

## Career profile

Name: Enam Ali MBE – FIH

Job title: Entrepreneur



### Write your own meal ticket.



Enam Ali MBE – FIH, takes genuine delight in a satisfied customer. He is an original and creative entrepreneur, responsible for launching the highly prestigious British Curry Awards and a respected quarterly trade magazine Spice Business. He is a modern day philanthropist and owns an award winning restaurant, Le Raj, in Epsom, Surrey.

#### What do you enjoy the most about your job, what do you find most exciting?

The restaurant in my belief is “The hospitality Theatre”, and it’s important that my team displays and deliver a stellar performance each evening and produce distinctive ambiance so that people leave us having experienced something exceptional. Just as an actor or actress will soak up applause from an audience, I still get excited and delighted when customers tell me how much they’ve enjoyed and appreciate amazing gastronomy of Le Raj restaurant.

#### How did you begin your career in hospitality?

While studying for a degree in Hospitality & Management, I worked part-time as a waiter. It was there I first experienced the satisfaction to be gained from genuine customer appreciation for a little creative service and present delicious food beautifully on the table and job well done. From that moment on, I knew this was what I wanted to do with my life.

#### What’s your best and worst career moment?

I’ve been fortunate to have a few significant highlights in my career. It was a tremendously proud moment for my family and me. The staging of the first British Curry Awards in 2005 was something extra special. It had been a long-held ambition of mine to provide our industry with a suitably glamorous and high profile annual Curry Industry Oscar to celebrate its achievements and successes, so finally getting it off the ground proved tremendously satisfying. Since then, of course, it has gone on to become the biggest night in the British hospitality industry calendar with a roll-call of VIP guests – including support of Prime Minister David Cameron, London Mayor Boris Johnson, Chris Grayling MP and any number of show business and sporting celebrities – that few would have thought possible.

My worst experience was probably the short time I spent selling insurance in the late 1970s. I hated it.

**If you could go back in time would you choose a different career?**

Certainly not. I've loved every moment of my time running my Epsom restaurant, Le Raj, and working on behalf of the British curry restaurant industry and the Asian community. I get huge drive and satisfaction from knowing that my peers in the industry trust me to represent them, and I relish the challenge of being able to make a real difference to the way the industry is run and perceived. Curry was born in India, but we made it great in Britain. I hope I've been able to contribute to that.

**What's your dream job?**

I am Restaurant and culinary critic but the media likes to dub me as the Curry Prince or the Curry King, but I'd prefer to be the Curry Lord! I'd be able to achieve so much more for our industry, and make a more meaningful contribution to the debate on wider issues such as immigration, race and culture from within the corridors of power. But, of course, this is my wish.

**Who is your idol?**

My late grandfather – my mother's father – has probably had the most influence on my life and career. He was a politician in Bangladesh in the old Colonial days and instilled in me the importance of service. He worked tirelessly over many years to help improve the lives of others, and the dedication and fortitude that he showed has been inspirational to me.

**What's your favourite food?**

Obviously good curry, but I like anything that is original and creative. The last few years have seen some exceptionally talented chefs bring all manner of original ideas to restaurant kitchens of all kinds, and I admire their willingness to experiment in order to come up with something truly amazing.

**What's the weirdest thing you have ever eaten?**

I once had a bhajee just made out of wheat grass. And I've eaten cow guts and lamb brain.

**What did you want to do when you were in school?**

Like a lot of young boys, I dreamed of becoming a professional footballer. The very first money I earned - £1 – was for playing football, so I guess that almost makes me a professional!

**Tell us an interesting fact about yourself**

I was recently part of 39 delegation Conservative party social project, led by Co- Chair Baroness Warsi, that went on a charitable mission to Sylhet, Bangladesh. As well as getting involved in hands-on work to rebuild and decorate a school and create a climbing frame in the playground, I also represented our UK Parliamentarians in a cricket match against their Bangladesh counterparts. We let them win as a diplomatic gesture! In all seriousness, though, I was enormously proud that the Conservative party chose to extend their Project Maja initiative, launched in Bosnia in 2009, to my place of birth, Sylhet.

**Any unusual hobbies/talents?**

I'm a dab hand at the game of spoof over vindaloo or phall, and I follow mostly cricket and football (Liverpool)

**What's the secret to success?**

Being original and thinking creatively and do the SWOTI analysis before I consider any project. Too many people are prepared to sit back and copy the ideas and initiatives of others. Real success comes from being an instigator rather than a follower. I've always maintained that smart work is better than hard work, although the latter is often required as well. I love being able to change attitudes and perceptions, and help to make the impossible possible.

**What advice would you give to other people who want to work in hospitality?**

Always endeavour to stand out from the crowd and be the best that you can be, whatever your role. Few other industries offer the scope to be able to use your personality as a key part of your skill set. Look forward to every working day as a fresh challenge and a new opportunity to express yourself in a way that will pleasure your customers and your performances added value to business. Most of all, enjoy the excitement of it all.

**What are your thoughts on the immigration cap? How it has affected your business (and/or Asian and Oriental Cuisine industry as a whole) and how are you dealing with it?**

Whilst I accept that the government has to do something to try to control mass immigration, I also believe they need to recognise the damage they are doing to our industry by imposing such draconian rules. I refer in particular to their decree that in future only the top five per cent of skilled chefs, each of whom must be paid more than £28,260 a year, will be allowed into the country. When this was announced last March, it sent shock waves through our industry. By removing our ability to recruit from overseas, and with one in four chefs' vacancies remaining unfilled, there are genuine fears that the restriction will lead to widespread closures and preventing the industry to grow and creating more jobs.

Many restaurants were started with nothing; they are family run and play an active part in the community. It is a wonderful business model, but if our hands continue to be tied by these regulations there is no doubt that many will go out of business.

A few years ago many restaurants were able to operate with just a single chef, but the industry has grown so much that they now need three or four to meet customer demand and it's not a job for novices.

This is my country. I don't want to bring people in who are a drain on society or who will be in competition with my own children for jobs, but the reality is we have a skills shortage and the current immigration requirements are doing more harm than good.

**Further information**

For further information on career opportunities in hospitality visit [www.hospitalityguild.co.uk](http://www.hospitalityguild.co.uk)