

# Curry life

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Living the dream

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fire for lack of diversity



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## Outdoor dining: Here to stay?

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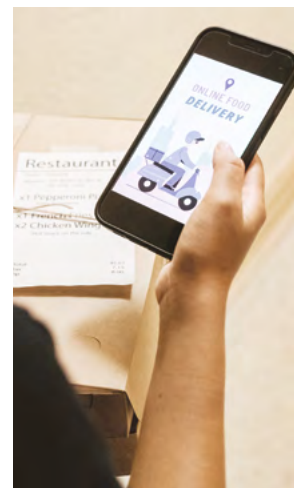
The Madhu's brand may have been established 40 years ago, but it continues to innovate and push the boundaries in Indian cuisine and catering. Director Arjun Anand and creative chef Poonam Bell explain why

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# Curry life

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# **E**ditorial

## **Government initiative shows woeful lack of diversity**

Last month, the government announced the establishment of The Hospitality Council, spear-headed by business minister Paul Scully (see our story on page 5. Made up of members drawn from the hospitality industry, the Council will identify measures aimed at helping England's pubs, restaurants and cafés to thrive post-pandemic.

On paper it sounds like a promising initiative, particularly now that the furlough scheme, which protected millions of jobs during the pandemic, has come to an end. Here at Curry Life, however, we are disappointed and dismayed to see that no representative from the curry/Indian/Bangladeshi restaurant industry has been included as a council member or consulted about the initiative.

The curry sector is worth more than £5bln to the UK economy. Business minister Paul Scully has made no secret about his love of curry, regularly tweeting about his support for the industry. And yet when the industry needs government support the most, there is none forthcoming. We urge Minister Scully to do more to represent the curry industry's interests and we are also disappointed by the choice of council members, many of whom are from big, corporate food businesses. The Council was announced as Curry Life went to press, but we

are now seeking answers from the business minister, questioning the Council's lack of diversity and we hope to report on progress in the next issue. We are also interested in finding out the views of our readers regarding the Council and the lack of representation so please have your say by contacting us at [info@currylife.uk](mailto:info@currylife.uk)

The initiative has also been criticised by the British Takeaway Campaign (BTC) for not adequately representing the interests of smaller, independent takeaways and restaurants, with the BTC saying that 'the nation's takeaways have been snubbed' by the Council appointments. Even more worrying, the BTC wrote to the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy twice to make the case for small businesses needing greater representation on the Council, but ministers and officials failed to reply on both occasions.

Separately, the takeaway industry too is under the spotlight, with the BTC saying the sector needs further support. It says consumers could end up paying £2bln more for takeaways, unless VAT on hospitality is frozen and it has called on the Government to

introduce five policies to underpin the sector's recovery in the coming months. You can read more about this on page 6.

## **Putting Bengali food on the map**

Masterchef Australia finalist Kishwar Chowdhury won fans the world over with her show- stopping dishes, highlighting her Bangladeshi heritage with Bengali comfort food such as Panta Bhaat - leftover rice soaked in water, and Aloo Bharta (mashed potatoes) on her menu. On page 20, you can read all about her Masterchef journey, and how her family, travels and chefs such as Anthony Bourdain and Yotam Ottolenghi have been her biggest inspirations. On page 51, we pro-file Curry on Naanstop, a start-up that is aiming to take Mumbai street food to the next level. Husband and wife founders Swati and Karthikk Kandala gave up successful careers in science and finance and have not looked back since. Over the last year, they have been busy feeding thousands of festival-goers at various events across the UK and in September, they opened an outlet at Seven Dials market in Covent Garden.



# Move to make outdoor dining permanent

attractions to prosper, made out of town centres livelier and have been enjoyed by millions of us. As part of our vision to transform high streets into thriving places to work, visit and live, we intend to make as many of these measures permanent fixtures of British life as possible.”

The PDR introduced over the past year that is relevant for the hospitality industry and that the government is now consulting on is the right for moveable structures in the grounds of



**Temporary** measures that have given a boost to hospitality during the pandemic could be made permanent, says the government, following a public consultation launched in early September.

So-called permitted development rights (PDRs) allowed people to enjoy al fresco dining as the nation reopened from the pandemic. They also gave businesses and councils a lifeline to operate alongside the right to regenerate and new licensing arrangements.

The government is looking to make

these rights permanent so that people can continue to enjoy outdoor hospitality and local attractions, and businesses can innovate. The consultation means that the public can give their views on the proposed reforms, so they can continue to benefit everyone in the future.

Robert Jenrick, Secretary of State for Housing said: “The simple reforms we made during the pandemic to help hospitality businesses, markets and historic visitor attractions make use of outdoor spaces more easily, made a massive impact. They helped thousands of businesses and

pubs, cafes, restaurants and historic visitor attractions.

In April 2021, moveable structures such as marquees and additional seating were allowed for the first time in the grounds of listed buildings, helping support the important hospitality and tourism sectors. This has helped businesses increase capacity as they reopened, and the government is now seeking views on making this permanent. The consultation, which is open until mid-November, does not cover alfresco dining on streets, however.

# Hospitality Council comes under fire for lack of diversity



**The newly-launched** Hospitality Sector Council, made up of industry experts to help England's pubs, restaurants and cafés to thrive post-pandemic, has been criticised for its lack of diversity and representation for small businesses.

The Council and its members were unveiled on 29 September, with a statement from business minister Paul Scully saying: "With the launch of this council, we're taking the next step in the journey to build back better from the pandemic by unveiling the experts who'll be driving the reopening, recovery and resilience of the sector. It's a real 'Avengers Assemble' moment for the industry."

The Council is co-chaired by Paul Scully and hospitality entrepreneur and chair of Prezzo Karen Jones. Other council members include UK Hospitality CEO Kate Nicholls, Emma



Minister Paul Scully MP

McClarkin of the British Beer and Pub Association, Nando's UK & Ireland chief executive Colin Hill, Greene King chief executive Nick MacKenzie, Starbucks UK general manager Alex Rayner and Mowgli street food founder Nisha Katona.

The British Takeaway Campaign (BTC) (whose members include

Curry Life magazine and the Bangladeshi Caterers Association) says that the nation's takeaways have been 'snubbed by the Hospitality Council Appointments'. It says it is 'deeply disappointed to see the lack of diversity and representation for small businesses among the Hospitality Council members. The Council membership is overwhelmingly focused on big, corporate chains, with little regard for the huge variety of cuisines, ethnically diverse entrepreneurs and independent business owners who make up the sector beyond London.'

Andrew Crook, vice chair of the BTC added: "The government is clearly not interested in the views and experiences of small, independent businesses. This Council is London-centric, big-business focused and seems to have been put together with very little consideration for the hundreds of thousands of hard-working, independent businesses who fought to survive the pandemic and served their communities throughout."

Syed Nahas Pasha, editor-in-chief of Curry Life magazine said: "Paul Scully has been known as the 'Minister of Curry' for many years, so we are devastated by his failure to serve the curry industry's interests and those of thousands of small, independent curry houses, at this critical time. We are looking to open a dialogue with the Minister and look forward to receiving his feedback."

The BTC says the takeaway sector contributed £7.7 billion in value to the UK economy during 2020. Small businesses form the backbone of the industry, with over 70% of takeaways employing fewer than 10 staff.

# Cost of takeaways could soar in coming months

Consumers could end up paying £2b more for takeaways, unless VAT on hospitality is frozen, according to the British Takeaway Campaign (BTC).

**VAT** on hospitality is set to increase to 12.5% in October, and then rise further to 20% in March next year. With the sector facing labour shortages and with post-Brexit challenges on imports continuing, restaurants are worried that they'll be forced to pass on those costs to the consumer, or risk closure and axing jobs.

The BTC, an umbrella group which represents those involved in the supply and preparation of the takeaway foods, says the sector needs further support and has called on the government to introduce five policies to underpin the sector's recovery in the coming months. The BTC's 'five-point plan' includes the following:



## Scrap the VAT increase in March 2022 and freeze VAT at 12.5% permanently

Businesses will already struggle to accommodate the 12.5% increase and the BTC says a further increase in the new year could be the death knell for many. Burdened by excessive pandemic debts and a lack of staff, to survive, many businesses may need to increase their prices, making them less competitive in an already challenging market.

## Extend Business Rates relief until the end of 2022

The business rates holiday has been one of the most effective support measures for the hospitality sector, with hundreds of thousands of businesses benefiting from the 100% relief during the last 18 months. Extending the relief while the outcome of the Business Rates Review is implemented would allow small businesses ample time to survive the turbulence of the coming months and properly prepare for a fresh start.

## Introduce a Commonwealth Common Good' visa

The BTC says it agrees with the Government with regards to upskilling the domestic workforce and making the hospitality sector a more appealing career, however, this will take decades to achieve. Restaurants need staff now, not in 2030, so the Government must introduce a visa for people from Commonwealth countries to come and work in the UK quickly and easily, plugging a gap in the labour market that needs filling.

## Grants Extension into 2022

The BTC says that many small businesses struggled to access the grants scheme introduced during the pandemic and found that councils were providing funding inconsistently and irregularly. Those that managed to get a grant will have used it up by now as the roadmap to unlocking was extended, especially those in quieter areas, where footfall has failed to recover. A new or revised grant scheme could be delivered through central government - much like Eat Out to Help Out - to ensure support is targeted to where it is most needed and delivered quickly, supporting businesses while they acclimatize to the post-pandemic economy.



## Extend the Kickstart Scheme and make it easier for small businesses to take part

The BTC is asking for the Kickstart scheme to be extended beyond December to allow the smallest, independent restaurants to make the most of the scheme as the sector recovers and jumpstart the development of new talent to plug the labour shortage in the sector.

Ibrahim Dogus, BTC chair, said: "Takeaway restaurants added £7.2billion in value to the UK economy in 2020. Raising VAT while thousands of them struggle to get

the ingredients they need and can barely find the staff to work in their kitchen is a real kick in the teeth.

"The Government must use the upcoming budget to protect our restaurants, not slap them down with costs they can't afford. Without support, restaurants will be forced to pass the costs onto the consumer if they want to survive, meaning millions of families could end up paying more for their favourite curry, pizza or pho."

# Bangladesh Caterers Association to celebrate Diamond Anniversary and return of awards



From l-r Forhad Hussain Tipu, M A Munim, Saidur Rahman Bipul and Mitu Chowdhury

## The Bangladesh

Caterers Association (BCA) will be celebrating 60 years of service this year and has also revealed that its BCA Awards night will return in November.

The announcement was made at a press conference held at the Zaika restaurant in London in September, with BCA President M A Munim, Secretary General Mitu Chowdhury, caterers Oli Khan MBE, Kamal Yaqub, Saidur Rahman Bipul, Forhad Hussain Tipu, Jamal Uddin Mokoddos and Chef Atiqur Rahman in attendance.

The BCA Awards night, now in its 15th year, will be held on 7 November at the Intercontinental London - the O2. The Awards recognize the achievements of outstanding restaurants and talented chefs, who have the flair to create exceptional curries, with categories including Britain's best 'Curry House' and 'Chef of the Year'. The BCA says that this year's event will be even more special, with the awards coinciding with the association's Diamond Year.

The anniversary celebrations will highlight the BCA's contribution to

Britain's hospitality and catering sector over the last 60 years. The BCA has continuously campaigned for its members on pressing issues, including the shortage of skilled chefs, reducing VAT and business rates, and finding solutions via apprenticeships schemes.

BCA President, M.A.Munim said: "We are incredibly proud to be holding our 15th year of Awards in our 60th year. This is a very special time for us as an organization, considering everything our industry and members have faced over the last year. BCA will continue to ensure that this dynamic sector continues to innovate and evolve."

At the height of the pandemic, BCA members distributed a quarter of a million much-needed free meals to the NHS, care homes for the elderly and other key front line workers, and also offered heavily discounted meals to the NHS at 50 per cent.

Shaun Goode of Kingfisher



Samson Sohail of Cobra



Oli Khan MBE



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# Shopping mall planned for BRICK LANE



**Plans** to build a five-storey complex with a shopping centre and corporate office space in Brick Lane have been given the green light, despite fierce opposition from local residents and businesses.

At a Tower Hamlets Development Committee meeting held on 14 September, councillors passed the planning application by two votes to one. Up until 2 September, 82 letters of support for the plans had been submitted, versus 7,476 letters of objection. The plans would involve converting the existing Old Truman Brewery site, which at present houses many small businesses, into a mixed-used site featuring office space, retail and restaurants.

Those objecting to the scheme said the plans would result in a shopping mall-type structure. They say this would be detrimental to the local Bangladeshi community, having a negative impact on the area's identity, and would result in smaller businesses being forced out of the area, due to rising rents.

Saif Osmani, co-founder of Bengali East End Heritage Society, which forms part of the Save Brick Lane Coalition said: "The decision to 'rubber stamp' gentrification leads to social cleansing. Inevitably the embedded local communities like the British-Bangladeshi community would be most affected. The Coalition spent months collecting signatures from the homes and estates around Brick Lane, meeting

young families in their 20s and 30s who were bringing their own families up but had seen no improvements to their local area. Where are these opportunities that planning and development promises?"

The Bengali East End Heritage Society has taken legal advice and is looking at the options available to challenge the Development Committee's decision.

"We would like the future plans for the Truman Brewery site to include a mixture of truly affordable homes for local people and families," added Osmani. "Successive previous master plans have said that this is possible and remains an important social need."

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# KBE Drinks Introduces Peacock Lychee & Lime Cider

**KBE Drinks**, the premium world beer and cider company, has announced a new flavour for Peacock, its award-winning cider brand. Peacock Lychee & Lime is the first-ever lychee flavoured cider into the UK market and contains sweet lychees which are perfectly balanced by zesty lime to refresh the palate, even after the spiciest of

curries. KBE is also delighted to announce that 25p from the sale of every bottle will be donated to charity partners Hospitality Health, Hospitality Action and Only a Pavement Away.

Peacock was first launched

back in 2016, the original two flavours were Apple and Mango & Lime. It was specifically crafted to partner the exotic flavours of Asian cuisine. As a result, the brand has already been embraced by many trendsetting restaurant groups, such as Dishoom and Masala Zone, but is quickly gaining wider popularity. To support the launch of Peacock Lychee and Lime, KBE Drinks will be promoting the charity link-up via consumer PR, heavyweight social media and further supported by Asian food bloggers and influencers.

John Price, head of marketing of KBE Drinks, comments, "It has obviously been an extremely challenging last eighteen months or so for the hospitality industry, so we are delighted to team up with some of our charity partners on this launch and hopefully be making a significant donation to them. During lockdown UK consumers have been embracing new flavours and the lychee is growing in popularity, in part thanks to the Lychee Martini, so along with the current growth in popularity of fruit ciders in general, we are confident it will be well received by consumers."

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# Taste of Nawab toasts 25 years of business with local MP



The Taste of Nawab team with MP Theresa Villiers



Abdul Rahman and Theresa Villiers MP

**Muswell Hill**-based restaurant Taste of Nawab recently celebrated 25 years of business, and marked its milestone anniversary with a visit from Chipping Barnet MP Theresa Villiers.

*Curry Life* editor-in-chief Syed Nahas Pasha was also present at the occasion, held at the end of August. Established in 1996 by Abdul Rahman, the restaurant's reputation is renowned within the local community and beyond, having won numerous awards. Over the years, Taste of Nawab has also participated in many charitable events, including fundraising for Anthony Nolan Bone Marrow Trust and Save the Children. Its most successful charitable event was organising a charity night for the Breast Cancer campaign, Rett Syndrome and supporting local schools.

A statement on the restaurant's Facebook page said: "We would like to take this opportunity to express our deepest gratitude to all our

customers, and make it known to them that they have made us what we are today. We sincerely value the opinions of our customers, and can honestly say that they have contributed to the high standards we set ourselves.

.Thank you to our customers for supporting us over the last 25 years, we couldn't have done it without you all! We thank you for continuing to choose Taste of Nawab as your go-to Indian and Bengali restaurant."

The menu features chef's recommendations such as 'Shotkora' curry, cooked with Bangladeshi lime and 'Takore', cooked with mustard seeds, alongside a range of Bengali specialities. These include 'Hallim', pieces of chicken or lamb cooked with a thick lentil- based special garam masala, whole coriander, whole cumin, fresh mint and lime juice and 'Tilapia Fish', with a fillet of fish cooked with a special citrus sauce and special spices.

Following her visit, Theresa Villiers said:"It has been an honour to attend the Taste of Nawab's 25th anniversary celebrations. It is important for any MP to keep in touch with local businesses and I am delighted to have been able to be part of this very special anniversary."

"It was great to meet the staff of Abdul's restaurant, and get the chance to taste their wonderful food. They all gave me a very warm welcome. I congratulated Abdul and his team for creating such a thriving and successful business."

Taste of Nawab was also featured in a *New York Times* article in April last year, which focused on efforts from businesses and consumers to help those most in need during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic. Taste of Nawab provided free food to local residents over the age of 70.



*Customers brought champagne to congratulate Abdul Rahman*



*Theresa Villiers MP with the team and Curry Life editor-in-chief Syed Nahas Pasha (front left)*



*Taste of Nawab has a varied menu*



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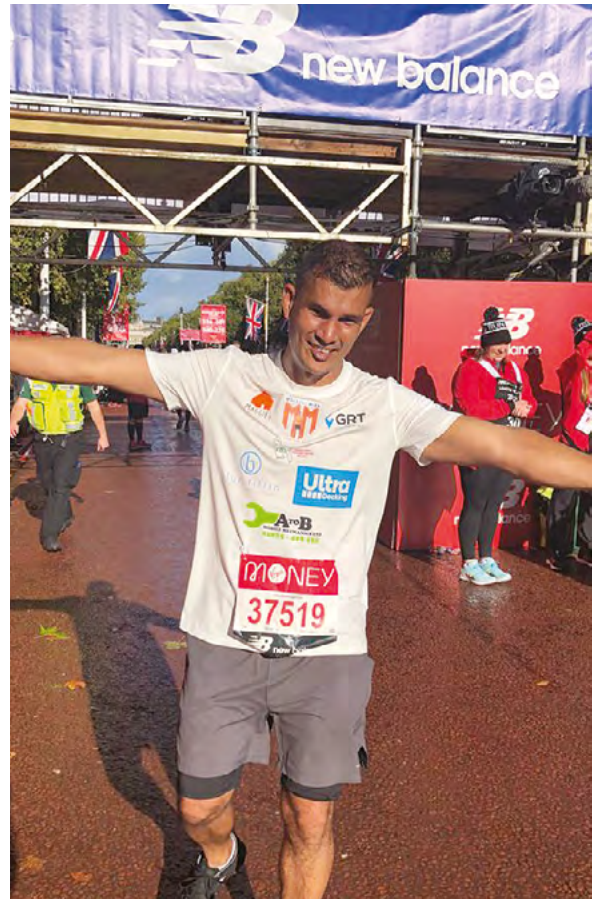
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# RESTAURANT OWNER COMPLETES LONDON MARATHON

Mofozul Miah, owner of Warrington-based restaurant Bombay 8 achieved a life-long ambition when he completed the London Marathon 2021, the world's biggest marathon.

Normally held in April, the event was rescheduled to 3 October, owing to the Covid-19 pandemic. Miah ran the 26.2 mile course in 4 hours and 52 Minutes 06 seconds and set himself a target of raising £5,000 for charity. He had raised £8,000 when he finished the run.

"I took on the challenge to help raise much-needed funds for three charitable causes, including Maggie's Cancer, GRT and to help build homes for vulnerable people in Bangladesh," said Miah.

More than 40,000 competitors took part in this year's event, running a route in Blackheath and finishes on The Mall.

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# Curry Life Awards return in style



**The Curry** Life Awards 2021 took place earlier this month in spectacular style, after last year's event was cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Restaurateurs, chefs and experts from the curry industry and beyond gathered together on 10 October at the Royal Lancaster London hotel for an evening of networking, entertainment, fine food and above all, celebrating the achievements of the industry.

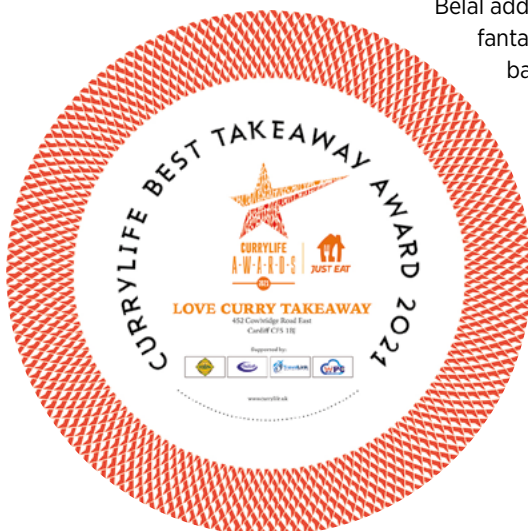
The awards, which were chaired by Channel 4 news presenter Jon Snow, and supported by headline sponsor Just Eat, were given out in various categories, including Best Restaurant, Editor's Choice, Best Chef, Best Bengali Food Restaurant and Best Supplier of the Year.

Commenting on the Awards, Syed Belal Ahmed, editor of Curry Life said: "Many congratulations to all this year's winners. The Curry Life Awards remain the curry industry's highest benchmark in terms of excellence awards. Expert professionals and their peers judge each entrant."

The event was also a time to remember those who have passed away in the last year during the pandemic, with the Curry Life Awards brochure containing a special editorial to these 'Fallen Heroes'.

Belal added: "While it is a fantastic feeling to be back with the Curry Life Awards 2021, it is also a very emotional time. Many prominent industry gurus sadly passed away during the pandemic. We will never

forget their sacrifices and excellent work, and we also stand by those friends and colleagues within our industry who are still suffering from the effects of long Covid." Check out the next issue of Curry Life for information on all the winners of this year's Awards. With the Awards proving once again to be a hugely popular event in the curry industry calendar, the Curry Life Group is already looking forward to planning the 2022 event. Next year will also see the launch of the World Food Life Awards, which celebrate diverse cuisine across the UK. From Western to Eastern, to Oriental and from Middle Eastern to African, the Awards will showcase the best achievements in a range of categories. Email [info@worldfoodawards.co.uk](mailto:info@worldfoodawards.co.uk) for further information.



# Living the dream

**Pantha bhat** (fermented rice), aloo bharta (spiced mash potato) and khashirrezala (goat meat curry) are just some of the traditional Bengali dishes that wowed television audiences this year. Prepared by Masterchef Australia contestant Kishwar Chowdhury, who placed third in the cooking competition, the dishes were both a celebration of her Bengali heritage and her love of the cuisine.

For those unfamiliar with the television series *Masterchef Australia* (which is different to the UK version), 24 competitors are selected following auditions. They then take part in various tasks over a number of weeks until three remain in the grand finale, undertaking three challenges over two nights. The winner is decided by the most points scored for their dishes and stands to win a grand prize of AUS \$250,000, with the runner up winning AUS \$30,000 and the third-placed contestant AUS \$20,000. The latest series, which featured Chowdhury, aired over several months, from April to July.

Melbourne-based Chowdhury, who owns a printing business with her husband, has been cooking for as long as she can remember. One of her earliest memories is of baking with her mother, while she also recalls marking festivals and family occasions with meals around the table, with her father rustling up hearty dishes. Her desire to bring Bangladeshi culture and cooking under the spotlight stems from her heritage.

**Masterchef Australia contestant Kishwar Chowdhury tells *CURRY LIFE* about her ambition to bring Bengali food and culture to the masses**



**“My upbringing was very traditional, like many migrant families we really held on to our culture and food through arts and language,” recalls Chowdhury. “My mother was from India and my father from Bangladesh [where he was a freedom fighter], both were well-travelled, with my mother having visited Burma (now Myanmar), Pakistan and Afghanistan. “We had a lot of different foods on our table and for me, cooking was a creative passion.”**

Chowdhury moved from Melbourne to London in 2007 to study at university and took the opportunity to travel around Europe, before heading to Bangladesh in 2010 to set up her printing business.

“When I was a young adult, travelling and living on my own, I pared down what I cooked and ate more simply,” she explains. “I found beauty and simplicity in cooking for myself and became more technical with my food and explored new flavours with my travels. My move to Bangladesh had a massive influence on my cooking. Living in Asia changed my food philosophy completely and made me aware of seasonality. If something was not in season, it was not available, and when it was, people would eat that fish or that vegetable. What seemed like a hindrance instead became a revelation and it was an important lesson.”

### Industry influences

During her time away from Australia, Chowdhury cites chefs such as Anthony Bourdain and Yotam Ottolenghi as huge influences, and she emulated the latter’s cooking while in Bangladesh.

“Ottolenghi is all about those Middle Eastern ingredients, such as pulses and grains and I could easily find these ingredients in Bangladesh,” she says. “There were other interesting vegetables and it was an opportunity to learn about plant-based food. From a young age, I loved watching Anthony Bourdain, who went into uncharted territories, as well as Poh Ling Yeow [a former *Masterchef Australia* contestant]. She brought so much diversity to our screens and it was fantastic to see a role model like Poh embracing her heritage.”

Chowdhury returned to Melbourne in 2015 and continued ▶

with the family printing business while raising a young family. But she says she struggled to reconcile her upbringing with her heritage, and felt a desire to reconnect with Bengali culture, which led her to eventually apply for Masterchef Australia.

“My parents had worked hard to hold on to their identity and I struggled with being born and brought up in Australia and being Bengali as well,” she says. “I felt that I really needed to pass down everything they had taught me - my parents were very hands-on where food was concerned.”

Chowdhury believes representation played its part too, as she says there is not really much said about Bengalis, Bangladesh or east Indian practices, instead, it all tends to get wrapped up in Indian culture and forgotten about.

“When I was growing up, no one here knew where Bangladesh was until the cricket team started winning,” she says. “It is important for someone like me to be visible, so my children can also be seen and not be embarrassed. As my son was growing older, he was happy to take bao to school for example, but less keen to take Bengali food. It comes down to representation.”

## Pursuing her passion

Chowdhury's son prompted her to enter *Masterchef Australia*, an experience she describes as ‘very spur of the moment’.

**“I didn’t expect to get in but when I got there [to the auditions] and they asked me what my background was, I said if there was one thing I feel passionate about it’s that Bangladeshi food is not really ‘seen’ and deserves more,” she says.**

Chowdhury describes the Masterchef experience as a ‘magical place’, one that is very competitive, where you are not just cooking under time pressure but trying to stand out amongst 23 amazing cooks in the same room.

“There are very long hours and you have to dig deep and open yourself up and be vulnerable,” says Chowdhury. “You also have to always be in exam mode, you have to be ready to go, whether it’s sweet or savoury or pastry, you have to get dishes prepared and be ready to cook. It’s competitive, it’s tough and a lot of pressure but extremely exhilarating. Taking part has given me a new fire in my belly.”

The experience, adds Chowdhury, taught her where her strengths lie - she admits that like many other families, she cooks a lot of everything and anything.

“I always knew Bengali food was fantastic and I love it but it’s about being open and vulnerable - you are on international television, cooking something you know is great but you don’t really see it in a restaurant, it’s not something that is known and seen in public,” she says. “Most of the time, I was doing something for the very first time on an international platform; when the judges ate it and appreciated it, this gave me the confidence to keep doing it and to back myself and say: ‘this is my food dream, it starts now’.”

Once *Masterchef Australia* aired, Chowdhury's Bengali dishes had millions of hits on the web and her creations were shared online by many more people, which she says goes to show that there is a place for the cuisine. The dishes she created were a combination of what her parents taught her and different cooking techniques learnt from her own experience, which helped to elevate dishes or add a twist.

“Having to cook dishes in 75 minutes was a challenge, it’s about trying to stay authentic while adopting many new techniques,” she says. “If there was



something we would marinade in the tandoor, I would smoke it first with a wood apple chip finish on a hibachi or in the oven, so the flavours are punchy.”

## Onwards and upwards

Since Masterchef Australia finished in July, Chowdhury has not looked back. As soon as the show finished, she started training with Michelin-star chef Masahiko Yomoda at Ishizuka, which offers fine dining with French/Japanese Kaiseki degustation menus. Chowdhury described her time there as a ‘fantastic experience’. This has since led to a collaboration with Adam D’Sylva’s modern Indian restaurant Tonka, based in Melbourne, where she released a selection of her own dishes. These included ‘Kishwar’s Charred Corn



*Kishwar during the show*

Chaat' and 'Kishwar's Veal Osso Bucco Rezala'. With the restaurant booked out for much of August with diners keen to taste the menu, Chowdhury says it was 'desperately disappointing' when Melbourne went into lockdown, forcing the restaurant to close.

**“We had one service on the night of my launch, then Melbourne went into lockdown,” she recalls. “It was very traumatic, we had worked for weeks**

**to perfect the menu and there was a huge response, with the whole event booked out every single night in August.”**

Chowdhury adapted quickly to the fast-changing situation, with the food available instead for home delivery and stocked in supermarkets.

It comes as no surprise then that at present, Chowdhury has no plans to return to the family printing business. She wants to use the momentum from the show and her experience

gained to start a conversation about the importance of sharing identity and food. In the near future, Chowdhury is looking to produce a cookbook that reflects her roots and her experiences to date, and which honours the cuisine of her ancestors. It's an idea she referred to often on the television show; having learnt her craft from her mother and her grandmother, she is equally keen to pass this knowledge on to her two children.

“I want to incorporate my food influences, places I have travelled to and been inspired by and my Bengali heritage, so I can take readers to those corners of the world,” she says. ▶

# Kishwar Chowdhury's Ruby Chicken Tikka and Ruby Masala and Jewelled Pilaf recipe

## Ingredients

### Ruby Chicken Tikka

- ½ onion
- 3 cloves garlic, peeled
- 3" piece ginger, peeled
- ½ cup Greek yoghurt
- 3 tbsp mustard oil
- 2 cinnamon sticks
- 3 bay leaves
- 2 bird's eye chillies
- 1 tbsp chaat masala
- ½ tsp garam masala
- 1 tsp Kashmiri chilli powder
- 4 skinless chicken thigh fillets

### Ruby Masala

- 1 tbsp grapeseed oil
- ½ onion, sliced
- Reserved marinade
- 2 tsp salt
- ¼ cut reserved onion garlic ginger paste
- 2 tsp tomato puree
- 65g butter
- 1tbsp honey
- Thinly sliced ginger, lime, chillies, pomegranate seeds, to garnish

### Jewelled Pilaf

- 2 cups basmati rice
- 2 ½ cups water
- 2 tbsp ghee
- Pinch saffron threads, bloomed in milk or water
- 2 tbsp dried cranberries
- 2 tbsp cashews, roasted
- 2 tbsp pomegranate seeds
- Pinch of salt



- Prepare coals for hibachi if using
- For the Ruby Chicken Tikka, place onion, garlic and ginger into a small food processor and process to a smooth paste. Combine two tablespoons of the paste with the remaining ingredients, except chicken and mix well
- Transfer half of the mixture into a dish, add the chicken thighs and mix until evenly coated. Set aside for 20 minutes. Reserve the remaining half of the marinade for later use
- Thread onto skewers and sear over hibachi or in a smoking hot grill pan until charred but not cooked through. Remove chicken from the heat and set aside in a bowl
- For the Ruby Masala. Heat a wok over high heat. Add some oil and when hot, add onions, marinade, and salt and cook until onions are soft and the oil splits. Add onion, garlic and ginger paste and tomato puree and sear for two minutes
- Add 1 ½ cups water, bring to a boil then reduce heat to low and simmer for 10 minutes
- Remove chicken from skewers. Add to sauce and cover with a lid. Simmer until chicken has cooked through, about 10 minutes
- Add butter and honey and stir through. Remove from the heat and transfer to a serving bowl and top with garnishes
  - For the Jewelled Pilaf, wash rice then soak in cold water for 20 minutes
    - Drain and place into a rice cooker along with water, ghee and salt and cook until tender
    - When cooked, add bloomed saffron in small pockets in the rice. Serve in small bowls garnished with cranberries, roasted cashews and pomegranate
    - Serve bowls of pilaf and masala on a serving board





# COVID-19 and the Future of Takeaway

**The British Takeaway Campaign (BTC) have studied the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on restaurants and the takeaway sector and looked at how businesses have adapted throughout the pandemic and lockdowns.**

The report is entitled 'COVID-19 and the Future of Takeaway.' And as well as considering the industry's response to the pandemic it looks at the trends and technology that are going to shape its future direction over the coming months.

If you're interested to learn more about the ways in which the pandemic has changed the future of the industry, and how you can prosper from it, it's well worth a read.

# Restaurants and takeaways

## Some of the key findings

Market size risen by

**43%**

over the last 5 years



Expected to grow to over

**£22 billion**

by 2025

Household average  
spend on takeaways

**£45**  
**a month**

in 2020

**53%**

of consumers  
ordered more  
takeaways during  
lockdown

**12%**

**increase**

to

**£15.1**  
**billion**

of total spending  
on takeaways

from 2019 to 2020

**38%**

of households ordered  
takeaway at least once  
a week since the start  
of the pandemic

**32%**

of consumers say they  
will continue to order  
more takeaway once  
lockdown ends



We'll be in the fortunate position of coming out of the pandemic a much stronger business and are looking forward to further growth in the future.

Matthew Bean: Owner, Cantina Carnitas, Hitchin

Scan the QR code to  
read the full report



**JUST EAT**

www.currylife.uk 27



# কভিড ১৯ এবং টেকওয়ের ভবিষ্যত

ব্রিটিশ টেকওয়ে ক্যাম্পেইন (বিটিসি) রেস্টুরেন্ট এবং টেকওয়ে খাতে কভিড ১৯ মহামারীর প্রভাব সম্পর্কে বিশ্লেষণ করে দেখেছে, এই ব্যবসা মহামারী এবং লকডাউনের সঙ্গে খাপ খাইয়ে কিভাবে পরিবর্তিত হয়েছে।

রিপোর্টটির নাম 'COVID-19 and the Future of Takeaway.' মহামারীর সময়ে এই ব্যবসার অবস্থা বিবেচনা করে সাম্প্রতিক প্রবণতা এবং প্রযুক্তির উপর নজর রাখা, যা কিনা সামনের মাসগুলোতে ব্যবসার ভবিষ্যত দিকনির্দেশনা তৈরিতে ভূমিকা রাখছে।

মহামারী কিভাবে এই ব্যবসার ভবিষ্যৎকে পরিবর্তনের পথ দেখিয়েছে সেই বিষয়ে আরো জানতে হলে এবং সেটিকে কাজে লাগিয়ে উন্নতি করতে হলে এই রিপোর্টটি পড়ে দেখা ভাল।

# রেষ্টুরেন্ট এবং টেকওয়েসমূহ কিছু গুরুত্বপূর্ণ ফলাফল

বাজারের চাহিদা বেড়েছে

# 43%

শেষ পাঁচ বছরের তুলনায়

# £

ব্যবসা বাড়বে বলে মনে করা হচ্ছে  
**£22 billion**  
2025 সালের মধ্যে

2020 সালে পরিবার পিছু  
গড়ে টেকওয়ের জন্য

# £45

এক মাসে  
খরচ করেছে

# 53%

ফ্রেতা আরো বেশি  
টেকওয়ে নিয়েছেন  
লকডাউনের সময়ে।

# 12%

বৃদ্ধি ঘটেছে

টেকওয়ের উপর  
মোট খরচের হিসেবে

থেকে

# £15.1 billion

বেড়েছে 2019 থেকে  
2020 সালের মধ্যে

# 38%

পরিবার মহামারীর শুরু  
থেকেই সপ্তাহে অন্তত একটি  
টেকওয়ে অর্ডার করেছে

# 32%

ফ্রেতার বক্তব্য, লকডাউন শেষ  
হয়ে গেলে তারা টেকওয়ে  
অর্ডার সংখ্যা বাড়াতে আগ্রহী



মহামারী এই ব্যবসার ভিত আরও শক্ত করেছে। সেজন্যেই ব্যবসার  
ভবিষ্যত অগ্রগতির দিকে আমরা তাকিয়ে আছি।

ম্যাথু বিন: স্বত্বাধিকারী, ক্যান্টিনা কার্নিটাস, হিটিন

রিপোর্টটি সম্পূর্ণ পড়ার জন্য

QR কোড স্ক্যান করুন





Curry Life sat down with restaurant owner **Brian Mohan Miah** and his son **Ismail**, who run Café Spice in Darlington, a restaurant that recently celebrated its fourteenth anniversary.

**FAMILY**  
*Ties*

*Brian Mohan Miah and Ismail Miah*



at university studying quantity surveying. While I plan on getting more involved in the restaurant, I'd also like to work in property and construction on the side."

## A question of succession

Miah and Ismail are both aware of the 'curry crisis' - succession issues that arise when restaurant owners have nobody to leave their business to once they retire. This has forced many restaurants to ultimately close, causing harm to the industry.

However, Ismail is the exception to this worrying trend; he's happy to inherit the restaurant from his father for multiple reasons. First, despite his young age, Ismail has an entrepreneurial flair, which was immediately apparent when speaking to him. He recognises Café Spice for the successful business it is, and he also knows that he has the knowledge and skills to continue his father's vision.

Secondly, as Miah's son, he doesn't want his father's hard work in building the business to go to waste once he retires. However, Miah plans on running Café Spice for many more years; therefore he is encouraging Ismail to complete his education and follow his own path in the meantime.

"I'm confident I'll pass my degree. I'm working hard for it," says Ismail. "I know that I'll be able to pursue some well-paid jobs once I graduate, but this trade is what I know. I've grown up around restaurants, so I want to carry on in this industry."

"I enjoy my work; I wake up everyday knowing that I'm going to have a good day. I know a lot of people don't enjoy their jobs, but for me it's the complete opposite." He jokes, "Although I can't cook as well as my dad yet."

## Experience counts

Ismail provided his thoughts on the 'curry crisis' and why he's keen not to contribute towards it. "It's a difficult one. If there's a business and there's nobody to pass it down to, restaurant owners can sell it, but do the next owners have as much experience as before? Would they even keep the same cuisine?"

"The best chefs are in the industry right now. My dad, for example, has been cooking most of his life, so if he was to sell the business, would he be selling to someone who understood the recipes as much as he does? The food quality risks going down. Maybe the service isn't as good as it was. All these factors are a huge risk to our industry."

Ismail also pointed to how children from Bangladeshi families who have grown up in the UK may not feel the same attachment to the restaurant trade that

## Cafe Spice Team



their parents or grandparents felt. Instead, they may be more interested in pursuing a career more suited to their skills and personality rather than their heritage.

“Young people have a lot of opportunities today, and they all want to go after those high-paying jobs,” he says. “They may not see running a restaurant in the same way I do. I see it as a very profitable business as well as something important to my family. I wouldn’t like to see the restaurant go anywhere else.”

One way to overcome the problem of young people of Bangladeshi heritage avoiding the restaurant trade could be to train chefs from other backgrounds to cook traditional dishes.

“It’s possible, but it would be a lot of hard work,” says Ismail. “Restaurant owners in our community grow up with these recipes. But it is feasible. Perhaps it’s one way for our industry to carry on.”

### Digital success

While Miah is keen for Ismail to focus on his studies, he still works regular shifts at the restaurant and is gradually taking on more responsibilities from his father. For example, while Miah usually works in the kitchen as head chef, Ismail now takes charge of the front of house.

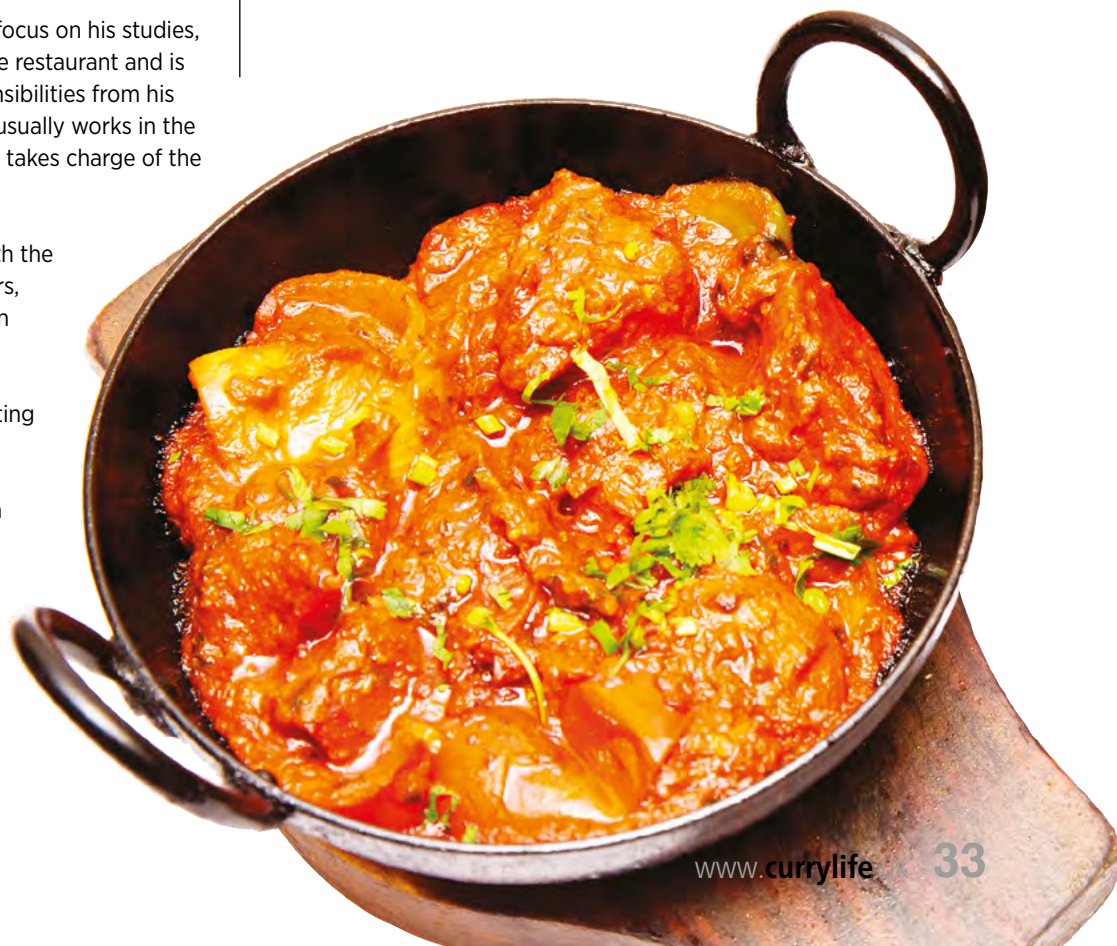
“I’ve built good relationships with the majority of our regular customers, so I’ll be ready to take over when my dad retires,” he says. “He encourages me to do my own thing, but it would be too upsetting to see anything happen to this restaurant. I’ve seen how hard he’s worked to build it up. When it comes to the food, I strongly believe in what we sell; if I

didn’t, I’d just go off and do my own thing. But I take an active interest in the food when I engage with customers.”

The restaurant’s customers are also very loyal. “We’ve had customers move away, but when they return to the country, they come back to us.” Ismail adds, “That’s more than one set of customers too.” Café Spice has also been visited by a few famous faces, from celebrities to politicians. James May has visited twice, as has former Chancellor Sajid Javid.

Miah is proud of how his son has also taken over the restaurant’s digital marketing efforts. Since Ismail has taken over responsibility, the restaurant’s campaigns have gone viral on a few occasions. For one campaign, Ismail hired lookalikes to record videos promoting the restaurant, with some of these including chef Gordon Ramsay and UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson. Café Spice and Miah as the owner, also have a significant following on social media.

Miah believes that these new marketing methods have helped Café Spice bounce back following the pandemic. Both father and son have looked forward to welcoming back their customers for table service and have a positive outlook when it comes to the future, despite the challenges the industry must overcome.





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# The making of

*Arjun Anand and Sanjay Anand*

# Madhu's

Madhu's has built a stellar reputation for Indian cuisine and excellent customer service over the last 40 years. *CURRY LIFE* finds out what's next for the brand

**Opening** a restaurant during the Covid-19 pandemic, when many eateries were forced to close down, would certainly have been seen as a risky proposition. Opening two, however, and other words might come to mind. Yet this is precisely what Madhu's has done. ▶



My father started doing a lot of catering and approached many hotels in the 1980s and managed to secure a contract, becoming the first Asian caterer to land one at a five-star hotel



Having started with a restaurant back in 1980 in Southall, Madhu's is something of an institution in the west London area dubbed 'Little Punjab'. Over the last four decades, alongside this flagship restaurant and one just a few miles away - Madhu's Heathrow, which opened in 2014 within The Sheraton Skyline hotel, the Madhu's brand also has a formidable reputation as a stylish and innovative Asian caterer for banquets and lavish events. It has provided dishes for a number of high-profile guests and prestigious venues, including Prince Charles, Number 10 Downing Street, Windsor Castle and Buckingham Palace, among others.

With catering contributing to the bulk of Madhu's business and with the pandemic putting paid to its close-to-380 events a year, the business experienced a significant decrease in turnover in 2020, going from £12m to £250k. This led Madhu's to explore a

resurgence of the business by investing in restaurants. In early December 2020, it opened one at The Grove Hotel, a five-star property in Watford, followed by another which debuted in The Dilly Hotel in June 2021, a luxury five-star establishment in the heart of London's Mayfair.

"The catering business ground to a halt so we looked at how we could preserve and protect the brand," says Arjun Anand, director at Madhu's and the fourth generation of the family to be involved in the business.

### Innovative approach

Madhu's celebrated its 40th anniversary last year but its history stretches far further. The business' foundations were laid down by Bishan Das Anand in 1935 in Nairobi in Kenya, when he started a catering business and later a hotel. This legacy inspired his grandchildren Sanjay (Arjun's father) and Sanjeev Anand to open Madhu's in Southall in 1980, when they were aged 17 and 16 respectively. The name Madhu's derives from the nickname of their father, Jagdish Kumar Anand. Their mother, Krishna Kumari Anand was also a significant driving force in the success of the flagship restaurant, acting as head chef.

"My father started doing a lot of catering and approached many hotels in the 1980s and managed to secure a contract, becoming the first Asian caterer to land one at a five-star hotel," recalls Arjun. "The business owes everything to my parents' persistence and the recipes from our forefathers, which we evolve and change with the times."

Poonam Ball is Arjun's aunt and the creative chef and marketing director at the business. She previously considered a career in law before being tempted back to the family business, where she showcases her passion for food and cooking. She has also shared her cooking skills on Sony TV. Ball acknowledges that Madhu's approach to cuisine - sticking to recipes passed down through the generations, comes

### Madhu's Food



with its own challenges, as some chefs like to put their own stamp on their cuisine to reflect their own style. Family recipes have been handed down for years, so they can easily tell whether every single dish is up to scratch.

“We are evolving our recipes all the time but what is important to remember is that we have not moved away from authenticity, we have not decided to do fusion or gone too upmarket,” says Ball. This is our formula and people keep coming back for more. We are updating items but not letting go of the past.”

Over the years, Madhu's has also redefined service, designing and developing the 'Karai' stand and the Crystal stand. The former, pioneered in 1990, is a metal revolving structure that can hold several dishes at different heights, making it easier to share various platters family-style at banquets, particularly when mixing starters and main courses. The idea came from the standard small pickle stands common among many Indian restaurants. The 'Crystal Stand', invented in 2005, meanwhile features dishes on a rotating glass platform. Arjun has inherited this flair for inventiveness, having introduced a robata grill to the brand with the opening of the Heathrow restaurant. Robata - the shortened form of 'robatayaki' is a Japanese cooking technique that closely resembles a barbecue/charcoal grill, and which translates as 'fireside cooking'. It was, in Arjun's words, a 'blazing success', quickly establishing the Heathrow outpost as a concept restaurant.

“We took the meat out of the tandoor oven and onto the Robata grill,” explains Arjun. “This frees up the tandoor to focus solely on breads and with the grill, there is more time for the meat to rest, which gives more control over the cooking and an intense flavour.”

Madhu's other innovative approach lies in its dishes' ingredients and historical



*Original Madhu's in Southall*

influences - namely Kenya, with earlier generations having originally settled in Nairobi. Madhu's signature dishes include secret family recipes as well as gourmet Punjabi cuisine with a Kenyan twist which have been handed down across the generations.

“My grandfather taught everything to my father, even down to our garam masala secret recipe and our home-made ghee - it's a labour of love,” says Arjun. “There is also a lot of influence from Kenya in our grilled meat. Ninety per cent of the recipes on our menu are traditional family recipes that have been handed down over the years. If our head chef were to leave, it would not make such a difference to our end products.”

Other business milestones include working with high-end department stores and other hotels. Madhu's took over the Indian food counter in Harrods in 2005 and started supplying Indian food to Harvey Nichols a year later. In 2014, it became the first-ever outside specialist food supplier to The Savoy Hotel. ▶



My grandfather taught everything to my father, even down to our garam masala secret recipe and our home-made ghee - it's a labour of love





**Poonam Ball**

### A successful formula

The opening at The Dilly is a reaffirmation of Madhu's success formula to date, opening restaurants within a hotel. As Ball explains, there are different personalities and diners suited to the various sites.

"You get a different experience with the Robata grill [at The Sheraton Skyline] and The Grove is a completely

new environment as it has a country house feel with fine dining," she says.

Arjun says that 'Madhu's can't do anything half heartedly' and one benefit the business gained over the pandemic was time. This has resulted in much thought going into new ventures. The restaurant at the Dilly in particular stands out architecturally, with high ceilings, mirrors adorning the walls, and ornate chandeliers. On the menu you'll find some of Madhu's standout dishes all in one place. The Boozy Bafu, Madhu's signature lamb chops on the bone are mouthwateringly tender while Masalear Kuku features chicken thigh cooked in a rich sauce with a real kick, which brings out rather than overpowers the flavour. The Robata grill also features here, with dishes including Achari Gobhi, grilled cauliflower florets, and Asparagus Choma, with the vegetable spiced with chilli and lemon. Attention is second to none too, with a range of mini poppadoms served in their own box. The overall feel is of an indulgent dining experience, one where you would want to linger for some time. There is also an equally stunning bar attached to the restaurant, where diners can relax before and after dinner.

"We are a cash-rich business, we have not relied on loans, investors or shareholders," explains Arjun. "For our new ventures we were all of a sudden trying to conjure up a business plan and the risk that was attached to that,



For our new ventures we were all of a sudden trying to conjure up a business plan and the risk that was attached to that, as well as doing a presentation to the bank during the pandemic, when there was no helping hand for the hospitality industry

### Madhu's at The Dilly





**Madhu's food**

as well as doing a presentation to the bank during the pandemic, when there was no helping hand for the hospitality industry. We were left to our own devices to come up with something new."

**Investing in passion and people**

As well as opening two restaurants during the pandemic, the business also debuted Madhu's 2 Go in May at Harvey Nichols' flagship department store in London's Knightsbridge. In keeping with the brand's ethos, Madhu's 2 Go features a fusion of signature recipes passed down through generations as well as contemporary dishes with Punjabi and Kenyan inspiration.

"We are very hands-on and our passion stems from what we've achieved over the years," says Arjun. "When we open a new place, we are on the floor, we don't see employees as members but more as our family. "We want to know who they are and we want them to feel that passion and driving force behind the business."

Such an approach does not come without its own challenges. Like many other hospitality businesses, Madhu's was not able to keep all of its staff on during the peak of the pandemic, with nearly half of its workforce leaving the business. And with many of its employees having been with Madhu's for years, Arjun admits that having to make redundancies was one of the hardest decisions to make.

"We have many who have been with us for so long - this is one of the reasons why we decided to open at The Grove," reflects. "We had let some people go and we couldn't bear to tell more people who have been with us for so long. We had to come up with something where we could diversify and use existing staff."

With the lockdown restrictions having been lifted across the UK, it's full steam ahead for the Madhu's business empire, as it is now looking forward to growing its two latest restaurant additions, its takeaway concept and bringing events back with a bang.



When we open a new place, we are on the floor, we don't see employees as members but more as our family. We want to know who they are and we want them to feel that passion and driving force behind the business



# Santosh Shah debuts Nepalese pop-up

later in the year.”

Singh added, “Seeing talented chefs grow within the Cinnamon family is a pride and a privilege, and to have alumni like Santosh go on to flourish and carve their own path is one of the greatest pleasures I take from my work.”



**Santosh Shah**, former head chef at Vivek Singh’s Cinnamon Kitchen City and a former contestant on MasterChef: The Professionals 2020, is running a month-long Nepalese-themed pop-up at the restaurant.

The residency will run Wednesdays through to Saturdays evenings between 29th September and 30th October and will showcase fine-dining Nepalese dishes. Dishes are inspired by the food and heritage of Shah’s birth town Siraha in regional Nepal, aiming to offer a new take on the traditional cuisine of southern Asia.

Each sitting is limited to 15 guests, to ensure an intimate and interactive experience at the restaurant’s open plan kitchen counter. Diners can taste canapés such as miniature lamb brain donuts and duck breast salad, and papadum and potato pickle. Main courses feature chicken momo with a twist - steamed Nepalese dumplings with pickled cucumber and caviar, and traditionally-rooted dishes of market-style fried fish with burnt tomato chutney and puffed rice, or spiced chargrilled octopus and

spice yoghurt. Meat dishes on offer include a cannon of lamb with akoru rice, bone marrow sauce and mustard greens while desserts feature ‘Nepalese yomari’ - sweet dumplings filled with chocolate, chilli, cinnamon and orange. A vegetarian tasting menu is also available on request. Shah said: “Having spent many happy years as head chef at Cinnamon Kitchen City, there was only one place I wanted to run this pop-up, at the restaurant where I learnt so much. It was Vivek and his team who gave me the confidence to start celebrating and developing my own signature style of modern Nepalese cuisine, and cooking at Cinnamon Kitchen City feels like coming home. Vivek has been so kind in giving me the opportunity to showcase my Nepalese cuisine to diners and I can’t wait to welcome guests to our pop-up



*Santosh Shah*

KUTI'S BRASSERIE

# KUTI PIE..R

**Within** a few minutes of meeting Kuti Miah you're left in no doubt that you're in the presence of a real character - a showman who wants to tell everyone who will listen about his passion for the food business.

Hardly surprising then that he has located his latest restaurant within one of the most famous iconic landmarks in Southampton - no less than the Pier and building used by Queen Victoria to prepare for her regular trips across the Solent to her legendary home on the Isle of Wight, Osbourne House.

Talking about the thinking behind the location, Kuti explains: "I've ▶

*Kuti Miah*

always tried to find something special and different to wow my customers.

“I love this business so much - and have done since I was a rebellious teenager - that I want this passion to come across in every aspect of the business.

“That includes everything from the surroundings and service to front of house to the quality of the food from the kitchen.

He adds: “Of course we’ve had some extra challenges during lockdown, but now that we’re starting to get back to normal it’s like I’ve been given a new lease of life.”

So be prepared! For Kuti, that new impetus has included everything from providing ‘greeters’ to welcome guests to their tables, to developing the impressive upper level of the restaurant, to include outside dining with views across the Solent. The wow factor again



is motivating Kuti.

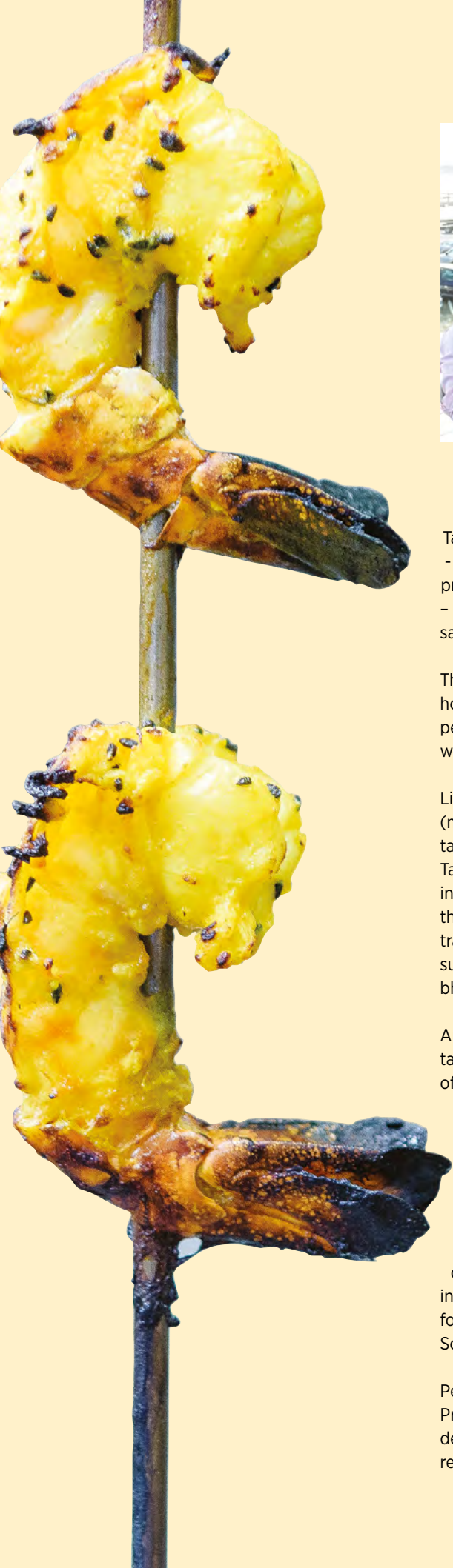
But do all these fine words and ambitions translate into success on the ground?

Judging by the 130-cover full house

present on an ordinary Thursday evening, the answer is yes.

And that’s a verdict confirmed by the quality of the service and food served up on the night.





Taking mainly fish dishes for starters - followed by a mixture of chicken, prawn and lamb choices for our mains - we tried to select a representative sample from the vast menu.

The monkfish, salmon and garlic prawn hors d'oeuvres were all cooked to perfection-well spiced and bursting with fresh ingredients.

Likewise the Moonngphali Chicken (marinated with peanuts, yoghurt, tamarind and gram masala) and Tandoori King Prawn Masala (finished in a sweet creamy masala sauce) were the pick of the mains - while even traditional common or garden sides, such as sag bhaji, aloo gobi, and bindi bhaji, were a clear cut above average.

And a quick canvass of nearby tables elicited similar expressions of satisfaction from other happy customers.

Numbered among that regular clientele are top politicians- including local MP Royston Smith and, notably, Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rishi Sunak, who actually did some shifts as a waiter for Kuti in his younger days; not to mention footballers from Premier League club Southampton.

Perhaps that's appropriate, as the Premier League is where Kuti is determined to keep his impressive restaurant.

After mingling with virtually every table, he returns wearing a deep pink dinner jacket to expand on his philosophy.

"After 40-odd years in the business, I've learned to use the mantra Time Is Love. That means treating my customers like they are family-and putting on a show for them. That applies whether it's front of house through the service provided, or in the kitchen thanks to the quality of food delivered."

As a quote on the menu from Kuti puts it: "I came to Southampton in 1980 for four weeks but I liked it so much I stayed a little bit longer. In 2018 we moved to the Royal Pier - a building that I've always loved and dreamt of restoring to its past glory.

"In many ways, this restaurant is my gift to the people of Southampton, who have always welcomed me; it's a place that I love and have made my home."

Judging by the reactions of customers dotted around us - and the Best Indian Restaurant award won in the recent Tiffin Cup held in Parliament - it's a cute philosophy that should bode well for Kuti for many years to come.

**Kuti's Brasserie**

Mayflower Park, The Royal Pier,  
Town Quay, Southampton SO14 2AQ  
Phone: 023 8022 1585  
Website: [www.kutis.co.uk](http://www.kutis.co.uk)

# INNOVATION

## in *Action*



How technology is changing the restaurant business in the kitchen and beyond

**Before** the pandemic, the global restaurant trade was on the cusp of a technological revolution, one that could drastically change the hospitality industry forever. Each one also represented a positive change, designed to help restaurateurs and chefs increase their efficiency in and out of the kitchen.

The curry industry especially could benefit from these technological innovations. Many of these represent a significant yet worthwhile investment; while others are quick wins that could yield substantial results.

While the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in many business owners pausing their restaurant's technological upgrades, and instead focusing on survival, others used innovative technology as a means to ensure that survival. After all, a time of crisis often encourages innovation and can lead to a new dawn for those who adapt successfully.

As the UK's vaccination program continues apace and restaurants return to table service, now may be the time to implement these innovations. Doing so may kick-start a business and arm it with some new tools to tackle any future challenges. Here are some of the ways technology can transform the restaurant experience in 2021.

### **From cleaning...**

The kitchen is one of the most essential parts of a restaurant, but many are lagging behind when it comes to equipment and technical innovations. While many restaurants use sophisticated booking systems or software to support staff working front of house, it's often a different story in the kitchen, with many using outdated tools. This is a missed opportunity, as many problems can begin in the



kitchen and affect the restaurant as a whole.

With some investment in terms of time and capital, however, a kitchen can run much more efficiently. While some of these items can be expensive, they are usually well worth it in time from a financial point of view. It will also make life much easier for the chefs, not just when it comes to cooking but also when managing and maintaining inventory.

It may sound obvious, but a dishwasher is a must-have in any busy restaurant. Not only does it allow kitchen staff to clean more dirty dishes than is possible by hand, it's also much more hygienic. Cleanliness is more important than ever following the pandemic, and the hot temperatures needed to clean dishes thoroughly cannot be achieved by hand using the tap.

A dishwasher however, can reach temperatures hot enough to kill the Covid-19 virus and any other bacteria that may be hanging around. There's often some reverse snobbery applied to dishwashers; owning or using them is sometimes seen as lazy or unnecessary. But this is an outdated view. Using a dishwasher is a sensible and efficient choice for any restaurant.

### ... to cooking

Another device that saves chefs a lot of time and effort is a dough machine. Restaurants that serve Indian and

Bangladeshi dishes often produce a lot of naan bread and other dough-based recipes. Making this by hand is time-consuming, especially when you consider how much time is being spent doing this. A dough machine may allow chefs to move on to other tasks much faster and more efficiently.

Many curries and other traditional dishes require a lot of onion, which many chefs still slice by hand. Some restaurants can get through a whole bag of onions in one day. That's a lot of onions. Investing in an onion slicer could save time in the kitchen.

There has been a debate in recent years among curry chefs on tandoor ovens versus combi ovens. For Zakir Khan, owner of Reading-based Zyka,



**Zakir Khan**

who has experience of using combi ovens at his other businesses, there is no question that a tandoor oven offers the most authentic taste.

"While combi ovens can replace the work of half a member of staff and the taste is good, it cannot replicate that of cooking done in a tandoor oven," he says. "But there is a bigger issue at play - unless we have staff with the necessary skills to use a tandoor oven, we may have to go towards using combi ones."

He adds that ultimately it would be preferable to attract staff who can use tandoor ovens and open fires. "If you have a good tandoor chef you simply can't compare this to a top-of-the-range combi oven - the best dish will be the one the chef provides."

Chef Oli Khan from Surma Takeaway recently spoke at Curry Life's Culinary



**Oli Khan MBE**

Workshop and highlighted how it was vital, now more than ever, for chefs to continue with traditional cooking methods. "I've heard that people

are using a combi oven for cooking and this is useful if you are catering for a vast amount of people, at a wedding for example," he says. "But for a restaurant serving a standard number of diners the situation is quite different. Some in our industry are abandoning the tandoor oven and adopting a combi oven but it is vital to maintain authentic ways of cooking."

Digital food probes are





another useful technology too. These can be applied in fridges to help food retain a specific temperature. It also allows chefs to keep track of their stock and ingredients, saving them from constantly checking if food is fresh, in date, and unspoiled.

## The online experience

Takeaway food has always gone hand in hand with Indian and Bangladeshi recipes. While nothing beats a sit-down meal in an authentic restaurant, the UK adores a takeaway. When the pandemic struck, the curry industry was able to pivot quicker than most to a takeaway-only model. Many restaurants asked customers to pick up their food while others added a delivery service.

Restaurants that predominantly serve local, regular customers may get enough orders by simply having a website that clearly displays their telephone number. However, once all orders were coming in this way, it may have made sense to implement an online ordering system. Many customers prefer to order online rather than pick up the phone, so having such a system in place frees up the phone lines. This means customers don't need to wait as long to place their orders during busy periods. It also allows customers to place an order for a specific time.

Curry Life has spoken to lots of restaurant owners throughout the pandemic about these online systems. Some restaurants have created their own ordering systems, either through their website or as a different platform entirely. Many others have signed up for food delivery apps, Just Eat being the most popular. Some restaurants may have had this infrastructure in place before the pandemic.

While technology like this has been a major boon for some restaurants, it's not suited to all. However, it's certainly worth considering for restaurants looking to boost their online orders or free up their phone lines.

## Digital assets

Social media has also proven to be of tremendous value to restaurants in the past twelve months. Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter can all be valuable tools – and can be used for free. Facebook is still the most prominent platform and can be very useful when used at a local level. It can help you build a network of loyal customers who share your content, post reviews, or engage with you in other ways.

Facebook and Twitter can also be used to post important updates to your customers, such as certain dishes returning to the menu, or that you're now open for table service and other

updates. These platforms have real value when used as communication tools, especially during a pandemic when things change so suddenly.

Sites like Instagram are primarily focused on images and video content, so they are ideal platforms to showcase dishes or the stunning ambience of a restaurant. Owners with professional pictures, or even just good-quality ones taken on a smartphone should really consider using Instagram frequently to build a following and entice customers with visual treats.

Finally, don't forget to take ownership of your listing on Google. All businesses will be listed, but not everyone takes advantage of this. Doing so can be free, but restaurants can tailor their listing to their liking for a small charge. Always make sure this is up to date and displaying accurate information, as it's often the first thing customers see when they come across your business.

In this modern age there's no excuse for not taking advantage of social media to promote a business, especially when many tools are free.

From interviewing various restaurant owners in recent months, Curry Life has been amazed to see how some teams have banded together to support each other and their employer. The staff at many restaurants have been forced to evenly split shifts between them and communicate amongst themselves (and management) to make sure this flows smoothly.

As these teams have been observing social distancing and lockdown, they've communicated by creating WhatsApp groups, Zoom calls, and other digital apps to stay in touch. This way the staff can talk together and include the management to make sure everyone is on the same page. This may be a helpful idea for other restaurants too and with WhatsApp and Zoom also free to use, there is no better time to start trying these tools.

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# Giant sculpture in London marks 50 years of Bangladesh independence

50



**A sculpture** entitled 'Bangla' has been unveiled at Idea Store Whitechapel in London, part of ongoing events to commemorate 50 years of the independence of Bangladesh.

Devised by Tower Hamlets Council, the National Portrait Gallery and Bangladesh-based artist Ruhul Abdin, the illuminated installation is clad in fabric and is suspended in the façade of the Idea Store, where it will be on display until early 2022.

The artwork is accompanied by a history exhibition, which tells the story of the Liberation War of 1971, the contribution of Tower Hamlets residents to the independence struggle, and the importance of the Bengali language then and now.

John Biggs, Mayor of Tower Hamlets, said: "Diversity is one of our borough's

greatest strengths and we are proud to celebrate the best of Bangladeshi culture throughout this 50th anniversary year. I hope that many people will visit the Whitechapel Idea Store to view the artwork and learn more about the



significance of 1971 to Tower Hamlets past and present."

Councillor Sabina Akhtar, cabinet member for Culture, Arts & Brexit at Tower Hamlets Council said: "The Bangladeshi War of Independence was a significant moment for thousands of eastenders even though none of its battles were fought here.

"At the turn of the 1970s, as war loomed back home, Bengali communities across the UK lobbied and protested in support of the independence struggle. I am delighted that we are showcasing this important part of our history, in this creative art installation and exhibition at Idea Store Whitechapel."

The installation will be on show until 2022. A public event will be held at Idea Store Whitechapel to mark the 50th anniversary of Victory Day in December 2021.

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# Word on the Street

Swati and Karthikk Kandala are the founders behind start-up street food business Curry on Naanstop

**A background** in finance and science aren't the usual credentials you'd associate with a start-up food business. But for husband and wife team Karthikk and Swati Kandala, their previous careers have helped them to stay grounded and focused when launching and growing Curry on Naanstop - a Mumbai street food offering.

It's been more than a decade since Swati and Karthikk arrived in the UK. The two met via an arranged marriage - Swati is originally from Nagpur, while Karthikk hails from Hyderabad. Following their marriage, they both came to England in 2008 on the 'highly-skilled migrant' programme, with Swati working for HSBC (continuing a role she previously held in India), while Karthikk worked as a chemical engineer for GlaxoSmithKline.

Starting a food business had been a passion of Swati's for some time, as she craved her mother's home-style cooking and was unable to find similar-tasting food in London.

"The one thing I always missed when I came to London was authentic dishes and comfort food and also street food. There are plenty of curry houses with curries but it was not what I was craving," she says. "I also wanted to introduce people to the Indian street food concept - most of it is made and served from carts on the streets."

## Self-taught chef

Swati also discovered a love for cooking. Prior to her marriage, she had never done much of the cooking in India, leaving this to her mother and mother-in-law, who she says are 'amazing cooks'. When she came to London, she had to learn to cook and got inspiration from her mother and in-laws, learning different forms of cuisine and techniques via Skype, with online lessons from her mum and mother in law.

As a self-taught chef, this is when she realised cooking and serving food to family and friends was a big part of her passion and that she wanted to share those

flavours with others.

"I learnt cooking to show I could do just as well if not better than my mother and in-laws," she says. "I cooked for colleagues at work and they suggested I should do something in the catering industry. I made many traditional 'comfort'



Swati and Karthikk Kandala





South Indian dishes, like lentils and biryani but to get the authentic element, I started looking at street food. I spent time with the street food owners in India when I returned for visits.”

Swati recalls how she would pay some of the traders to share their recipes with her and teach her how to make them, and although they were reluctant at first as they thought she was a competitor, some of them were happy to pass on their cooking techniques, including recipes for snacks such as samosa chaat. She learnt the art of dosas from her mother while chutneys have been inspired by her mother-in-law’s recipe. Other dishes were created when Swati put her own stamp on them, such as chicken tikka naan wraps. Many of the dishes that have found their way on her menu were tested on friends, some of whom have been her harshest critics.

“I have amazing friends and colleagues, they have always been such a support system for us, always giving us feedback” she says. “Some of them have been brutally honest which has been a great help in getting the dishes right.”

## Streets ahead

It wasn’t until the beginning of 2018 however, that Swati and Karthikk took the plunge to set up a food business, although they took a cautious approach. They stuck to their day jobs while launching the business with their own savings. Curry on Naanstop started life as a street food truck, with the pair converting a former Sainsbury’s delivery



van and customising it with bright colours and rangoli art. Swati wanted something fun and playful for the business name, and is quick to point out that it has nothing to do with the iconic British ‘Carry On’ comedy films that spanned the 1950s to the 1980s.

Curry on Naanstop started in the pair’s local Surrey Street Market in Croydon in South London. Both Swati and Karthikk stayed within their jobs for about another year, before turning their attention to the business full time. On the menu you’ll find ‘Mumbai Special Small Plates’, such as ‘Vada Pav’, (a Mumbai version of a vegan burger) a potato dumpling in a bread roll with three different chutneys: a dry chutney made with chillies, peanut, sesame and coconut, a green chutney made with coriander and tamarind chutney. There’s also ‘Bhel Puri’, a rice dish made with puffed rice, peanuts, bombay mix and tangy chutneys, garnished with pomegranate seeds and herbs.

For a breakfast with a difference, the range of ‘South Special Tiffins’ feature ‘Masala Dosa’ and ‘Hot Idly’ - steamed savoury rice cakes, alongside ‘Medu Vada’, fritters made from Vinga mungo and lentils. More substantial meals include Hyderabad Bagara Baingan, an aubergine curry made with nutty peanuts, fresh and creamy coconuts and sesame seeds. Around 50% of the menu is vegan, with those dishes proving very popular. Swati is in charge of the menu and the cuisine, while she says Karthikk is ‘the brains and strength of the business, leading all the operations.’

“There is a big vegan and vegetarian community out there who are discovering our menu, with half of our dishes suited to them,,” says Swati. “In fact, both Karthikk and I have largely had a meat-free diet and now it’s a growing trend.”

## Looking to the future

Lockdown was an opportunity to reflect on where the business was going, with Swati saying they invested ‘considerable funds’ into building a central production facility in London’s Herne Hill, with walk-in fridges and blast chillers. Next came stops on the UK music festival circuit, with Curry on Naanstop serving food at the likes of Latitude, Camp Bestival, Eastival and The Big Feastival.

Last month saw their launch in Covent Garden’s Seven Dials Market, after having been through street food operator Kerb’s ‘inKERBator’, a three-month programme designed to give early stage businesses with raw talent but little experience the chance to accelerate their growth through mentorship and advice on business issues such as branding.

“We were quite scared to start with as we didn’t know what footfall there might be post-lockdown or post-pandemic,” says Swati. “But it’s been one of the best locations to set up, it’s early days but feedback has been very positive and we enjoy being here.”

Swati is also eyeing up the corporate market, having catered for businesses previously, with many of her street food snacks doubling up as canapés. A bigger ambition is to have some of her street food snacks stocked in cafés and coffee shops and she’s also planning to launch some home made spices and cooking kits.

“We have done some ‘corporate canteen’ takeovers and I want to bring the concept to coffee shops,” explains Swati. “In India, in the coffee shops, you will find street food snacks; I would love to introduce that concept here.”



# Cultural Revolution

Bradford is bidding to be named UK City of Culture 2025. What impact will this have on the city's celebrated curry reputation?

**In May**, the Government officially kicked off its search for the UK City of Culture 2025. According to guidance from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, the competition aims to drive positive economic and social outcomes, as well as developing lasting local, national and international partnerships. It can also strengthen communities, build a sense of place and inspire local pride, celebrating and boosting local and grassroots arts and culture, and attracting new investment and tourism.

Bradford is one of several cities in the running and has been preparing its bid over the last two

years. It is hoping that a win will transform the city into a creative powerhouse, as well as attracting significant investment. A winning bid is also likely to have a sizeable impact on the city's curry industry - Bradford has long been known as the UK's 'curry capital', having won the accolade six years in a row.

## Getting creative

Shaukat Ahmed, former owner of an Indian restaurant in Bradford and an ex-Labour councillor says there will be many benefits for the city's Indian restaurants and wider hospitality if Bradford is successful with its bid.



“Bradford was the ‘curry capital’ of England and now it is a well-established foodie hub, with a lot of experimental cuisine,” he says. “There is a lot of creative work on the catering side. If Bradford achieves its bid, it will attract many more visitors to the city, to watch a play or attend a street festival for example. What Bradford can also offer them is a wide range of catering, from street food to haute cuisine. Some restaurants have 400 covers so they can cater for a large number of visitors.” Ahmed believes a winning bid will not only promote the city’s curry industry further but will also put its fusion food scene firmly on the map.

“There are some fantastic examples of dishes with an Indian or Asian twist and this type of cuisine will become more and more popular,” he says. “This will really help Bradford compete with other cities such as Leeds. The city has a history of culture with a diverse community and we have some great venues such as St George’s Hall and The Alhambra. Bradford is one of England’s bigger cities with lots of potential.”

Si Cunningham, communications & bid development manager for Bradford 2025 UK City of Culture bid says that ‘culture’ can mean lots of different things, but food certainly plays a big part in it, and it’s important to celebrate

the fact that Bradford has a renowned culinary reputation.

“Curry is synonymous with Bradford, it’s a huge part of our character and people from all walks of life tell us how fiercely proud they are of our ‘curry capital’ accolade,” he says. “We can use food, and south Asian food in particular, to help tell the story of Bradford – from the arrival of beautiful curry houses in the 1950s, to the new trends in fusion dining and chai cafés that really chart the development of our city. There are also numerous opportunities for new festivals and other food-focused events.” ▶



**Curry boost**

**Si Cunningham**

If Bradford were to win the bid, Cunningham believes it would provide a boost for the curry industry in and around the city.

“Winning the bid will really put Bradford on the map for culture and will bring in many new visitors,” he says. “We know that many of these visitors will rightly recognise Bradford as being famous for serving the best curry in the UK, so hopefully they will be seeking out our restaurants and providing a real boost to the hospitality trade. It would be great to see areas famed for their curries, such as Leeds Road, really celebrated in their own right, and that could lead to some quite interesting improvements to those areas that will support our curry

industry.”

When it comes to submitting the bid, Cunningham adds that the bid committee can say without hesitation that ‘Bradford curry is the best in the UK’.

“But aside from the mouthwatering experiences on offer in Bradford, the best thing about curry is that it really brings people together,” he says. “Everyone has a favourite Bradford curry, and it can sometimes lead to fierce, but friendly, debate! When it comes down to it though, it’s a wonderful way for us to break bread and share more of what we have in common. We can’t wait to show that to the rest of the world. This is what Bradford is really all about.”

**Bringing cultures together**

The Crafty Indian, a restaurant focusing on street food and craft beers, located in Shipley, around three miles from Bradford, has a similar view. Its owner Harry Khinda says curry brings people and cultures together.

“If Bradford were to win the bid, it would tell the wider world what a great city Bradford is and that should attract visitors who will come and spend money in our city and restaurants,” he says. “This will contribute to help make the city more prosperous.” Indian restaurant Prashad, located in Drighlington, a few miles from the city centre, says it makes

authentic Gujarati food, but with its own twists that could only come from its experience in Bradford. While owner Bobby Patel is unsure whether a winning bid will bring new visitors to the restaurant, he says it would be great to see Bradford’s curry reputation recognised nationwide, outside of the curry lovers’ community.

“People have concepts of Bradford that deserved to be smashed - this would definitely help,” he says, “Bradford’s culture isn’t just about the National Science and Media Museum or the Alhambra or David Hockney, although all of those things are really important. It’s about the people. It’s a massively multicultural place that’s full of people coming together to create things drawn from all over the world. It means there’s so much grassroots art and theatre and music - and, of course, the food.”

The winning city or town will be announced in Spring 2022 and will have the ‘baton’ passed to them from Coventry, the UK City of Culture 2021.





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## Legal Matters



By Maria Fernandes

# OPTIONS for employing temporary staff

With restaurants struggling to recruit staff, Maria Fernandes outlines what options might be available and how to apply

## Non Sponsored Employment

Sponsorship is the main means used by businesses to bring migrant staff from abroad. However it is worth remembering that there are other non-sponsorship routes for temporary employment of staff.

This is the first time India has been included in the Youth Mobility Scheme. However the number of spaces is miniscule and there are additional criteria which Indian citizens alone have to meet. None of these routes lead to settlement.

## Youth Mobility Scheme

The Home Office has announced changes to the Youth Mobility Scheme on 10 September 2021, which will come into effect from 2022. India has been added to the list of countries eligible. Under this scheme, persons aged 18 to 30 years from eligible countries can come to the UK for up to two years

and undertake employment in the UK without sponsorship. The allocation of places available for the year 2022 for India is limited to 3,000 places.

## Requirements

The applicant must have £2,530 available. The applicant must not have previously been in the UK on the Youth Mobility Scheme route.

## Additional requirements for Indian citizens

Indian citizens should hold education qualification equivalent to or above RQF level 6 (graduate level) qualifications or have a minimum of three years work experience in a professional role equivalent to an eligible occupation as listed in 'Appendix Skilled Occupations'.

## How to apply

The proposed plan by the Home Office

is to use a ballot process to submit an expression of interest to the Home Office. They will then select at random applications for those chosen to apply for entry clearance. Applications must then be made within a specific period of time. A similar system exists for Japanese, Hong Kong and South Korean nationals.

Work is permitted except as a professional sportsperson (including as a sports coach).

No self-employment is permitted, except where the following conditions are met:

- (i) the person has no premises which they own, other than their home, from which they carry out their business; and
- (ii) the total value of any equipment used in the business does not exceed £5,000; and
- (iii) the person has no employees.

Dependants are not permitted on this route.

The Youth Mobility Scheme is not a route to settlement.

## The Graduate Route

The Graduate Route Visa introduced by the Home Office and in operation since July 2021, has created opportunities for international students who have successfully completed an eligible course as a student, to live and work in the UK for a period of two years, or three years for PhD or other Doctoral qualification.

The applicants will not need a job offer to apply for the route, which will help those UK employers who do not hold the sponsor licence to employ such graduates for their business. There are no restrictions on the type of work that can be carried out and it allows an applicant to switch to a skilled worker at a future date. There are no minimum salary requirements. There are no caps on numbers of the application. Graduates on the route will be able to work flexibly, switch jobs and develop their career as required.

## Who will qualify

International students who have successfully completed an eligible course as a student at a student sponsor.

## Eligibility requirements

### To be eligible to apply

- ★ The applicant must be in the UK to apply for the Graduate Route permission.
- ★ The applicant must have successfully completed the course of study undertaken during their most recent grant of permission as a student which includes permission under Tier 4.
- ★ The student will be considered to have successfully completed his degree when he receives his final results, and his record is updated to reflect completion.
- ★ The course must be an award of a degree at UK bachelor's

or postgraduate level or a professional course requiring study at UK bachelor's degree level or above.

- ★ The applicant must have current permission as a Student or Tier 4 migrant.
- ★ The student must not have previously held permission on the Doctorate Extension Scheme (DES) or the Graduate route.
- ★ The applicant will need to score a total of 70 points.

## Conditions

The applicant will be granted Graduate Route permission subject to certain conditions:

- (a) no access to public funds; and
- (b) work (including self-employment and voluntary work) permitted apart from working as a professional sportsperson; and
- (c) permitted to study; and
- (d) study is subject to the ATAS condition in Appendix ATAS;

The partner and child of the applicant will be granted permission under the Graduate route, provided they are in the UK and had last been granted permission as dependents of the main applicant on the Graduate route. No new dependents will be permitted, except where a dependent child was born in the UK during a period of student or graduate permission. The visa fees and the Immigration Health Surcharge will be applicable to the dependents. The conditions as applicable to the student will also be applicable to the dependents. The route does not count towards settlement.

## Maria Fernandes

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