

Curry life

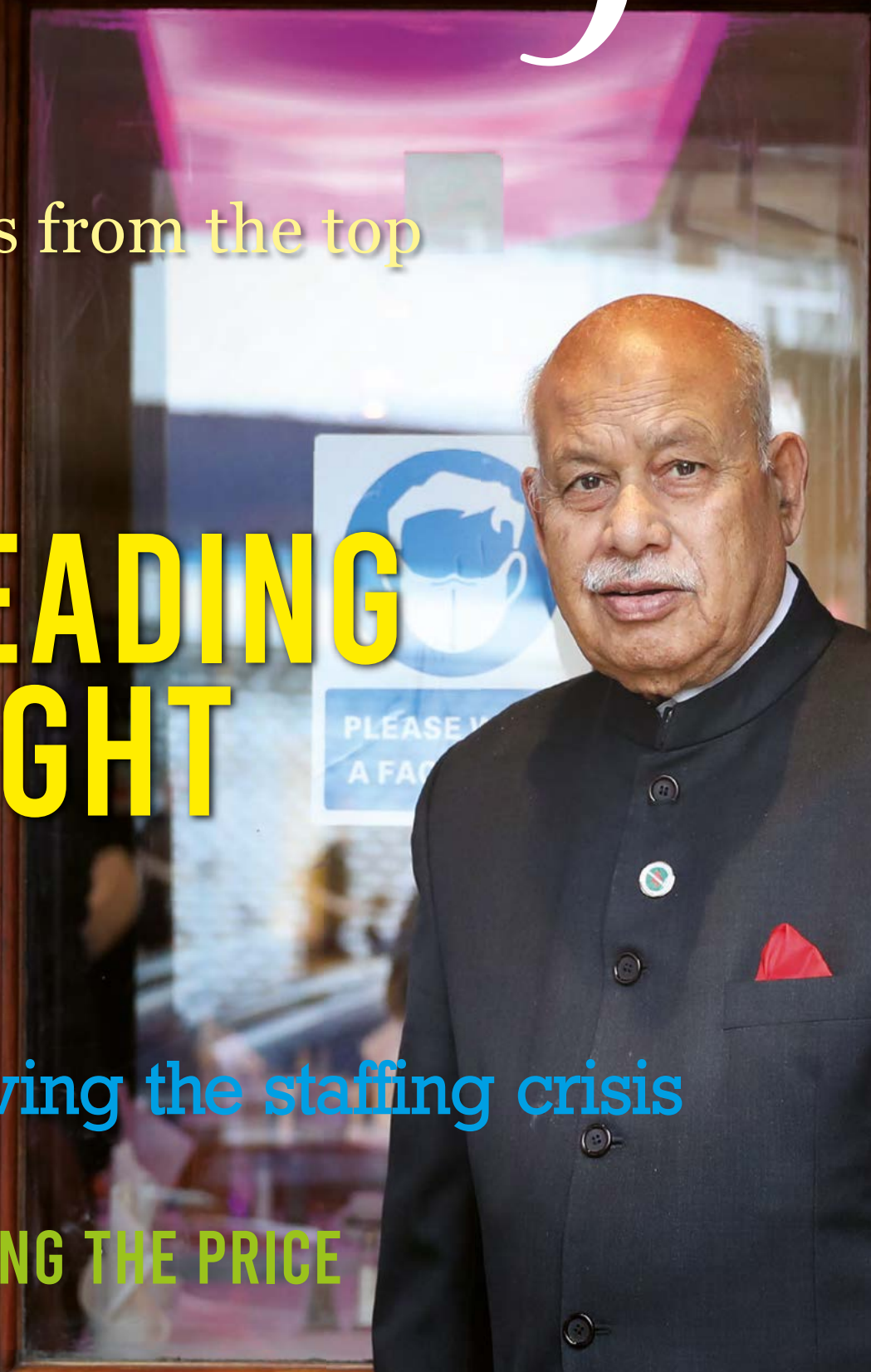
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Tips from the top

LEADING LIGHT

Solving the staffing crisis

PAYING THE PRICE





BRITISH CURRY FESTIVAL 2022

DHAKA BANGLADESH

British Curry Festival is going back to Dhaka after a decade gap. To celebrate the friendship of our two curry loving nations, Bangladesh and Britain, the Festival will be held at the InterContinental Dhaka on 16-29 October. A VIP delegation and a highly acclaimed Chef from British food scene will join the British Curry Festival team.

To participate please call or send a message to:
07956 439 458 or 07956 588 777 for full details of the programme.
Places are limited and must be booked in advance.



04

Experts on hand

Curry Life's Culinary Workshop took place in June, bringing together a host of experts to discuss some of the industry's most pressing issues, such as the impact of high food prices, how best to incorporate sustainability, managing food allergens and new legislation



21

A date with Dhaka

Curry Life's British Curry Festival will take place from the 16th-29 of October at the InterContinental Dhaka, an IHG Hotel. Previous participants describe their experience at the festival and how it taught them many practices they use within their restaurants today as well as giving an insight into what this year's group can expect



26

Pricing pressure

Price hikes are placing a heavy burden across the whole supply chain. Curry Life caught up with a restaurateur and a wholesaler to find out what their response is, what advice they can give to others and what we can expect in the near future



36

Lifelong learning

Shamsuddin Khan has been working in the restaurant industry for close to 65 years and is still very much involved with his first venture, Maharani. He tells Curry Life about the lessons he has learned over the last few decades, how he has risen above numerous challenges and why it can be hard to let go



40

Take two takeaways

Business has boomed for takeaways in the last year, particularly during the pandemic. Curry Life profiles two takeaways to find out the secrets of their success, why their customers keep coming back for more and what the ongoing challenges are



46

The search for staff goes on

With many employees having been forced to leave the industry during the pandemic, restaurants - from big chains to independents, are struggling to find experienced staff. The curry industry, in particular, is facing an uphill struggle recruiting from abroad



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Health matters

From calorie labelling, to using healthier alternatives for certain ingredients to allergen management, food health and safety can be something of a minefield. Experts offer advice on what restaurants and their staff need to know and where they can go for further guidance



Curry life

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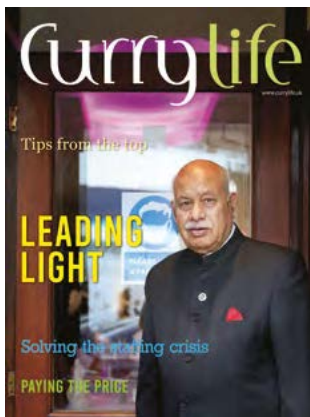
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details. All our journals are distributed Free to 20,000 restaurants and takeaways across the UK. We aim to keep everyone in touch with new developments and best practice in the hospitality sectors - and provide a voice for the people who work in the food industry, i.e. restaurant owners to food suppliers and chefs. We can also let you know about our advertising opportunities in magazines from one-off ads to advertorial features.

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Staff shortages: a deepening crisis

Last month, the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee launched an inquiry into the UK's labour market as skills and worker shortages continue to restrain the post-pandemic economic recovery, with recent ONS figures showing that there are more vacancies than people to fill them for the first time. As part of the inquiry, MPs will examine the challenges faced by workers and employers and what the Government and companies can do to support the labour market.

It may be a case of too little too late however, with restaurants having to take matters into their own hands to deal with the ongoing staff shortage situation. One restaurant owner told Curry Life that his restaurant is only open for three and a half days. This means it can operate with less than 50% staff, and ensures the restaurant is full and able to make a profit, rather than having the restaurant half empty for seven days. Speaking to other restaurants, this appears to be a strategy that many are adopting, being open Wednesday to Sundays only for example.

As Kate Nicholls, CEO of UKHospitality puts it, the industry is facing a 'workforce crisis'. The trade body recently announced the appointment of a new 'skills director', Sandra Kelly, to shape the future framework of skills in hospitality. Kelly's role will be to look at the short-term



opportunities to tackle the current labour crisis but also ensure there is a pipeline of talent.

Talent and skills is one area in particular that is affecting the curry house sector - alongside a shortage of staff, many restaurants say they are finding it difficult to recruit chefs with the right level of skill required.

The food factor

In more unsettling news, record fuel and energy prices continue to put pressure on the cost of living, while food inflation is also expected to rise sharply this summer. According to analysts IGD, food inflation is likely to reach 15% this summer, rising on average around 11% over 2022. Its forecasts indicate that food inflation is set to hit its highest level for more than 20 years and that the pressure on consumers will last through to mid-2023.

Food inflation is expected to persist for longer than official forecasts due to several factors, including the impact of the war in Ukraine and pre-existing supply chain challenges. IGD says the strongest inflation pressure is expected to come from meat, cereal products, dairy, fruit and vegetables. In particular, it says products that rely on wheat for feed, such as white meats, are likely to see prices soar in the short

term. It concludes that the cost-of-

living pressures are unlikely to ease anytime soon, which it says will undoubtedly leave many households - and the businesses serving them - looking to the future with considerable anxiety.

Making a difference

At Curry Life, we have always been as keen as possible to provide the curry house sector with as much support and guidance as possible. We were thrilled to see so many of our supporters - both old friends and new faces, at our recent Culinary Workshop. This annual fixture provides an occasion for the industry to network, be inspired and share insight, which we all need at this moment in time. We hope to see many more of you at our next event, the Curry Life Awards 2022, taking place on 9 October. ●

NEW

Curry

Voice of the British Curry

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A PASSION
TO INSPIRE

Mark Popham

Tips from *the top*

Curry Life's latest event, the 2022 Culinary Workshop, featured a host of experts sharing best practice and industry insight



The Curry Life Culinary Workshop 2022 took place on 12 June, with 150 industry professionals gathering together to share best practice, network and pick up more than a few tips. The event, which took place at the Crowne Plaza London Docklands, featured a drinks reception with networking, a series of interactive sessions and certificate presentations for a number of chefs. Guests also enjoyed a three-course dinner, prepared by Bangladeshi catering company Pride of Asia.

Addressing attendees, Syed Belal Ahmed, editor of Curry Life magazine, said: "This is an event about learning, raising standards within the industry and networking and it is nice to get back to some sort of normality." ▶

From left to right: Vijay Singh Panwar, Tipu Miah, Jamal Uddin Ahmed, Md Al Amin Ali, Mark Poynton, Atul Kochhar, Syed Zohorul Islam, Abdul Gani, Mohammed Shaek Ahmed and Joe Choudhury.



Left, right and below: a harpist welcomed diners, a chance to catch up



From Lakeland Dairies

Savouring street food

Fergal Mullan, food safety manager UK at Just Eat, a long-time partner of Curry Life, also took to the stage, alongside food safety experts from NSF Ash Pancholi Dhillon, which visits restaurants to support them in achieving better hygiene ratings as well as offering training. Atul Kochhar, the first Indian chef to receive a Michelin-star, led a live cooking street food demonstration, preparing a delicious, mouth-watering Kerala fish curry



Misbah Uddin Siraj (2nd from left), a guest from Sylhet



Guests and partners of JUST EAT



Guests and celebrity chefs

recipe. It featured spices and condiments such as chopped ginger, garlic, chilli, turmeric, red chilli and coriander powder, together with tamarind paste and coconut milk.

“Spices start popping and releasing flavour into the cooking oil,” Kochhar told attendees. “And that cooking oil carries the flavour over into your curry or the sauce you are making. If you add spices too early they will not release the flavour, if you add spices when the oil is too hot, it will get burnt before it has a chance to release the flavour.”



Curry legend: Shamsuddin Khan with Atul Kochhar



Curry Life's editor-in-chief Syed Nahas Pasha and editor Syed Belal Ahmed with guests.



Syed Belal Ahmed



Fergal Mullan



Ash Pancholi Dhillon



Ludovica De Pieri



Mark Poynton



Atul Kochhar



Live cooking demonstration

Kochhar also spoke on how restaurants can counter the high prices of food, which have been rising steadily against a backdrop of the war between Russia and the Ukraine, supply chain issues and high labour costs.

"There will be some costs you will have to absorb - if the price of oil increases five times over, you cannot do the same to the ▶



Many industry guests attended



Above and below: event attendees





Syed Pasha, Ludovica De Pieri, Atul Kochhar and Mohan Miah of Cafe Spice



Abdul Gani and Ruhel Hoque of Indian Ocean



Mohammed Shaek Ahmed of Junoon Restaurant



Chef Md Al Amin Ali and Abdul Ahad of Millenium Balti



Chef Jamal Uddin Ahmed of Shozna Restaurant



Chef Zoe Choudhury, Jaminoor Choudhury of River Spice



Chef Tipu Miah and Abul Hasan of Zyka Restaurant



Khayer Ahmed Chowdhury of Kaz's Restaurant



Syed Zohorul Islam of The Capital Restaurant

price of your onion bhaji," he said. "But there will be some things you can increase the price of. Let's go back to the strength of our cuisine, we have been very strong on vegan and vegetarian food and we need to adapt, bring those dishes on the menu, which will help give you better margins."

Michelin-star chef Mark Poynton spoke about the benefits of sustainability focusing on embedding sustainability within your business and how it impacts many other aspects beyond food and waste. This includes how you treat your staff and how to ensure your business can maintain its presence over the next decade. ▶



CURRYLIFE A·W·A·R·D·S

2022



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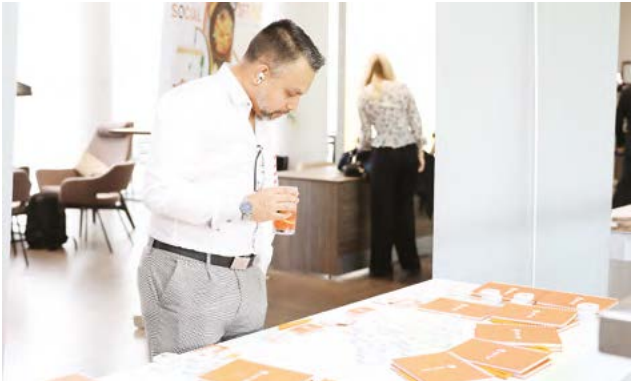
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“Sustainability is not just about where we buy produce from and what we do with zero waste,” he said. “It’s about how we run our business and much more besides - there is a bigger ecosystem than just the food.”

Ludovica De Pieri, a nutritionist and management consultant to the food industry and founder of Reveal My Food, also delivered a presentation, with the aim of highlighting current food-themed legislation, specifically new rules around calorie labelling. She also spoke on how restaurants can optimise their operations, how they can get the most out of ingredients and how to reach out to more diners.

“We’re also sharing some details on our website, including information on how to optimise allergens,” said De Pieri. “The whole point is to try to reduce the pressures facing restaurants.”

Syed Nahas Pasha, Curry Life magazine editor-in-chief said the event aimed not just to bring people together to share insight but was also aimed at inspiring the younger generation.

“The industry is going through a very tough time at the moment because of huge increases in the cost of living,” he said. “Everything has gone up in price and restaurants are suffering so we wanted to tackle these issues and offer some advice and guidance. Safety and hygiene is also very important.”

Delegates were keen to network and share knowledge, with Ruhel Hoque, managing director of The Indian Ocean restaurant in Cambridge saying it presented a great opportunity to network and learn about issues affecting the industry, such as forthcoming or new legislation. Other attendees said there was a fantastic vibe during the event, and that it was ‘great to see so many familiar faces as well as new ones.’

The event also featured stands from Curry Life partners, including Lakeland Dairies, which has recently launched a long-life single cream product and Bangla Beer.

Chefs who received their certificates on the night included Ruhel Hoque from The Indian Ocean, Brian Mohan Miah from Cafe Spice, Syed Zohorul Islam from The Capital, Mohammed Al Amin Ali from Millennium Balti, Mohammed Shaek Ahmed from Junoon, Tipu Miah from Zyka, Jamal Uddin Ahemd from Shozna, Joe Choudhury from River Spice and Khayer Ahmed Chowdhury from Kaz’s India & Bangladesh Restaurant.

The event was held together with support from headline sponsor Just Eat, with additional event partners including Unisoft Solutions, City Bank, Bangla Beer and Travel Link Worldwide. Curry Life’s next event will be the Curry Life Awards, which reward and recognise the individuals who represent the very best of the British curry Industry. It takes place on 9 October at The Great Room, The Grosvenor House, London. Find out more about the event by visiting www.currylifeawards.com. ●

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A helping hand from Cobra

Cobra Beer has supported several causes over the last few months, including Zest Quest Asia, a competition founded by restaurateurs Cyrus and Pervin Todiwala.

The competition encourages and inspires hundreds of student chefs in the UK to demonstrate their skills and knowledge of Asian cuisine, by designing and creating a dish inspired by authentic Asian tastes, textures and flavours.

Cobra Beer founder Karan Bilimoria said: "Cobra Beer and I, would like to thank and congratulate Cyrus and Pervin Todiwala and the Zest Quest team for all the wonderful work they are doing for our industry – you have always been, and continue to be, an utter inspiration to us all. We wish the participants in Zest Quest Asia 2022 all the very best."

Cobra Beer also sponsored the Lord Mayor's Platinum Jubilee Big Curry Lunch, which took place in April. The event was aimed at supporting the Veterans' Pain Management Programme at the King Edward VII hospital. It helps those suffering from the debilitating impact of pain - physical, psychological or both, offering advice on managing the pain and giving veterans the opportunity to seek employment.

Cobra provided a year's supply of beer that was raffled in a silent auction and also supplied beer for the event. ●

Oil and poultry prices to remain 'volatile'



The latest

edition of the Foodservice Price Index from CGA by NielsenIQ and Prestige Purchasing highlights edible oils and poultry as areas of 'particular volatility'. The availability of edible

oils has been hit by the war in Ukraine, while capacity for poultry has been reduced, Avian flu is active and feed and fuel costs have risen sharply.

James Ashurst, client director at CGA, said: "Energy costs have a direct impact on prices right across the foodservice sector, and the war in Ukraine has piled on even more inflationary pressure. Soaring prices are also starting to affect consumers' spending, and on top of global supply issues and the after-shocks of Covid and Brexit, the outlook for the rest of 2022 is extremely challenging." ●

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Cobra adds twist to Asian cuisine

Cobra Beer has launched a campaign highlighting how the beer is the ideal accompaniment for spicy food. 'Where There's Spice There's Cobra' aims to inspire and equip consumers to cook and eat pan-Asian cuisine, from Indian to Japanese and everything in between.

The campaign, which kicked off at the end of April, features four recipe videos available on social media. Cobra is working with 15 different influencers throughout the year, who will help support the beer brand in the wider pan-Asian foodie space.

It also has its two regular influencers - 'Cobra Flavour Seekers', who each month are sent into pan-Asian restaurants which stock Cobra, to create content featuring their dining experience, which they then share with their followers. Influencers, videos, and all content created will be featuring the Where there's Spice there's Cobra campaign. ●

Cobra's first every spicy snack partnership with PepsiCo's Sensations Naan Crisps

Cobra Beer has launched its first-ever spicy snack partnership with PepsiCo's Sensations Naan Crisps. Cobra and PepsiCo have teamed up to bring consumers in the off-trade promotions on bundles across 2022, delivering a step change for how beer and food brands collaborate and aiming to deliver a fantastic consumer experience at home.

Walkers launched its Sensations Naan Chips - crunchy baked snacks featuring Indian flavours, in March. They are aimed at those who are looking to try new flavours and textures in their snacking moments.

The range is currently available in two flavours: Garlic & Herb and Lime Pickle and is aimed at the premium crisp market. ●

Cobra appoints head of global sales and channel director



Samson Sohail

Cobra Beer has named Samson Sohail as its new head of global sales, with responsibility for extending Cobra's footprint across western Europe and beyond.



Sami Al Hakiem

Sohail was previously on-trade channel director. He has been replaced by Sami El Hakiem, who joined Molson Coors Beverage Company in 2009. El Hakiem worked in a variety of sales and procurement roles across the business, before moving to the role as on-trade channel director earlier this year.

El Hakiem is looking forward to continuing the traditions of the Cobra brand and the strong relationships that have been built up over many years by Sohail and the whole team, all whilst growing Cobra in new markets. ●





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Hospitality staff least likely to receive pay rise, survey suggests



Those working in the hospitality sector are least likely to receive a pay rise or financial incentive, when compared to other sectors.

This is according to a recent survey of UK adults, focusing on their current employment and asking whether they have received financial incentives to counter the cost of living crisis or if they have considered asking for a pay rise due to the current economic situation.

It found that only 4% of companies have voluntarily awarded financial compensation, with the hospitality industry among the least generous. Only 2.4% of hospitality employees were voluntarily offered a pay rise, while 65.6% of hospitality employees considered asking for a pay rise, the lowest of all industries and below the national average of 68%. Despite being the lowest for those who considered asking for a pay rise, 17.2% of employees in hospitality ended up asking for a salary increase.

Of those that asked, 17.9% of employees received a pay rise, among the lowest of all industries. Zero hospitality employees received a pay rise above the current level of inflation (9%).

The survey was carried out among 5,100 UK adults by personal finance experts at Forbes Advisor. Of those surveyed, 3,546 (68%) revealed they have considered asking their employer for a pay rise. The highest number of respondents answering yes were those aged between 35-44, with 75% revealing they had considered asking for more money.

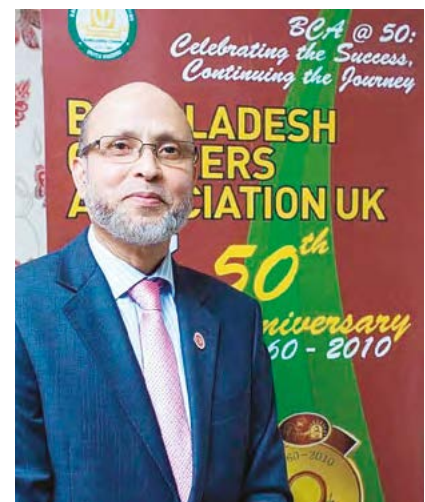
The age group which were least likely to consider asking for a pay rise were those aged over 54 years old, at 69%.

Regionally, those living in the East Midlands were most likely to ask for a pay rise due to the cost of living crisis with 76% of respondents answering yes. In second place were those in Wales at 73.9%, followed by the North East with 73.4% responding. ●

OBE honour for BCA president

Mohammed Abdul Munim, the president of the Bangladesh Caterers Association, has been recognised as an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) for services to the British Bangladeshi catering industry.

Munim was included in the Queen's Birthday Honours list 2022, revealed in June on the Queen's official birthday,



and which this year coincided with Platinum Jubilee celebrations.

The list recognises the achievements of those who have gone above and beyond their role and made a significant impact on their community, organisation or the country.

Speaking to Curry Life, Munim said: "I am delighted to receive the recognition of my hard work and dedication to the curry industry and local community. It will definitely help to raise the profile of Bangladeshi issues in the UK while all the recognised people work together for the common goal." ●



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Kingfisher unveils modern-themed brand refresh



Kingfisher has unveiled a new look that highlights the brand's premium and modern credentials, as part of a major brand refresh.

Unveiled in June, the rebrand includes new-look labels and outer packaging, as well as new glassware, a new font and POS materials for restaurateurs.

Core to the rebrand is the tagline 'Look up and see the beauty', which is front



and centre of a consumer marketing campaign focusing on encouraging drinkers to be more present in their lives and appreciate the beauty all around them that they may otherwise take for granted. The new-look encapsulates the beauty of the bird and the colourful heritage of India.

Shaun Goode, chief operating officer at KBE Drinks said: "We are immensely proud of Kingfisher's Indian heritage, and we've reflected this in our new colourful and vibrant brand creative. We're really excited to be bringing our new look to life through our 'Look up and see the beauty' marketing campaign, which will encourage consumers to think about their well-being, take a step back from digital spaces and appreciate the world around them by enjoying real-life experiences that improve mental and physical health. This should resonate with our target audience." ●

Lutfur Rahman wins Tower Hamlets electoral race



A new mayor has been elected for Tower Hamlets, with Lutfur Rahman standing for the Aspire party, defeating incumbent Labour mayor John Biggs. Rahman was previously mayor of the borough in 2015, but was removed after being found guilty of electoral fraud. After second preference votes were counted, Biggs received 33,487 votes compared to Rahman's 40,804 votes. Following his victory, Mr Rahman told the BBC he was very pleased voters had given him "another chance to serve them" and "deliver my progressive agenda which I started in 2010".

"The people of the borough gave a verdict today. I was in the court of the people and they said in a loud voice that they wanted Lutfur Rahman and his team to serve them for the next four years," he added. ●

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HOW TO GET AHEAD

Taking part in the Curry Life Food Festival is a great way for chefs to improve their knowledge and skills

The Curry Life Food Festival, which showcases some of the UK's favourite curry dishes alongside the best of British regional cuisine, is taking place in October in Dhaka, Bangladesh. It gives participants the chance to learn new skills, share recipes and gather tips from a range of experts. It's an inspiring educational, culinary and cultural experience and this year's UK delegation will be led by Dominic Chapman, chef/patron at The Beehive in White Waltham, and former head chef for Heston Blumenthal.

Learning curve

Curry Life spoke to former participants to find out what they learnt when they took part, and why it's a must-attend event. Kayum Ali is the owner and executive chef at Spice Fusion in



BRITISH CURRY FESTIVAL

Halesowen and attended the festival in 2017, when it was held at the Hyatt Regency Chandigarh in India. He said being part of the event is a great way to promote yourself and your restaurant, and it has helped to boost Spice Fusion's reputation among its customer base, as



Keith Vaz, Karen Buck and few other MP's were present at the Dhaka Festival in 2008

well as attracting new customers.

"I went to one festival in India and I have also attended a few other Curry Life seminars and workshops," he says. "It has given me a real confidence boost as well as teaching me some new skills. It does involve being away for a few days but it's definitely been worth it for me."

For Abul Monsur, chef at Taj Cuisine in Walderslade, attending the festival was also a memorable experience. He was part of the 2016 event, which took place at the ITC Maurya in New Delhi in India.

"You can share some of your own ideas with the chefs in the country you are visiting as well as gain some new ones that you can use in your restaurant when you return," he says. "You are learning every day in a fast-paced environment and it's really exciting to find out about new trends and to see first-hand what others in the industry are doing."

Monsur adds that sharing knowledge and recipes can be a great way to improve as a chef, not just on a professional level, but a personal one too and being immersed in live cooking demonstrations is a fun way to learn. ▶



▲ Chefs take part in live cooking demonstrations

Chef Jamal Uddin from Shozna restaurant in Rochester, Kent has previously attended two festivals, one also in India and the other in Dhaka. He says that those chefs that take part get to experience ‘the bigger picture’ of the industry and learn new techniques, particularly as they are surrounded by highly knowledgeable chefs with years of training between them.

“It’s definitely worth taking the time to go; when I returned from both festivals, I used everything I learnt to improve my knowledge and to become a better chef,” he says. “They were both fantastic experiences and they have given me more confidence to do things in a bigger and bolder way.”

Widen your knowledge

Those participating can also benefit from advice on health and safety. Shamsul Islam, a regulatory service manager for the London Borough of Brent, has been involved in several festivals and will be attending the forthcoming one in Dhaka. His day job involves working with restaurants, shops and hotels to ensure the health and safety of those who work in the borough. At the festival, he will be on hand to ensure chefs understand about food safety and hygiene, such as washing hands regularly, wearing gloves when preparing and mixing food, wearing a hairnet and ensuring

food is cooked thoroughly and that cooked rice is not left out or that rice is not prepared three days in advance, for example.

“While they are preparing the dishes and the menu, my role is to help raise the hygiene standards of the food and to focus on health, by highlighting how we can make a high-calorie dish such as chicken tikka masala more healthy,” he says. “We can prepare a vegetarian version instead or use olive oil rather than ghee as an example, which is a possible substitute for many dishes or reduce portion sizes. We want to encourage chefs to rethink and redesign the way they work with food and I am advising on the health benefits.”

Islam says chefs can also learn about

making their cuisine more energy efficient. “Instead of preparing a dish five times, can you do it in one go in a tandoor oven for example?” he says. “Restaurants are normally open from 5pm until 11pm and with the high prices of energy and climate change, it’s important to learn about energy efficiency as it can help reduce costs and be more beneficial for the environment.”

He adds that those who participate don’t just have the chance to work alongside Michelin-star chefs and executive chefs from five-star hotels, they also get to learn and interact with front-of-house managers who run complex, large events.

“It’s not just about cooking and

▼ Guests savouring festival food



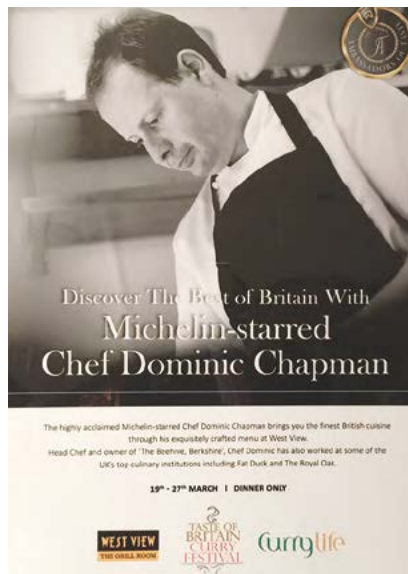


▲ Lord Bilimoria inaugurated Delhi Festival, and restaurateurs from the UK attended the festival.

improving your restaurant - it's about understanding a whole range of other processes involved in cuisine and food preparation, for example, looking at the latest technology available," he says. "You can look at all the equipment on offer in the hotels and see how these work and how they can improve processes and help you to better manage your time."

Participants can also learn about many other aspects that can help refine their attention to details, such as the best types of knives to use for preparation and how to enhance flavours for different palates.

"Chefs get to exchange knowledge and experience the dishes from other chefs, as well as learning new and different



▲ Dominic Chapman: leading the UK delegation

ways to present food," says Islam. "They can also test new equipment and even find out how to redesign a restaurant menu."

The Festival is taking place from 21-27 October and aims to promote British Bangladeshi chefs' artistic and culinary skills, highlighting the leading role they play in ensuring curry's enduring popularity in the UK and beyond. It also aims to strengthen ties between the UK and Bangladesh.

There are limited places available for those who wish to join this exciting culinary journey, or if you are interested in finding out more about sponsorship opportunities, contact Syed Belal Ahmed on 07956 439458 for further details. ●

British Curry Festival 2022

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Beehive

Two new ventures for Curry Life contributors

Chefs Dominic Chapman and Mark Poynton, two long-time contributors to Curry Life, have revealed two new food-themed ventures. Chapman, who currently operates The Beehive in White Waltham, has taken over the Michelin-starred gastropub The Crown at Burchetts Green in Berkshire, while Poynton, chef patron at Restaurant MJP at The Shepherds, Cambridge, which opened in June 2020, is unveiling a

new restaurant in 2023, Mark Poynton at Caistor Hall.

The Crown, previously owned by chef Simon Bonwick, was opened 10 years ago, in 2012. Chapman reopened the restaurant in mid-June and told Curry Life he was excited to get up and running with the new venture as soon as possible.

“I am always looking for new opportunities and The Crown has a fantastic reputation with lots of room

to develop,” he said. “My team wants to grow and while it’s a challenging time to take over a new business, there’s a lot to look forward to.”

Chapman added he will be putting his own stamp on the business, by putting in place many of the existing practices followed at his current restaurant.

“We will offer excellent service and food, making people feel welcome and ensuring we use quality ingredients,” he



Dominic Chapman



Dominic's new restaurant



Caistor Hall Hotel

said. "It is a 30-cover restaurant so it is a much smaller concept than The Beehive and we are looking forward to hitting the ground running."

The menu in the opening week featured dishes such as Warm Salad of Smoked Eel with Beetroot and Horseradish, Lasagne of Wild Rabbit, Wood Blewits and Chervil, Poached Turbot and Champagne Velouté and Roast Sutton Hoo Chicken with Smoked Cockles and Bacon Sauce. Desserts featured Cherry Trifle and English Raspberry Mess.



Mark Poynton

Chapman said the menu reflects his style of food, featuring seasonal ingredients that bring out flavours, with dishes changing on a regular basis.

Caistor Hall by Brasteds is a country house hotel close to Norwich. Mark Poynton at Caistor Hall will be open from Wednesday to Saturday for lunch and dinner and will be offering a tasting menu only, which will be five or nine courses at lunch, and the full nine courses at dinner. The new venture will have 8 tables, offering a maximum of 40 covers for

each service and a vegetarian and vegan option will also be available.

Head chef at Caistor Hall will be Byron Franklin who is currently working alongside Poynton at The Shepherds, while helping him to develop dishes at Caistor Hall ready for the opening in February.

Speaking to Curry Life, Poynton said: "Even though times are hard at the minute we have to continue to grow as a business and grow the people in the business. I was presented this opportunity with the amazing team at Caistor Hall, and I didn't think I could turn it down."

He added that the menu will focus on 'seasonal' and 'sustainable' produce, with his team sourcing the best seasonal ingredients possible to create light but flavour-driven dishes.

"With regards to the food industry, people and produce continue to excite me - without both we have nothing," he said. ●



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A wholesaler and restaurateur tell Curry Life about the impact of continued price hikes on their businesses



Paying the price

Hardly a day seems to go by without another worrying statistic about price hikes. In the last month alone, petrol costs have soared and retail price inflation hit 2.8%, the highest figure since July 2011, driven by an increase in fresh food prices, according to the British Retail Consortium. Businesses have also struggled with rising energy costs over the last few months and there are warnings of worse to come.

Curry houses are increasingly worried about their future prospects, having been hit hard by the price of oil, in particular that of sunflower oil. With the majority produced in Ukraine, prices have soared due to the ongoing conflict with Russia. Spice prices have increased too.

Rahims, the UK's largest Bangladeshi-owned cash-and-carry, which supplies over 5000 retailers and trade customers across the UK and beyond, and Ana Miah, the owner of Juboraj restaurant, in Wales, offer their views on the pricing issue.

Sharif Hussain

Director, Rahims

The outlook has been quite challenging for a few years, starting with Brexit, followed by Covid and now inflation - all of this is causing prices to go through the roof. Brexit uncertainty meant the general public spent less and there was uncertainty surrounding the trade rules with the EU, compounded by worry about the imports and exports and the amount of red tape. This resulted in lots of stockpiling.

During Covid we had panic buying which led to well-documented supply chain issues and there were increasing costs in manufacturing from a number of factors, for example, staff shortages in India, Bangladesh and many other countries. During the global pandemic, everyone

faced really challenging situations and factories were closed and it was difficult for the manufacturers themselves. Then there are problems with freight, with not enough empty containers heading back to source to bring in the goods from abroad. This means freight costs have just soared, and it all has a knock-on effect. There is also a backlog at UK ports: a shortage of staff means longer times to process imports and this also has an impact on the supply chain.

Smart purchasing

We initially tried to swallow the costs as much as we could but it gets to a point where it is unsustainable, particularly when you look at the current climate, with energy bills increasing, and minimum wages stagnating. It all has a knock-on effect and we have to pass these costs on; people are understanding luckily but we have been advising our customers as



Sharif Hussain

much as we can about smart purchasing, This means buying now to prevent further issues or finding cheaper alternatives to basmati rice. We've seen a shift in our customers' buying habits, changing from traditional basmati grain to extra long grain; there is one and a half percent

yield in comparison, so we are advising people to spend smarter. But prices are continually going up, with spices it is a daily thing. It's also challenging with the war in Ukraine and the oil situation, while a lot of chicken comes in from Europe; the price of chicken has soared and we have no idea when this will end.

With smarter purchasing, we are advising people where they can save money without compromising on quality. Traditional balti houses that 'cook out of a can', such as those using premade marinades, are likely to suffer but those that are smart, that are looking at fusion cooking or using fresh ingredients, will come through this crisis strongly. Premade marinades make it easier for the restaurant to have fewer skilled employees, saving on staffing costs but then it does not make you unique. It will be these sorts of businesses that will suffer while those that are spending a bit more on quality, will do well. ▶



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We are also advising our customers about the benefits of going digital in terms of having to adjust their prices in the current climate, as they won't have to spend so much on reprinting costs, for example. It's important to go digital as soon as you can, with your menu and advertising.

Next steps

We need a level of cohesion within local businesses: we are all in the same boat, let's not shoot each other in the foot. We need to address our issues altogether and come up with a plan that suits us all - one rotten apple can bring everyone down.

Is it reasonable for restaurants to increase the price of dishes? It's difficult to say whether it is good or bad, and what else can they do? They can either change the ingredients, and compromise on quality or in order to maintain quality, they have to increase prices. If the quality goes down, customers may not come back again. You have to be smart and look at alternatives.

Thankfully we all need to eat and we have all managed to save some money during Covid. People do have disposable income to spend and once inflation settles down, who knows?

At Rahims we are actively working with manufacturers on a regular basis to try and maintain price levels for the caterers. We are trying to take advantage ahead of any further price hikes and as we have live information on price movements, we are looking at how best to advise our customers on their purchases.

Ana Miah

Owner, Juboraj

The cost of goods, ingredients and energy has had a huge impact on our expenditure - week in and week out, our outgoings have substantially increased and we are finding it very difficult to sustain levels of business. Increasing the prices on our menu is easier said than done, we don't particularly want to pass on our price increases to our customers. If we were a seasonal business, we could change prices according to what we pay our suppliers but unfortunately, this is not the case.



Ana Miah



our own web ordering system rather than going through a third party. We may see a time when enough of our customers have moved to our website so that we can reduce our reliance on third parties, although we introduced this during the pandemic to help boost the takeaway side. You have to do a bit of mixing and matching and see what works and be prepared to change if necessary or do a number of trial runs.

Challenging times

We are finding it very difficult to pass on extra increases to our customers so we are having to bear it for the moment but how long this can go on for is anyone's guess. We can't sustain this for months to come - we have put up prices in the takeaway sector but at present, for those dining in we've maintained the same prices. It's easier to justify price increases with the takeaway than with the dining-in menu as we offer quite generous portions.

We haven't explored digital menus just yet; as a lot of our menus are printed, it's complicated to make these sudden changes. We do have our own website for online ordering and also use a third party, Uber Eats. We try to attract customers to come onto our website by giving out leaflets, for example, offering them a discount if they order directly from us rather than using a third party. It's something I have started relatively recently and we are seeing a good number of people moving to

Healthy approach

We are making a conscious effort to provide more healthy food using ingredients that are better for the consumers. We are aware of the high level of calories that some of our dishes can contain, so we are cutting down on our use of oil. Indian cuisine has a reputation for being unhealthy so it's important - even in the context of price hikes, to keep improving on these areas in order to keep our customers coming back.

We have certainly become very price conscious and we are looking to seek deals wherever we can find them and buying non-perishable goods in bulk. We are in a more fortunate position as we have extra storage space so we can store many goods. It's about finding the right solutions that suit your business the best, testing these and seeing what difference they make. ●

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Bradford's City of Culture win to boost curry houses?

The UK's 'capital of curry', Bradford, has been crowned the UK's City of Culture 2025, with the decision announced live during BBC's The One show on 31 May. Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, Nadine Dorries, announced Bradford's win live from Coventry, which currently holds the title. A piece on ITV News has suggested that the win could spark greater demand for curry,



with hundred of thousands expected to visit the area and the city's curry houses as a result. Three other contenders were vying for the title, including County Durham, Southampton and Wrexham. ●

Celebrities champion curry

Singer/songwriter Ed Sheeran enjoyed an Indian curry after his performance at the Queen's Jubilee celebrations, stopping off for a takeaway at his favourite local, the Curry India restaurant in Framlingham in Suffolk. In an article on the Suffolk



Ed Sheeran



Johnny Depp

Live website, owner Belal Mintu said that Sheeran is a long-standing and loyal customer, who has ordered a takeaway from Curry India between 10-15 times a year for more than a decade. "He is a regular customer for more than ten years; he loves our curry, and he is very, very friendly," Mr Mintu said.

Hollywood actor Johnny Depp, meanwhile, booked out one of the UK's biggest Indian restaurants to celebrate the outcome of his recent court case against ex-wife Amber Heard. According to a report in the Metro, Depp enjoyed a lavish feast at Birmingham's Varanasi, with guests feasting on kebabs and curries. Depp stayed for three hours and left with a goodie bag. Varanasi's general manager Mohammed Hussain was quoted as saying: "We were so excited to hear Johnny Depp was coming to visit and are just over the moon to have met and hosted him here at the restaurant." ●



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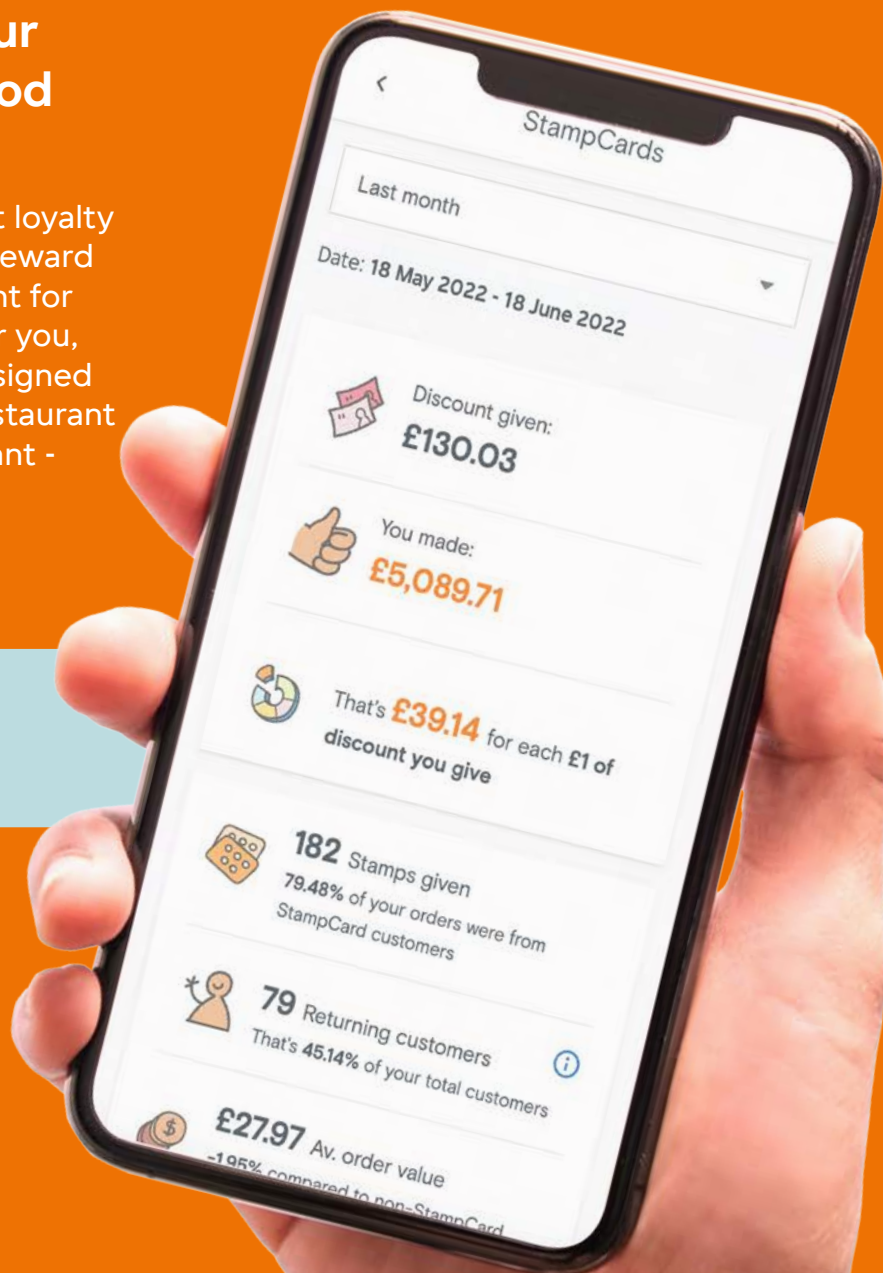
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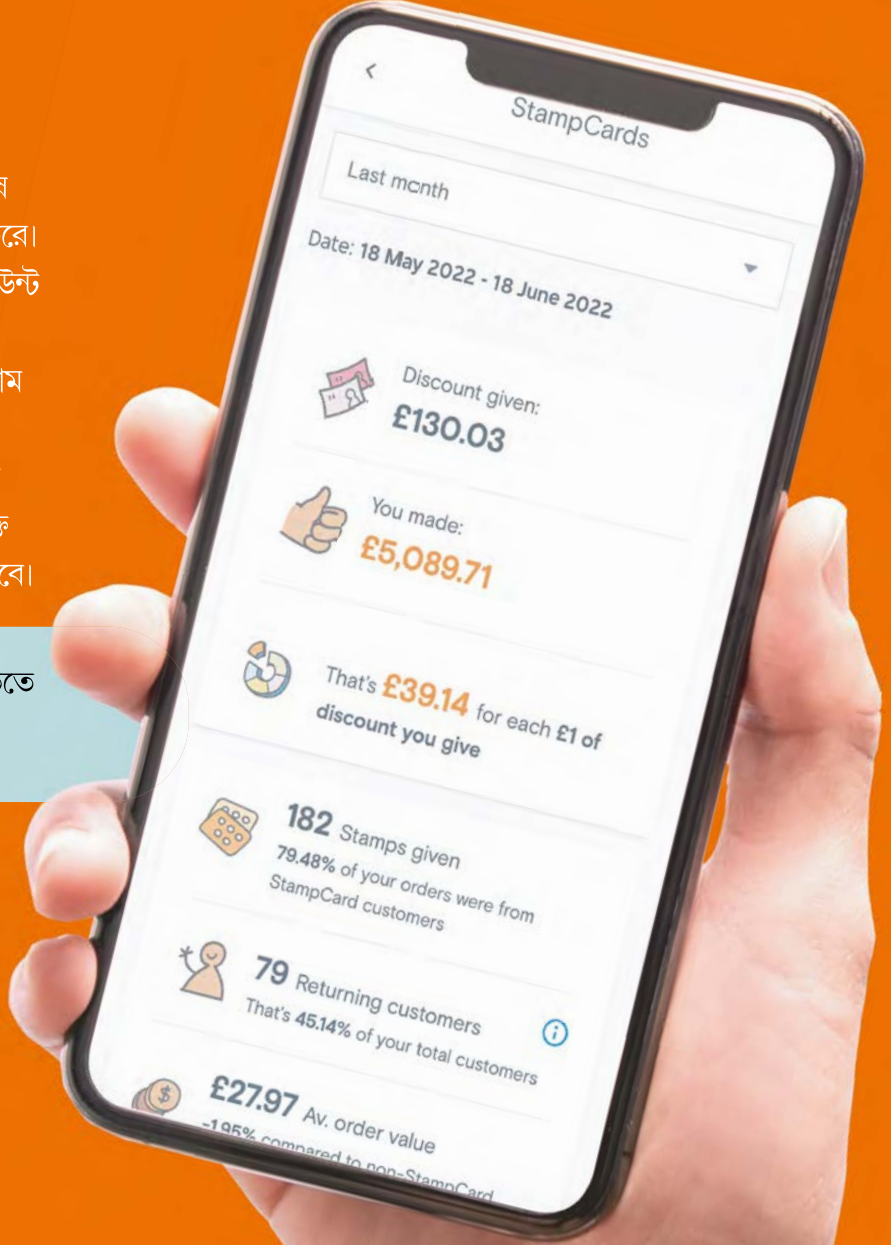


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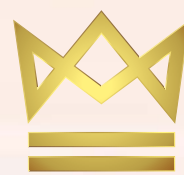
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JUST EAT



BRITISH
CURRY LEGEND

Leading Light

Shamsuddin Khan

Shamsuddin Khan's influence extends far beyond having opened one of the first Indian restaurants in London, as Curry Life finds out

Shamsuddin Khan, now in his 80s, has experienced first-hand the many changes in Bangladesh's political, historical and cultural landscape. But it's not from being in the country itself, as one might imagine, where he's seen these changes, but rather from a corner of south west London - Clapham to be precise.

It's here you'll find Maharani restaurant. Khan has been the owner for the last 65 years, ever since it opened in 1958, and deservedly has a reputation as one of the UK's founding curry restaurateurs. But Maharani - and Khan aren't just known for putting London on the map for Indian food - the restaurant was also a gathering place for the Bangladeshi community in the 1970s and early 1980s, particularly for supporters of the Awami League political party. Khan was the founder of the UK arm (while not involved today, he is still very much respected by existing members of the League) and his ties with the party led to a close friendship with Sheik Hasina, the current prime minister of Bangladesh.

Her father and other members of her family were assassinated in 1975 while she was away in Germany; as the exiled opposition leader following her father's death, she visited London, found her



Sheik Rehana, Mrs Khan and Sheik Hasina in Clapham, London

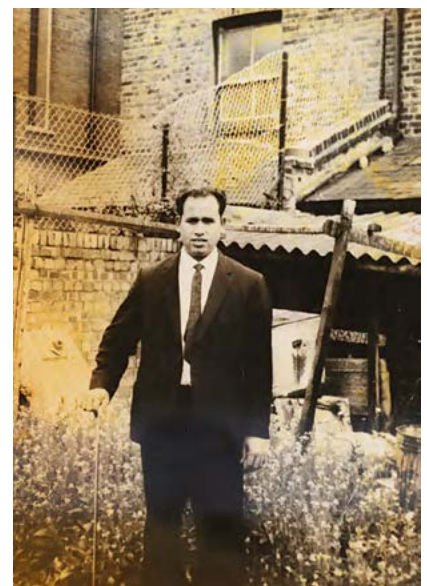
way to Maharani and often stayed with Khan and his wife in their home, just a few minutes' drive away from the restaurant.

Opportunity knocks

It's in that very same house, in a modest living room, where Khan is speaking to Curry Life, sharing some of the more colourful moments from his fascinating life story. He first came to London when he was 17, finding work in an Italian restaurant in Soho's Old Compton Street. Over two years, he honed his restaurant skills, moving from the kitchen to front of house, perfecting the art of making tea, and eventually moved on to work at Jaipur, an Indian restaurant in Shepherds Bush. At the age of 20, together with business partners, he then bought the leasehold to an existing Italian restaurant in Clapham, which eventually became Maharani.

At the time the area, much like other parts of London, was run down and curry was something of a novelty. Khan even recalls having to procure spices from unusual places, such as the local chemist and having to grind them ▶

Shamsuddin Khan in early days





Shamsuddin Khan in front of his restaurant Maharani

himself. Word soon spread, however, about the cuisine and as Khan says, many people were attracted as they had colonial ties to India, having previously visited or worked in the country. Business picked up a few years later, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when many parts of London were regenerated under then UK prime minister Harold Wilson's Urban Programme.

Well-connected

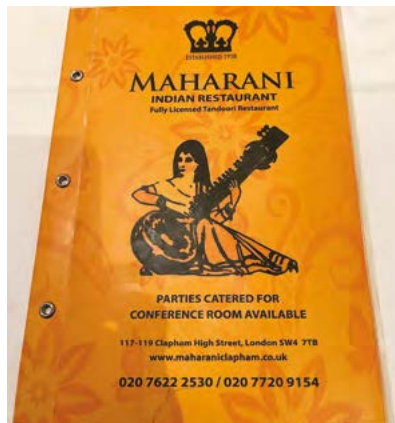
It seemed a natural progression for the restaurant to become a hub, a place where many Bangladeshis gathered to exchange ideas, particularly with Khan's ties to the Awami League, and by 1973, Khan had purchased the freehold and bought out his previous business partners.

"There were still not many restaurants at that time so Maharani became a community space for supporters of the League - that's how I became connected to Sheik Hasina," explains Khan.

The restaurant also grew a very loyal customer base, many of whom still visit today, some travelling long distances. Khan remembers one particular customer who was seven years old when he first visited; he has since moved away from London but visits with his own children from time to time when he is back in London.

Today, Maharani is as popular as it was all those years ago, and the menu features a mix of dishes such as Madras, Korma and Bhuna curries alongside house specials such as Shorisha Murg, (described as hot, spicy with mustard paste), Murgh e Zoyton (chicken tikka flavoured with olive & fresh spices, slightly hot), Gost Kata Masala (Diced lamb pieces cooked in a special sauce made from yogurt & fresh herbs) and Chicken Rajeshwari (cooked with fresh herbs, tomatoes, chutneys, coriander, ginger, garlic and green chillies).

The restaurant has also attracted its fair share of celebrity diners, including the actor Pierce Brosnan and television presenter Sarah Kennedy. It's also won numerous awards and expanded over the years. In 2002, due to ongoing demand, Khan bought the site adjoining the restaurant and the restaurant now offers 150 covers. Other restaurants followed too - a total of 11, within London or close to the capital, including takeaways but Khan now only operates two - the existing Maharani and another one based in Camden, which is managed by his nephew, Abdul Karim Nazim. Alongside the catering industry, Khan is also involved in a cash and carry



Shamsuddin Khan with his wife



"People became more interested in trying Indian curry - we had our menu on a blackboard, with prices and items, just a few dishes including chicken curry," recalls Khan, who managed the front of house. "The restaurant was busy every Friday and Saturday, and was packed after the pubs and clubs shut."

Most of the Indian restaurants at the time were based in London's West End (Veeraswamy in Regent Street is often credited as the being the oldest in London, having opened in 1926), so Maharani was able to establish itself as a restaurant that people were keen to travel to. Khan says that at the time, people were happy to help others out. He was even called the 'Young Governor', with many people coming to visit, impressed by the young entrepreneur and what he had already achieved.



business in London's east end, owns properties and several tea plantations in Bangladesh and has also contributed to a number of charitable endeavours.

Facing the future

While Khan has carved out an impressive business empire, Maharani is where it all started and it's clear to see that he is finding it hard to let his business go; he visits the restaurant most evenings and says he feels uneasy when he is not there. Talking about his succession plans is difficult too as none of his three children (two sons and a daughter) are interested in the restaurant industry or have any intention of taking over the business, having carved out successful careers in completely different sectors - within the foreign office, education and aviation.

It's a common problem faced by many within the industry. Bangladeshi restaurant operators are finding out their children who have been brought up and schooled in the UK have little interest in learning a trade they perceive as involving long hours and perhaps not as well paid as other careers. They also have less ties with their mother country and therefore perhaps less of an emotional connection with their

parents' businesses. The curry sector is also facing other issues such as a continued squeeze on margins and Khan believes there is no easy solution to help improve the sector's outlook, but suggests that the use of buffets and the way food is presented need to be addressed.

And what of Maharani's future, given that Khan has been at the helm for more than six decades now? With two nephews currently working with him, Khan is hopeful that the Maharani name will continue to make an impact for years to come. ●

From left to right, Abdul Karim Nazim, Mrs Sofrunnessa Khanom, Shamsuddin Khan, Syed Belal Ahmed and Syed Nahas Pasha



From left to right: Mrs Sofrunnessa Khanom, Prime Minister Sheik Hasina and Shamsuddin Khan in London.



Take-homes

for TAKEAWAYS

▲ The takeaway sector saw a huge surge over lockdown

Takeaways are big business, having grown across the UK in the last year. Curry Life catches up with two Indian takeaways to find out where the challenges lie and their tips for success



love of ordering meals at home, what they order differs across the country. Those in the North East for example, opt for traditional fish and chips as their favourite takeaway dish, while Londoners prefer pizza and are the biggest spenders, with an average of £73.70 spent on takeaways each month.

Curry also holds its own, with the Vodafone survey showing Indian food is also a top takeaway choice in the south-east of the country. A separate Just Eat survey, carried out across December and January 2022, put Indian as the third top-rated cuisine in England, and the favourite food in the West Midlands, particularly in Telford and The Wrekin. Despite Indian cuisine receiving a lower score in Worcester, the Korma dish has one of the highest ratings here than in any other district.

Obesity concerns

Recent figures from the Office of National Statistics (ONS) show that across the UK, the 43,235 takeaways and mobile food stands recorded last year represented a 5.6 per cent rise from 2020 – the largest increase since 2015. Many places with the highest density of takeaways were in urban areas that would naturally attract the trade – Westminster in the centre of London topped the list of London boroughs, with 116.7 takeaways per 100,000 people.

There are concerns, however, that the rise in takeaways is contributing to increased obesity levels. A report in the The Times highlights a World Health Organisation report released last month, quoting Dr Kremlin Wickramasinghe, the WHO lead for non-communicable diseases in Europe. He said the UK ‘was ahead of other European countries in adopting a lifestyle with “more and more digital screen time”, with online food deliveries and exposure to junk food advertising. He said obesity rates are increasing ‘because the measures being taken are not yet adequate’. The WHO report cites UK research which shows ▶

Whichever survey you look at, it’s clear the takeaway restaurant industry boomed in 2021. Figures from Barclaycard released last December showed that spending on takeaways and fast food increased by 62% in 2021, largely fuelled by the pandemic.

A study conducted among 2,000 adults, commissioned by Vodafone together with Just Eat, shows that the Brits are a nation of takeaway lovers. The findings, released in April, say a quarter of those surveyed, (25%) admitted to ordering takeaway meals three or four times a month. Findings showed that while people share a nationwide



RECENT FIGURES FROM THE OFFICE OF NATIONAL STATISTICS (ONS) SHOW THAT ACROSS THE UK, THE 43,235 TAKEAWAYS AND MOBILE FOOD STANDS RECORDED LAST YEAR REPRESENTED A 5.6 PER CENT RISE FROM 2020 – THE LARGEST INCREASE SINCE 2015.



that someone eating a takeaway meal consumes on average 200 more calories per day than when eating food prepared at home.

Such meals are typically higher in calories, fat, sugar and salt, while portion sizes are often larger, “which encourages overeating, particularly if there is little price differential between portion sizes”, the report adds.

A challenging environment

Takeaways are also not immune from the challenges that have hit the hospitality industry nationwide, such as increased prices for ingredients and hikes in energy costs. There are also calls for takeaways to become more sustainable. In a survey of 7,000 global consumers commissioned by online order management provider Deliverect, respondents revealed eco-friendly takeaway and delivery options are important to their ordering decisions. While 65% of survey respondents said they find healthy, sustainable eating to be more expensive, almost half (43%) are willing to pay more for takeaways where there are visible sustainability practices. Another 47% would even consider changing what they order from the menu to be more sustainable.

So what do takeaways think of the current business landscape? Curry Life spoke to Gyash Uddin, the owner of Fusion Foods in Markyate, St Alban’s and Abdul Malik, chef at Bolton’s Little India takeaway.

FUSION FOODS



For Uddin, who opened Fusion Foods in 2019, having previously had a restaurant close by, business boomed during the Covid-19 pandemic. He has noticed however that the takeaway is not as busy now as it has been, with rising energy costs making people more cautious about where they spend their money.

“We are seeing a pattern now with our regulars who used to come in two or three times a week - now they are just coming once a week,” he says. “It’s certainly quietened down.”

Uddin has seen a huge increase in the price of food - a 10 kilogram box of chicken for example that used to cost £34 is now £51. He says

that dealing with the rising cost of living is not as simple as increasing the prices of food; instead he uses social media such as Facebook and Instagram to offer promotions to his loyal customers, one example being if they have 10 takeaways, they can get a certain amount off the next one. He has also reduced his menu, taking out several fish dishes, such as those featuring monkfish, trout and seabass.

“It’s about being clever with the advertising and keeping standards high,” says Uddin. “The quality has to be consistent and the food has to be tasty. We’re in a small village of around 4,000 people and everyone knows everyone else, I know all the takeaway’s customers. We’ve been in business for three years now. When you first start, everything is new and it’s all too easy for standards to slip but you need to keep the same level of consistency.”



▲ **Fusion Foods: Challenges ahead**

Uddin is also keen to involve customers as much as possible, particularly when designing new menus, and he often invites up to 10 customers to taste new dishes and give their opinion.

“We give tasters to customers when they come in and I cook new dishes and ask them what they feel is right or wrong with it,” he says. “We have something similar to a korma and when we introduced it, we invited the korma lovers to come in because they will know whether the taste will work and it’s similar with the spicy dishes. There’s a lot of competition, even in a small village so we need to make sure the quality is always high.

With its location within a small village, Fusion Foods does not use third party delivery options, employing its own drivers instead. For Uddin, it’s vital to have reliable staff on board, particularly with a takeaway business, where people expect to have hot food, delivered on time. He is now looking to open another takeaway close by, in Harpenden.



▲ **Bakhtiar Murshed and Gyash Uddin**

LITTLE INDIA

Little India’s Abdul Malik enjoys the fast-paced environment of a takeaway business, and the fact that he can serve multiple customers all at the same time. He thrives on the pressures of takeaway - ensuring that the time from order to delivery is acceptable, that food is delivered on time and that dishes remain hot.



Like Fusion Foods, Little India does not use third party partners for orders and deliveries, preferring to handle the logistics in-house.

“We are an independent business, we advertise for ourselves and we don’t use a third party as we think we deserve the credit,” says Malik. Third parties provide a website - the hard work comes from the inside.”

Over lockdown, Malik says the Bolton takeaway was very busy, with the business switching to contactless delivery and ensuring it could keep its customers happy while ▶



▲ **Chef Abdul Malik of Little India**

WE ARE REDUCING THE AMOUNT OF CALORIES IN OUR DISHES AND TRYING NOT TO USE TOO MUCH FAT OR OIL, ALL OF WHICH WILL BENEFIT OUR CUSTOMERS,

managing health and safety levels within Covid guidelines. But he acknowledges the situation is quite different now, with increasing pressure on the business owing to the high price of ingredients.

“We use quality ingredients but due to inflation, the higher cost of living and the situation in Ukraine, prices have shot up,” he says. “We want to ensure our customers get the same quality so we are faced with a real challenge. We’ve been in our location for such a long time and customers have recognised our hard work, they are like family and they have seen us provide the same consistency time and time again.”

Malik says it is important that customers realize that any price changes are not about making more money but about keeping the business going and providing the same standard his customers are used to.

Little India also endorses social media, saying it is a great way to keep in touch with customers and promote the restaurant to a wider base.

“We are on Facebook and Google; it’s important to be on these channels because the majority of marketing is done digitally - before it was all about leaflets,” says Malik. “We’ve seen an increase in our business through social channels and it’s easier to talk to our customers via messenger services. There is so much competition in the takeaway industry that we need to keep in touch with our customers and keep them happy so they come back for more.”

Malik also recognises the trend for more healthy food options and says it’s important for perceptions around takeaway food to change.



▲ **Little India saw increased demand over lockdown**

“We are reducing the amount of calories in our dishes and trying not to use too much fat or oil, all of which will benefit our customers,” he says. “There are lots of ways to do this, it’s about being proactive and wanting to change, then you can experiment with different approaches.” ●

Government fails to tackle 'unhealthy food' issue



Henry Dimpleby

The Government's widely-anticipated Food Strategy for England, released in mid-June, has come under fire for failing to address major challenges facing the food industry, such as the sale of unhealthy food products.

The policy paper follows an independent review carried out by Henry Dimpleby, the founder of restaurant chain Leon, who made a number of recommendations around health, including introducing a tax on sugar and salt and addressing environmental issues, such as enabling sustainable food production.

In reports following the paper's release, Dimpleby himself said that the paper 'was not a strategy. It doesn't set out a clear vision as to why we have the problems we have now and it doesn't set out what needs to be done.' He added that 'food providers are being inflated into not producing healthy meals.'

A number of industry bodies have also criticised the content, saying the paper fails to address current, critical issues such as the broken food system and the cost of living crisis, which has been fuelled in

recent months by the soaring price of food as well as petrol.

Rob Percival, head of food policy at the Soil Association said in reports: "It seems that what broke this strategy was not a lack of good intent but a narrow-minded ideology which believes government should not intervene to reshape diets. They're letting a cost of living crisis go unaddressed, they're allowing unsustainable diets to continue and they're exacerbating the ecological crisis.

Minette Batters, president of the National Farmers' Union added that it is 'vital that food stays affordable and vital that social policies are in place for access to high quality food.'

Action on Sugar and Action on Salt also commented, with chairman Graham MacGregor saying: "The National Food Strategy proposed bold, evidence-based recommendations that would have had an enormous impact on improving our food system, making healthier food more available and accessible to all. This shambolic decision will no doubt massively impact the NHS and the nation's

health, which will suffer the consequences and escalating cost of treating obesity, Type 2 Diabetes and tooth decay, all linked to our very high and unnecessary sugar, salt and saturated fat intakes that the food industry is entirely responsible for."

Ahead of the policy paper publication, Curry Life spoke to several curry houses and chefs about how they were responding to the call for more healthy food, with many saying they are looking at incorporating more healthy choices. This could include cutting down on the amount of ghee used, substituting other oils for ghee and reducing the number of meat dishes in favour of more vegetable-based options. ●

National Food Strategy

An independent review for Government

National Food Strategy

Independent Review

THE PLAN.



The hospitality industry's staffing woes have been well-documented in recent months.

With many employees having been forced to leave the industry during the pandemic, restaurants - from big chains to independents, are struggling to find experienced staff. A recent survey from workplace management business Bizimply found that hospitality employees are putting in more hours to help plug the recruitment gap - working six hours a week more than pre-pandemic levels.

Last month, industry body UKHospitality launched its own plan to attract people to the industry. Called Fixing the crisis: a framework for collaborative action across the sector, the strategy examines five areas of the industry, including recruitment, skills and training, people's working lives, hospitality's image as a sector in which to work and the infrastructure to support employees.

Solving the **STAFFING** **CRISIS**

Industry professionals weigh in on the curry sector's recruitment challenges

LANGUAGE BARRIER

Curry houses are facing recruitment challenges like any other restaurant, but there is another issue at play. Many restaurants want to employ trained chefs from India and Bangladesh, those who have experience of tandoor ovens for example, but they face additional challenges. Lutfur Rahman, the founder and managing director of WorkPermitCloud, which specialises in UK immigration and HR system management services, says he has observed three major barriers for the curry industry when looking to recruit migrant staff from overseas. The first is that there is now a higher threshold with regards to English language skills.

"Before 2011, the English language requirement was 'A1*', now it's 'B1***' for all skilled workers, whether you are a chef, restaurant manager, scientist or a CEO of a large corporation," he says. "The curry industry does not demand this higher level of English proficiency. Reading and speaking are enough for



Lutfur Rahman

chefs or curry house professionals with relevant experience. I strongly recommend that 'A1' status should be implemented again for the curry industry."

Rahman says a further barrier is the lengthy, multistage visa process. Considerable efforts to fast-track the timelines for hiring employees have been made in the latest skilled worker guidance by concerned policy makers, he says, and the same guidance is applicable for curry house professionals.

"However, in reality, it takes at least six months due to multistage and repetitive assessments during the sponsorship licence process, the Certificate of Sponsorship (CoS) allocation, and subsequent visa decision," says Rahman. "As per the skilled worker guidance, the labour market test is not a requirement anymore. In practice, this is still a requirement which is very often demanded by the visa and immigration caseworkers. We strongly recommend the Home Office Case Workers should adhere to the guidance."

A third barrier is that functional competency assessment is being done by unrelated professionals:

"Visa and immigration officers often judge the technical competency of chefs and restaurant managers," says Rahman. "Since they do not have the relevant background, their decision often leads to the wrong judgement, which affects the employer considerably. If our policy makers can address these concerns with new directives the industry will benefit, helping to boost the economy."

TRAINING IS KEY



Oli Khan MBE

Chef and entrepreneur Oli Khan believes the answer to staff shortages faced by curry houses lies in improving the training opportunities available.

"It's a difficult situation as people are allowed to come [from India and Bangladesh] to the UK for work but the requirements are hard to fill," he says. "We need unskilled or semi-skilled migrants who can come over and learn the skills necessary for our industry, then they can be employed as a head chef."

Khan says that those with ambitions to become head chefs should spend time training, working as a sous chef or a cook, and that within a year or so they would have enough training to move to the next level.

"If we can get unskilled migrants we can train them to become head chefs - it's not that difficult," he says. "During the weekdays, curry houses are not that busy so they have time to train before the busier weekend periods."

LOOK AT THE BIGGER PICTURE

Shekhar Bharania is senior partner at Philip Jones Legal, which has secured a vast number of sponsor licences for curry houses across the country. He says that like every other sector, there is a lot of bureaucracy to overcome. He believes, however, that the immigration system has changed drastically, and is currently extremely favourable to the hospitality sector.

"The system makes it economical for restaurants, particularly Asian curry houses, to obtain sponsorship licenses and recruit an international skilled workforce," he says. "The problem is that many restaurants hold a short-term view of expenses to recruit such workers and fail to see the bigger picture. In our experience, a sponsor licence



Shekhar Bharania

enables a restaurant to expand, build its reputation and retain more control over its skilled workforce."

He adds that importantly, it cuts ▶



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overheads as the minimum salary to pay a skilled worker chef is £25,500 per annum and the curry house gets the benefit of having chefs that are able to deliver high-quality, authentic Asian food to the British public.

As chefs qualify for sponsorship, Bharania says he has seen a phenomenal increase in restaurant 'Sponsor Licence' and 'Skilled Worker' applications for chefs and bar managers.

"We predict that demand for this work will continue to increase, as more restaurant owners become aware of how sponsor licences operate and the benefits of having a licence," he says.

And with chefs having been taken off the shortage occupation list but continuing to qualify for sponsorship, Bharania says now is the time to apply.

"The Home Office has the power to stop this route for chefs at any time," he says. "For the curry house sector, this is certainly the opportune time to apply for a sponsorship licence and sponsor skilled, knowledgeable and experienced chefs to expand and flourish their businesses, as the law is currently in their favour."

**A1: Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.*

***B1: Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes & ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.*

Source: Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) ●



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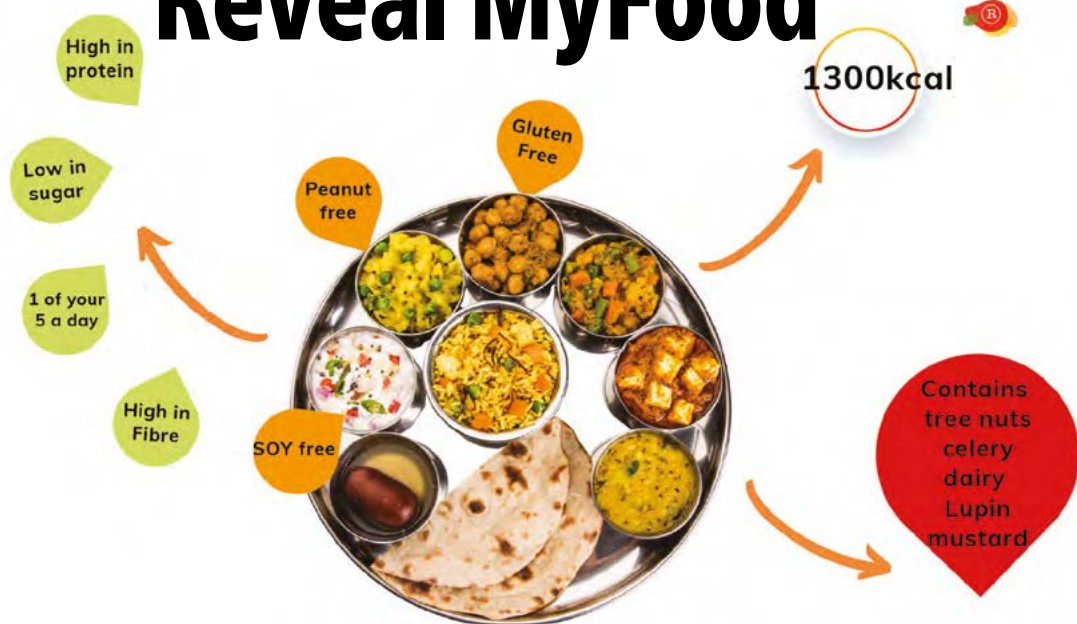


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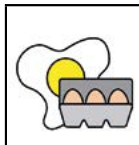
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Grawnfydydd sy'n cynnwys gluten
Gwenth (megis gwenth yr Almaen, Khorasan, Kamut), Rhyg, Haidd, Ceirch



Wyau

Eggs

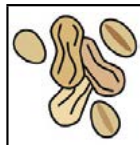
ডিম



Cnau Coed

Tree Nuts

বৃক্ষের বাদাম



Pysgnau

Peanuts

বাদাম



Llaeth

Milk

দুধ

Cereals containing gluten
Wheat (such as Spelt, Khorasan, Kamut), Rye, Barley, Oats

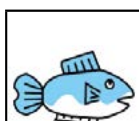
গ্লুটেন আছে এমন খাদ্যশস্য
গম (যেমন স্পেল্ট, খোরাসান, কামুট), রাই, বার্লি, ওটস



Molysgiaid

Molluscs

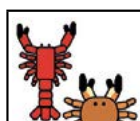
শামুক, বিনুক জাতীয়



Pysgod

Fish

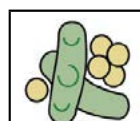
মাছ



Cramenogion

Crustaceans

চিংড়ি ও কীকড়া জাতীয়



Soia

Soya

সোয়া



Sylffwr Deuocsid (sulphites)

Sulphur Dioxide (sulphites)

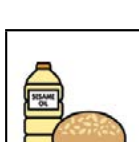
সালফার ডাইঅক্সাইড (সালফাইটস)



Bys y blaidd

Lupin

লুপিন



Hadau Sesame

Sesame Seeds

তিল বীজ



Seleri

Celery

সেলারি



Mwstard

Mustard

সরষে

Food business operators in the retail and catering sector are required to provide allergen information and follow labelling rules as set out in food law. As the Food Standards Agency states, this means that food business operators must provide allergen information to the consumer for both prepacked and non-prepacked food and drinks and handle and manage food allergens effectively in food preparation.

Modern-day allergens can be something of a minefield, however, and restaurant and bar staff can often lack the confidence or the necessary training to ensure that customers have a safe dining experience. High staff turnover in the food industry, which is particularly the case in the current climate, also means many restaurants can often fall behind with new employee food safety training.

Cherry Hagger, food allergy awareness officer at charity Allergy UK, which works with government, professional bodies, healthcare professionals and corporate businesses to help improve the lives of the millions of people with allergic diseases, says there are new demands on businesses around allergy all the time.

“Prepacked for Direct Sale (PPDS), commonly known as Natasha’s law is the latest change in 2021, and due to the war in Ukraine there are supply issues with sunflower oils, which has led suppliers to substitute other oils that they sell to restaurants, increasing the risk of allergies,” she says. “Businesses need to be on their guard and constantly updating their knowledge and keeping an eye on changes or substitutions in the supply chains. This can be challenging with the other business demands such as staff turnover and shortages, food supply issues and the energy crisis. Businesses without good training plans and processes can start to feel overwhelmed and under pressure which can lead to mistakes being made.”

Hit and miss

According to Allergy UK’s latest research, released in October 2021, 40% of people feel anxious when eating out, 54% felt discriminated against by food businesses and 45% were not told when a dish had an allergic ingredient despite asking, and this had led to a bad reaction.

Hagger says that someone starting work in any type of food business should ensure ►

All about Allergens

With food allergies become more common, it’s vital for those in hospitality to have a clear process in place to ensure a safe dining experience

that they are provided training on what food allergies are and know about the 14 allergens all businesses need to highlight. These are: celery, cereals containing gluten (such as barley and oats), crustaceans (such as prawns, crabs and lobsters), eggs, fish, lupin, milk, molluscs (such as mussels and oysters), mustard, peanuts, sesame, soybeans, sulphur dioxide and sulphites (if the sulphur dioxide and sulphites are at a concentration of more than ten parts per million) and tree nuts (such as almonds, hazelnuts, walnuts, brazil nuts, cashews, pecans, pistachios and macadamia nuts).

“Many staff these days may be given an online course around food allergy awareness to complete but the current training available to businesses can be very hit and miss,” she says. “Many training companies are selling training that is incomplete, inaccurate, or just out of date. This can lead to poor allergy customer service as your knowledge is incomplete.”

Hagger suggests that practical training from a manager or supervisor is important as it helps staff to understand that food businesses have a unique environment.

“It’s not just the staff who need to be aware of food allergies, there also need to be strict processes in place with regards to allergen ordering, cooking stations, labelling and incident reporting, to help reduce risk to the customer,” she adds. “Having an

appointed ‘Allergy Champion’ in the business who can give support to the staff if questions arise is important too.”

Allergy UK is currently in the process of developing new online interactive training and face-to-face programmes for both restaurant workers (front of house and in the kitchen) and also for managers.

“With the help of our team of experts with the clinical knowledge of allergy, we are looking to provide engaging, practical and up to date training courses,” says Hagger. “Through our public helpline we have a direct ear to the issues facing the allergic community which helps us to understand the demands being placed on businesses.”

Digital impact

Nutritionist and hospitality sector

consultant Ludovica De Pieri is founder and CEO of Reveal My Food, which helps restaurants improve the way they manage allergens. De Pieri gave a presentation on allergens at the recent Curry Life Culinary Workshop. Her business uses software to generate digital menus that can be used by any restaurant, but it is particularly

beneficial for those that experience high footfall, or who might

be short of staff, so they can easily manage any diners’ queries. There is no app to download and the digital menu comes as a URL, providing restaurants with the flexibility they need. The URL can also be added to any platform from Google Business to Tripadvisor to restaurants’ dedicated webpages, and also added onto the physical menu in the form of a QR code.

“In twenty four hours, restaurants can go from having out of date risky allergens management with no online presence, to putting in place highly reliable allergens and calories compliance, all automated and quickly updated on a digital menu,” says De Pieri.

Based on usage thus far, De Pieri says the software has contributed to a 100% increase in allergens analysis accuracy and offers full compliance for calories labelling legislation that came into force in April. Some users have seen an 80% improvement in their ranking on Google for searches such as “restaurant around me”, “vegetarian” and “gluten free”, as well as a 50% increase in organic visits and orders and up to a 45% increase in takeaway sales.

Alongside Reveal My Food, Pieri also offers restaurants a tailored consultation and an evaluation of their current operations, with the aim of finding the best strategy to optimise their operations, increase online presence and maximise the value of their ingredients.

Calorie count

Another important consideration for restaurants regarding food is calorie information. From 6 April, under new Government rules, restaurants with more





than 250 staff have had to display calories counts on their menus and websites. The rule has been introduced to help curb rising obesity levels. The rules at present only apply to larger restaurants but should smaller curry houses be taking note, particularly as Indian food has a reputation for being high in calories?

Shamsul Islam is a regulatory service manager for the London Borough of Brent and works with restaurants, shops and hotels to ensure the health and safety of those who work in the borough. He has also worked with Curry Life on its Food Festival events. With customers becoming more and more health conscious, and starting to check

salt, sugar and the number of calories on products, he says restaurants - regardless of size, need to start thinking about how they will inform their customers if they start enquiring about the nutritional content or the number of calories in the meals they are about to order.

“The big retail industries have already started to display nutritional and calorie information to make themselves more attractive to this new trend,” he says. “They are also offering healthy



alternatives such as a salad with your burger instead of fries or water instead of a soft drink, for example. It is no different to customers wanting to know about the different allergens in the food so that they can avoid the food they are allergic to.”

With smaller restaurants struggling to survive in the current climate, Islam believes they need to start lobbying the government for assistance in the form of grants, as well as lobbying the takeaway delivery platforms and/or their trade associations for further help.

“SMEs will have to start investing in this area if they want to compete and survive with businesses who are one step ahead by offering nutritional and calorie advice to their consumers,” he says.

Allergy UK will be relaunching its Allergy Aware Scheme this year. Restaurants can apply to become one of its approved catering businesses. Businesses that pass the assessment process are awarded the Allergy UK endorsement as a recognition for their allergen awareness standards within their restaurant. ●



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Legal Matters



By Maria Fernandes

option even where the applicant is not at fault. However for those with more complicated reasons for refusal which may include doubting the credibility of the applicant, a fresh application is unlikely to be successful. The alternative is to apply for this review and wait for six months whilst the application is being decided.

The mechanism to effectively challenge poor decisions is becoming weaker by the day and without it enables caseworkers to make bad decisions knowing that there is no challenge. And it seems that they can take as long as six months to make decisions if they want to.

Un-sponsored routes

For those who do not have sponsor licences, and even for those that do there are a few routes that are available which can help with the shortages

BARRIERS TO ENTRY

Clearance procedures may be not be as clear-cut as you think

As the hospitality industry gears up for business again, and the rules allow for businesses to employ a wider category of staff than before, employers have started to source skilled staff. Those who have sponsor licences are the only employers who can bring staff to work in their businesses.

All this spells good news unless the applicant is refused entry clearance abroad. This can be for a wide number of reasons. This could be trivial, for example not enclosing the correct documents or paying the correct fee. It could also be because the Entry Clearance Officer has failed to consider all the information or has arrived at mistaken conclusions.

In all cases, if entry is refused the only way to challenge the refusal is by a process called Administrative Review. This involves paying a fee, completing a form which only allows a limited explanation by limiting the number of characters allowed, and which does not permit any documents to be attached.

A waiting game

This process is an in-house system which is limited to “casework errors”,



which in practice covers glaring errors in most cases. What is more worrying and frankly scandalous is that if this process is followed, the Home Office takes six months to decide the case for overseas posts. Even if the case is successful, are businesses going to wait for that period of time? And why the delay given such a straightforward process? The pandemic as an excuse is wearing thin.

In straightforward cases, where applicants have been refused entry for reasons which can clearly be corrected, a fresh application can be a quicker

being experienced within the industry. These categories provide a temporary status of two to three years.

Graduate Route

This route is available to international students, who have completed a degree at undergraduate level in the UK or above and who have a valid Tier 4 visa. The applicant does not need to show funds or finance, or demonstrate English language ability. Applicants can



apply as soon as the university has sent final course results and do not have to wait for their graduation to apply. Applicants must be in the UK when applying. They are granted two years or three years for postdoctoral students. They can work at any skill level and can switch into 'Skilled Worker' status at any time during their stay.

This process is entirely digital and results in an eVisa.

The 'High Potential Individual' route

Applicants with a bachelor's or postgraduate degree qualification from one of the top global universities outside the UK, awarded during the last 5 years from the date of application, will qualify for entry for two years if they hold a qualification equivalent to a UK Bachelor's or Master's

level degree; or three years with a PhD. They will be permitted to work full time at any skill level. The application process has been open since 30 May 2022. They will be permitted to switch to 'Skilled Worker' status.

The UKVI have now published a list of universities that qualify. There are no universities that qualify from India or Africa. The universities are from Australia, USA, Switzerland, Germany, Hong Kong, Sweden, Japan, Canada, Singapore, China and France. ●

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