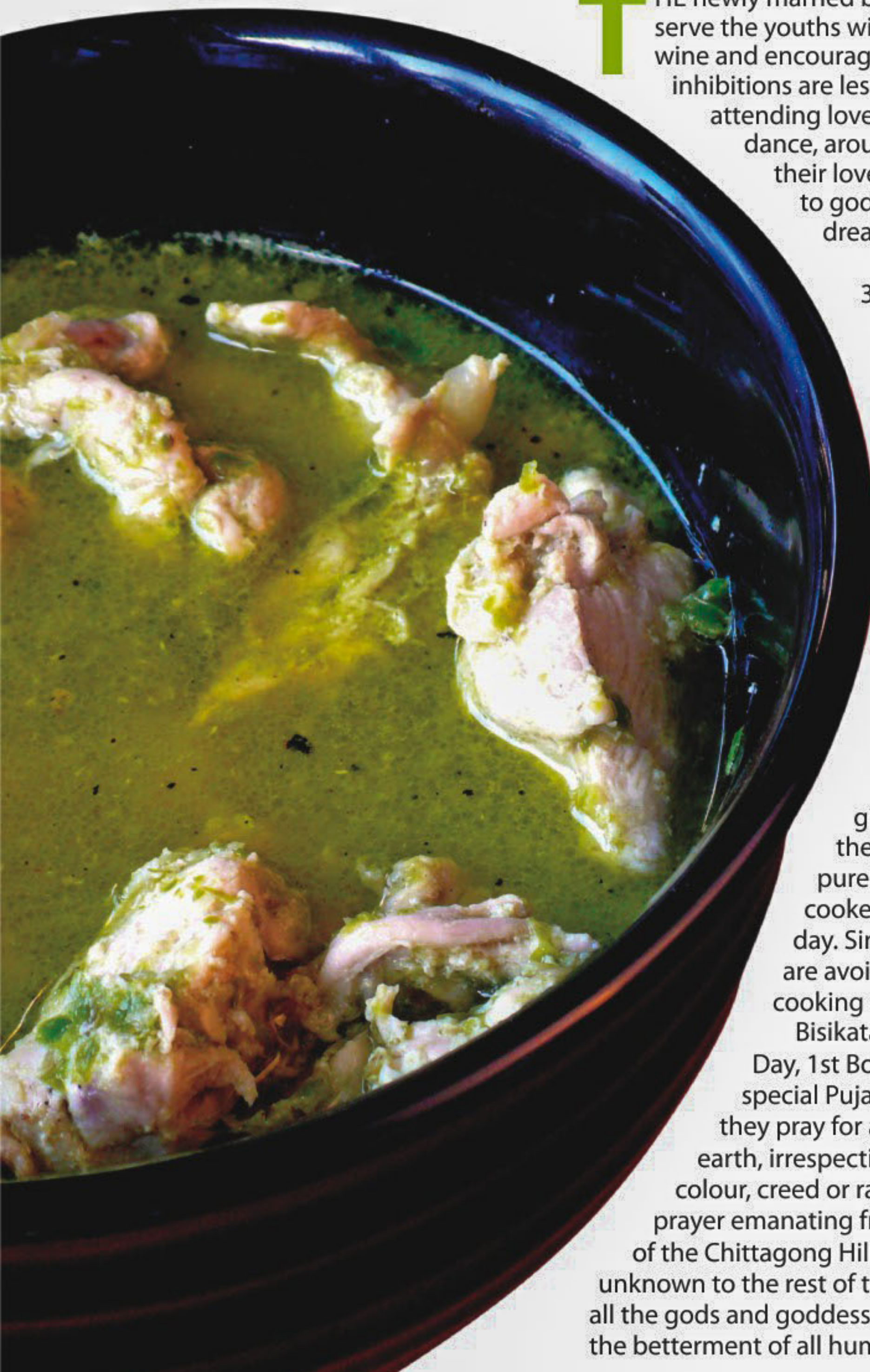


PHOTO: SAZZAD IBNE SAYED



PHOTO: RIDWAN ADID RUPON

Boishabi Celebrations



THE newly married brides of the tribe serve the youths with homemade rice wine and encouragements. As the inhibitions are lessened, and the attending lovers break into a "Garia" dance, around a bonfire; seeking their loved ones and wishing to god Gorja to fulfill their dreams.

The new year's eve, 31st Chaitra, and the second day of Boishabi, known as "Beechuma", is a day to bid farewell to the year, and it's a day of self-sacrifice and self-restraint. Thus by showing respect to the plant and animal kingdom the tribal people spend the day in humility and pious thinking.

On this day they give alms to the needy, the day's meals are purely vegetarian and cooked on the previous day. Since all forms of work are avoided, consequently cooking also is kept on hold. Bisikatal or the New Year's Day, 1st Boishak, starts with a special Puja at the crack of dawn, they pray for all the people on earth, irrespective of nationality, colour, creed or race. This is a universal prayer emanating from the tiny corners of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, literally unknown to the rest of the world, calling on all the gods and goddesses in the heavens for the betterment of all humanity.

The youths of the tribe, first bathes their elders with freshly drawn water and then they start the water festival: "Jol-Khayli"; water is the symbol of purity, so every youth symbolically cleanses each other by splashing fresh water on each other. Every member of the tribe participates in this joyous activity with Jol-Khayli signifies a clean and beautiful life in the New Year which has just begun.

High quality rice wine, specially brewed for the occasion, and non-veg food is called for on Bisikali Day, no visitor can leave without his fill, it is considered inauspicious to let anyone go hungry. The mistress of the house, happily treats guests with wine, fish and meat preparations.

The following menu is for this day's festivity. If you want to add desert just serve some local fruits, and should include the finger size banana: chini champa kola.

PACHON

On Beechuma the second day of the Boishabi festival, the food is totally vegetarian, as killing and hunting is prohibited on this day. Pachon is cooked with five (pach) local vegetables, it may be any five of these: broad or green beans (sheem), shimul flower, tara fig flower, banana flower, banana plant's pith, sajna (drumsticks), sajna flower, wild arum, cassava, tender cane vine, pearl aubergine, chalta (elephant plum), radish, pumpkin, ash gourd, bottle gourd, snake gourd, green plantain, wild water cress, plus numerous plants and vines known only to them.

For your pachon you can choose any five of locally available vegetable, but make sure one of them is a leafy vegetable (spinach), one with a sweet taste (pumpkin, sweet potato), one with a creamy consistency (aubergine), one pulpy (gourd) and one earthy (potato).

Ingredients:
1 kg mixed vegetables
50g raw turmeric, paste
100g green chilli

1 tsp panch phoron
3 tbsp ghee
3 tsp salt
2 tsp mustard paste
1 cup mung daal, soaked overnight, drained before use

Method:
Boil the green chillies in a small amount of



water into the stem and grind the chilli into a smooth paste. Prepare the vegetables as per your choice and tradition. Mix the prepared vegetables with: chilli paste, raw turmeric paste, mustard paste, daal and salt. Place the mixture into a pot and cook until tender. Switch off the flame. In a saucepan heat the ghee to a smoking point, take off the pan from the flame and dash in the panch phoron. As soon as the seeds stop sizzling pour this over the cooked vegetable and cover. Stand for 5 minutes and stir before serving.

DHAROSH KHOLA

The tribal hills of Chittagong were known as Karpos Mahal, the tribes that inhabit these regions, nearly half of the population belong to the Mongoloid race, one third belongs to the Marma or Tripura race, the rest in smaller number are of various clans of indigenous people living in the hills since antiquity, and they are: Murang, Teng-Hanga, Khumi, Lusai, Pankhu, Vhom, Mog, Kuki and Reng.

The process and style of cooking among the Karpos Mahal people are similar to the cooking process and style of the plains people, but still dissimilar, due to the use of certain ingredients, not available in the plains.

The most important difference comes with the use of "Nappi", in almost all their cooking. Nappi is made by fermenting small sweet water fish with rice husk and yeast. The resulting gooey mess are then dried and formed into soft cakes. They literally stay forever. It will be difficult to get Nappi outside of Karpos Mahal, so the best substitute can be "Thai Fish Sauce" – which is made in the same process as Nappi, only in the Thai Fish Sauce the strained liquid of the petrified fish is used. They smell and taste very similar, and can be substituted for each other.

Two more interesting flavouring agent of the Aadibasi's are: Saba Rang, which can be substituted with Lemon Grass (also a Karpos Mahal native), and Sara Long, can be substituted with Lemon Basil or Thai Basil (another Karpos Mahal native). Shutki is the fermented fish with a very strong flavour, it's a

your favourite ingredient.

"Dharosh Khola" is an okra recipe contributed by Jayati Chakma of Rangamati.

Ingredients:
2 cups water
1/8 tsp turmeric powder
1 tsp salt
10 green chillies, chopped
1 tbsp shrimp shutki
2 tbsp Saba long/cilantro, chopped
5 garlic cloves, crushed
250g okra

Method:
Soak the shutki in warm water to cover, for 10 minutes, drain and set aside. Heat water in a degchi/pot, toss in: green chilli, garlic, saba long/cilantro, turmeric, shutki, 1 tsp salt. Bring to a boil, and cook for 10 minutes. While the water is boiling, rinse the okra, pat dry and slice diagonally into 1 cm thick rings. Add the okra to the boiling spice, stir once, and cook undisturbed for 10 minutes. Cover with a lid, and again cook undisturbed for a further 5 minutes. Take degchi/pot off the flame, uncover, stir once and leave uncovered (covering it at this point will discolor the okra). Serve at room temperature.

KOCHI SAWSHA KHOLA

Recipe contributed by Jayati Chakma

Ingredients:
2 cups water
3 very tender cucumbers
3 tbsp shrimp shutki
10 green chillies, slit
5 garlic cloves, crushed
1/2 tsp turmeric powder
1 tsp salt

Method:
Soak the shutki in warm water to cover, for 10 minutes, drain and set aside. Heat water in a degchi/pot, put in green chilli, garlic, turmeric, shutki, salt. Bring to a boil. Cook for 10 minutes. While the water is boiling, rinse the cucumber (do not peel), pat dry and slice it lengthwise into two, and then chop them diagonally into 5 cm thick pieces. After the water has boiled for 10

minutes, chuck in the cucumber pieces. Pouch for 2 minutes and take degchi/pot off the flame. Serve with hot rice at room temperature.

SHEEM TOON

Choom morich is the green chilli commonly used by the tribal people; it is the hottest chilli in Bangladesh. Because of its tiny size, 5 – 7 mm, it is also called Dhainna (paddy grain) morich. Chakmas call their salon: 'toon', so a sheem toon, is a broad bean salon.

Recipe contributed by Jayati Chakma.

Ingredients:
1 tbsp soya oil
10 garlic cloves, crushed
2 red onions, chopped
2 tsp salt
1/8 tsp turmeric powder
10 choom morich or 15 green chillies, paste
1/2 cup Saba long/cilantro, chopped
200 g chhuri shutki, rinsed and chopped
1/2 kg Broad Beans (sheem), trimmed

Method:
Soak shutki in warm water for 10 minutes, drain before use. Heat oil in korai/wok; toss in: onion, salt, green chilli, shutki, garlic, turmeric and saba long/cilantro. Sauté stirring for 2 minutes. Add broad beans and 1 cup water. Mix up and bring to boil. Cook stirring frequently until sheem is tender.

KHURBO

Chicken in Chakma Vaj is called "khur", and meat is known as "awra". The Grey Fowl of Karpos Mahal along with the Red Fowl of the Khasia Hills (Sylhet) are considered by the scientific community as the progenitor of all the chicken species that we see today all over the world.

Selective breeding with these two fowl species have created the myriad forms of modern day chicken strains, so much so that it is difficult to believe that all these fowls came from just these two chicken species of Bangladesh.

The process of selective breeding started in ancient times to raise "fighting cocks", an obsession among the hilly population, which spread all the way to Indo-China.

Because of the long and ancient association of the Aadibashis with the chicken, it is no wonder that they have some of the oldest recipes of chicken. These dishes are still cooked and admired; I have selected these recipes to represent their chicken kingdom. All the Aadibasi dishes are simple to cook and mind blowing tasty; it is a marvel that such incredible taste can be produced with such minimum amount of spices.

KURA TOON

Chicken is also called 'kura', an influence of the Chittagonian dialect on the Chagma Vaj. Toon is their term for salon.

Recipe contributed by Jayati Chakma of Rangamati.

Ingredients:
1 country chicken, skinned
1 tbsp mustard oil
1 tsp ginger paste
2 tsp garlic paste
20 green chillies
2 tsp salt

Method:
Cut chicken into 32 small pieces. In a degchi/pot combine: chicken, oil, ginger, garlic, green chilli, salt and 2 cups water. Set pot over a flame and bring to a boil. Cook until chicken is tender. Take pot off the flame. With the underside of a ladle, crush the green chillies against the side of the degchi/pot. Stir vigorously to integrate the chilli paste with the gravy. Mix up and re-heat before serving.

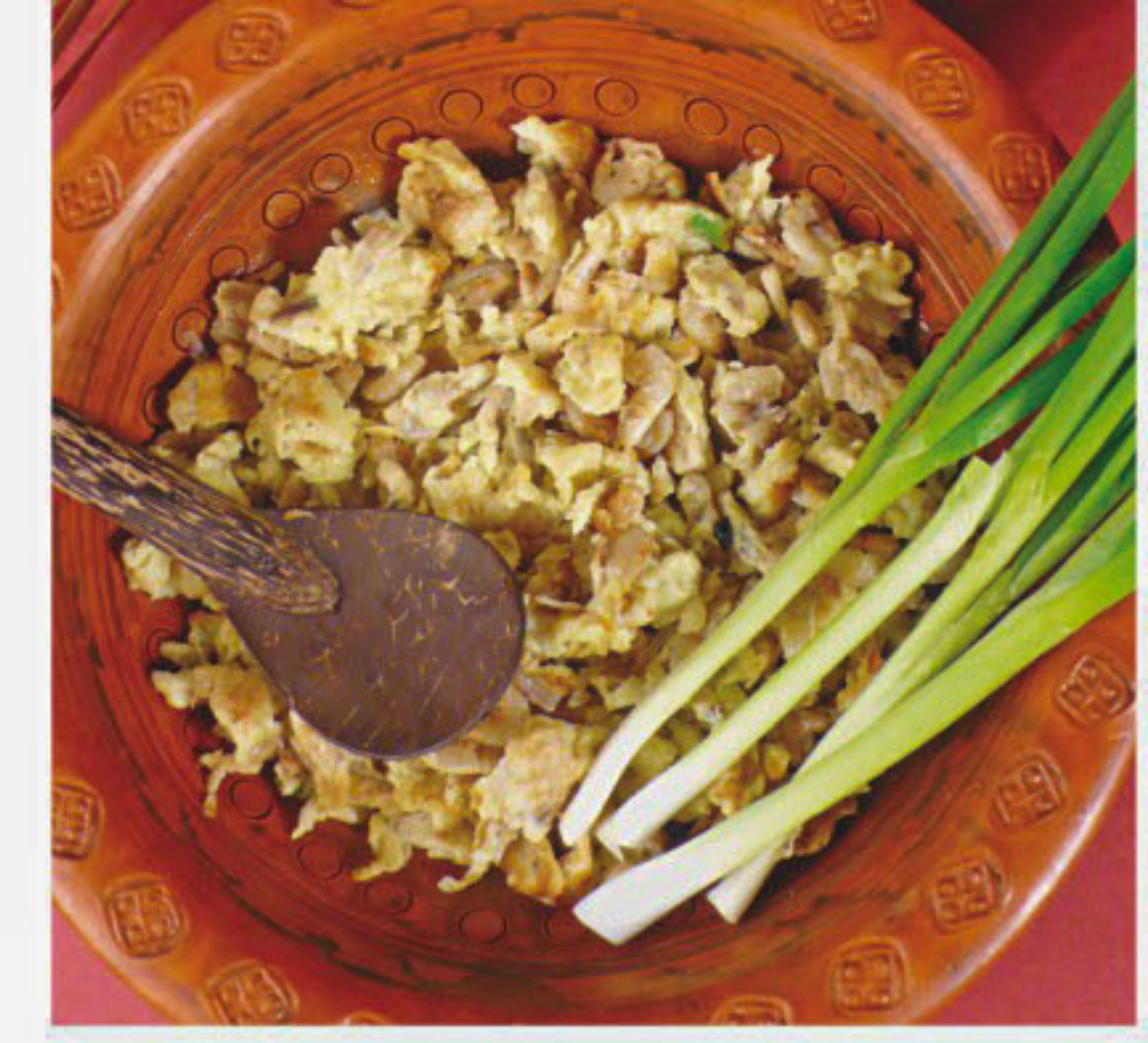


Photo: Rukhsara Osman