



# Curry chef scheme targets people hungry for change



**SKILLS:** Dipna Anand at the Brilliant food stand; (left above) Imli's Samir Sadekar with a couple of apprentices; (left) Gulu Anand talks to guests at the event; and (inset below) Mandeep Panesar



## RECRUITMENT DRIVE FOR UNEMPLOYED YOUNG TO TRAIN IN SOUTH ASIAN FOOD

by NADEEM BADSHAH

**IT IS A cross between hit TV shows *The Apprentice* and *MasterChef* – and the mission is to rescue the UK curry industry from crisis.**

This month a recruitment drive has been launched to recruit Britons into the curry industry – which is worth £4 billion a year – particularly as chefs.

South Asian restaurants have a shortage of skilled chefs due to immigration laws changes, where only chefs paid at least £28,000 annually can be recruited from outside the EU.

*Eastern Eye* went to the launch of the initiative at the University of West London in Ealing last week. It is one of five Asian and Oriental Centres of Excellence aiming to produce the next Cyrus Todiwala or Anjum Anand.

Leading Indian restaurants including Imli and Moolis were offering students free food and urging them to join a free six-week scheme of training and work experience, which guarantees them an interview with a restaurant or a paid apprenticeship at the end.

They were also keen to address the lack of British-Asians wanting to follow the family tradition by donning a chef's hat and apron.

One man looking to break the mould is delivery driver Mandeep Panesar, who insisted it was not a case that British-Asian men can't cook or won't cook.

The 26-year-old said: "Maybe it's to do with [Indians] wanting to be lawyers, doctors, dentists.

"I wouldn't say Indian men don't want to cook, [not] as a career choice maybe.

"My mum got me interested in Indi-

an cuisine. My partner doesn't cook, I do most of the cooking and have a bit of a passion for it.

"Without that knowledge, it's hard to make that step. If I go with a Thai or Chinese restaurant, I wouldn't know where to start."

With around 1.03 million people aged 16-24 looking for work, there is set to be a large take-up for the scheme which last 18 months. Once qualified, entry level chefs can earn £18,000.

Around 36 restaurants have signed up for the apprenticeship scheme which last 18 months. Once qualified, entry level chefs can earn £18,000.

One restaurant boss warning that more programmes like this are needed is Gulu Anand, who has been running Brilliant Restaurant in Southall for nearly 40 years.

Anand believes it will change the mentality of young British-Asians to try and become the next Gordon Ramsay.

"They have this mentality that being a chef is not popular. Word has sunk in, being a chef is a fantastic profession, there are role models. It's the only industry where you will be given a job if you have knowledge of Indian cuisine."

He added: "We want to stick to authentic rather than fusion cooking. We need chefs catering for authentic food, proper Punjabi, south Indian food. We need to improve on presentation but stick to authenticity, by not adding French cuisine or Italian sauce."

Anand believes the controversial im-

migration cap – launched last year – is unfair and does not impact the elite like multi-million pound footballers.

"A footballer who doesn't speak a word of English is paid millions and can join any club.

"Restaurants have also taken a lot of advantage before. There were a lot of people, not skilled and giving a hand in the kitchen. We don't need executive head chefs to supervise. We need pastry and tandoori chefs, people who can cook a curry."

Anand's daughter Dipna followed the family tradition and is now a lecturer at the University of West London in catering. She said: "Thirty years ago if you told someone you're a chef, it's not as impressive as today.

"I did [catering] because I was interested in it. I worked alongside my father part-time but am also a lecturer, so am venturing out.

"You get satisfaction [as a chef] – not just skills with food but what you will use in everyday life.

"We've had Gordon Ramsay come to learn Indian cooking from us. The rewards are indescribable."

Another restaurant group utilising apprenticeships is the Tamarind Group, which run the Michelin-starred Tamarind restaurant in west London and Imli. Its star pupil is Floyd Price, 18, who was showing youngsters at the event how to make Indian street food.

Samir Sadekar, chef manager at Imli, said: "Floyd is an expert in Indian

street food. He was a rugby-playing lad. He's been on the BBC and is a prime example of what positive can happen.

"With Indian cuisine it's not possible to do it quickly. Burgers are ready cooked, you can grill them and serve – anyone can become a chef there."

He added: "Eight apprentices have joined us and we're hoping to attract more talent. Some haven't been in the kitchen, they have only seen TV shows.

"If you last a month, there's a 90 per cent chance that you can make it."

Some restaurateurs have argued it takes too long for non-Asian trainees to learn about south Asian styles of cooking. But Sherin Alexander-Modi, executive director of the Blue Elephant Thai restaurant group, rejects those claims.

Alexander-Modi, who was helping to prepare *crab malabar* for the students, said: "If you have motivation or passion, you can be trained. I don't look Italian or Chinese, but I can cook that food. You can learn basic things, you can't be a 'chef chef', that takes five years.

"It's not just about Jamie Oliver and Gordon Ramsay, not just about Italian or French food or modern British. London is about various cultures and fusions, so why not Oriental and Indian food?"



In some cases, the recruitment drive is a chance for the about 11,100 Asian and Oriental eateries to hire staff in order to expand.

One chain aiming to do this is Moolis, which specialises in Indian street food. Head chef Raju Rawat was dishing out goat-meat wraps and fennel and cucumber lassis to students.

He said: "We want to open four more restaurants. We have chefs who are Hungarian, Colombian, Romanian.

"We train them from scratch to make street food. It takes roughly three to four months. If they want to stay with us, we recruit them into a full-time job as kitchen assistant, then they go up to kitchen supervisor."

The centres of excellence are a government-funded scheme run by skills sector council People 1st and the Hospitality Guild.

The University of West London claims it was the first to offer courses in Asian and Oriental cooking 15 years ago.

David Foscett, head of its school of hospitality and tourism, said: "It's [Asian and Oriental] is a huge sector of hospitality industry and is under represented. There are many jobs available and such high unemployment. By 2017, the industry will create 300,000 new jobs."

Suzi Jackson, executive director of the Hospitality Guild, said: "The Centres of Excellence will provide much-needed, practical support to business owners in the Asian and Oriental sector and a pipeline of skilled people from which they can recruit."