



North East Bangladeshi Awards

Recognising Bangladeshi Excellence

**Date: Monday
6th October 2025**

**Venue: The Fed
Dunston, Gateshead
NE11 9JR**

**4th NEBA
Awards Dinner**



Welcome to NEBA 2025

Assalamu Alaikum and good evening.

We are delighted to welcome you to the North East Bangladeshi Awards (NEBA) 2025 an evening dedicated to celebration, recognition, and community spirit.

Established in May 2022, NEBA was born from a passion to honour the exceptional achievements of British Bangladeshi individuals, communities, and businesses. Our platform shines a spotlight on excellence across diverse sectors, highlighting the inspiring work and contributions that continue to shape life in the UK.

The curry industry a cornerstone of British cuisine stands as one of the most successful stories of the Bangladeshi community. Yet, the heritage and people behind it often remain underrepresented. Few know that it was a Bengali entrepreneur, Sake Dean Mahomed, who opened the very first curry house in Britain back in 1810. Through NEBA, we proudly celebrate this legacy, encouraging pride in our identity, culture, and roots.

As we mark our fourth awards this year, we extend our gratitude to our former Lord Mayor, Councillor Habib Rahman, whose dedication to recognising Bangladeshi excellence has been instrumental in NEBA's creation and growth. His commitment to celebrating Bangladeshi women has led to the creation of the Bangladeshi Women in Leadership Award and the Shuley Alam Award established in memory of the late Shuley Alam. Her legacy continues to inspire, reminding us of the resilience and leadership of Bangladeshi women across generations.

NEBA is proud to celebrate the full spectrum of British Bangladeshi achievement, not only in business, but in arts, education, community service, and beyond with a special recognition of the curry industry's unique contributions. Looking ahead, NEBA will continue to grow, becoming even stronger and more inclusive with the continued support of our community. We encourage you to take part, nominate deserving individuals, and help us shape NEBA into a platform that truly reflects our shared values and aspirations.

We look forward to welcoming you again at NEBA 2026. Until then, let us celebrate tonight's achievements with pride, joy, and gratitude.



Mohammed Afsaruzzaman
NEBA Lead Co-ordinator

Meet Our Judges

NEBA 2025

COMMUNITY AWARDS JUDGES



**Yasmin
Uddin**

Service Coordinator
British Red Cross



**Mahnur
Roushan**

Founder: MSA Charity
& Gen D CIC



**Yasmin
Sultana
Khan**

NHS Commissioning
Manager



**Harun Bibi
Kajee**

Housing Officer
Your Homes Newcastle

CATERING AWARDS JUDGES



**Douglas
Jordan**

Chef and former
Chair of North East
and Culinary Trade
association (NECTA)



**Shah
Amad Ali**

Chef
Restaurateur
Member of Craft Guild
of Chefs



**Habibur
Rahman
Rana**

Restaurateur
Chef and community
activist

AWARDS RUNNING ORDER

Special Recognition Award

Late Abdul Latif p5
Councillor Ayrin Khan p7
Syed Dulal p8
Syeda Chompa Begum p10
Dr. Wali Tasar Uddin MBE p11
Nakkita Charag MStJ p12

Community Centre of the Year

Sunderland Bangladesh International
Centre (SBIC) p14

Shuley Alam Award

Shila Laskar p16
Syeda Chompa Begum p17

Rising Star

Enayet Zaman p18
Nakkita Charag MStJ p19

Maa (Mother) Award

Mrs Rehana Hoque p21

Public Sector Recognition Award

Hassan Kajee p23
Nakkita Charag MStJ p25

NEBA Takeaway of the Year p27

North Tyneside
Northumberland
Gateshead
South Tyneside
Durham
Teesside
Ashington
Newcastle
Morpeth

NEBA Restaurant of the Year p27

Highly Recommended Restaurant
Gateshead
South Tyneside
Sunderland
Teesside
Darlington
Durham
Northumberland
North Tyneside
Newcastle

Bangladeshi Women in Leadership

Cllr Sajna Ali p28
Latifa Miah p30

Bangladeshi Person of the Year

Ruhi Akther p31
Habib Rahman p33
Abdul Samad p35
Shajidul Haque p37
Cllr Ehtesham Haque p38

Special Recognition Award

Late Abdul Latif, FRSA

(Lord of Harpole)

*British Bangladeshi Restaurateur/
Philanthropist | Public Figure*

(15 December 1954 –

20 January 2008)



Abdul Latif, FRAS, was a distinguished British Bangladeshi restaurateur, cultural ambassador, and community leader. Born in Panch Para, Bangladesh, Latif migrated to the United Kingdom in 1969 and went on to leave a lasting legacy in the city of Newcastle upon Tyne.

Renowned for his pioneering contributions to the UK curry industry, Latif was the founder and proprietor of the iconic Rupali Restaurant. He created the legendary "Curry Hell," a dish acclaimed as the world's hottest curry.

His entrepreneurial flair, community service, and engaging media persona earned him national recognition, including frequent appearances in the cult comic Viz magazine.

He was appointed a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts (FRSA) for his impact on social enterprise and community engagement, and he was also recognised as a Guinness World Record holder for the longest-distance curry delivery. Latif proudly styled himself as the "Lord of Harpole," using the title creatively to engage with the public and promote his charitable work.

In 2012, the Houses of Parliament formally recognised his contributions through an Early Day Motion, which honoured his life and mourned his passing, praising his "enormous contribution to the city of Newcastle" as a visionary entrepreneur and cultural icon.

Career History

Founder

Rupali Restaurant | Newcastle upon Tyne (1977–2008)

Established one of Newcastle's most iconic Indian restaurants, elevating the UK curry scene.

Late Abdul Latif

(Continue)

Key Achievements

- Created the globally recognised Curry Hell (1987), marketed as the world's hottest curry.
- Pioneered innovative PR campaigns, earning national media attention.
- Provided five years of free meals to British servicemen and women returning from Iraq.
- Guinness World Record Holder (2004) for the longest-distance curry delivery (Newcastle to Sydney).

Career History**Family Restaurant | Whitley Bay (Early 1970s)**

- Gained foundational experience in the UK hospitality industry.
- Developed expertise in customer service and restaurant operations.

Achievements & Honours

- Lifetime Achievement Award – North East Restaurant Awards (2009), posthumously honoured for his outstanding contribution to the North East's culinary scene.
- Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts (FRSA) (2003) – Awarded for contributions to social impact and culinary innovation.



- Guinness World Record (2004) – Longest-distance curry delivery (UK to Australia).
- Ambassador of Peace – Universal Peace Federation (2012), posthumously recognised for promoting community harmony and intercultural understanding.
- Guest at the Queen's Garden Party (2005) – Invited in recognition of his community contributions.
- Lord of Harpole (1994) – A playful title adopted to engage the public and promote charity.
- Memorial Event (2008) – Held at Newcastle Civic Centre to celebrate his life.

Personal Life

Married to Neawarun Latif, and father to four daughters and two sons. A beloved figure, husband, and father, his legacy continues to inspire future generations in business, philanthropy, and intercultural unity.

Special Recognition Award

Cllr Ayrin Khan



Councillor Ayrin Khan made history by becoming the first British Bangladeshi councillor elected to Berwick-upon-Tweed Town Council, representing Grove Ward.

Born in Bangladesh, Ayrin arrived in the UK in 1993. She is a proud mother of three daughters and one son, and a grandmother of two. Her husband, Jahangir Khan, successfully runs the renowned Magna Tandoori restaurant in Berwick-upon-Tweed.

Cllr Khan's political journey began when she won her first election to the Ord Parish Council in April 2025. On 23 June 2025, she was elected to represent Grove Ward on the Town Council.

Having lived in Berwick for over three decades, Cllr Khan has been deeply rooted in the local community, balancing family life, business, education, and voluntary work.

Alongside helping to manage the family business and raising her children, Cllr Khan has dedicated significant time to community service and volunteering. Between 2009 and 2023, she worked in various schools across Berwick, holding roles as a Teaching Assistant and Childcare Assistant, where she supported both children and their families.

Currently pursuing a BA (Hons) in Digital Marketing Management, Cllr Khan continues to expand her knowledge and skills. Proud of her Bangladeshi heritage, she regularly visits Bangladesh and is an active human rights campaigner, supporting numerous charitable causes.

Cllr Khan's journey—from arriving in the UK without knowing the language, to adapting to a new culture, raising a family, and achieving professional and political success—is both remarkable and inspiring. Her achievements are a testament to perseverance, dedication, and community spirit, and they rightfully deserve to be celebrated.

Special Recognition Award

Syed Dulal

*Lyricist • Songwriter • Author •
Cultural Contributor*



Syed Dulal, born in 1969 in Syed Pur, Sunamgonj, is a prominent figure in the fields of music, arts, literature, and Bangladeshi cultural development. After completing his Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) at MC College, Sylhet, he moved to the United Kingdom in 1993 at the age of 24.

Like many fellow Bangladeshis, Syed Dulal began his career in the catering industry, initially working as a waiter and later becoming a chef. Through hard work and dedication, he managed several successful businesses before establishing his own restaurant in Hartlepool in 1998.

Syed Dulal is married to Mursheda Begum, and together they have one daughter and four sons.

They are also proud grandparents to one grandchild. Family plays a central role in Syed Dulal's life, and he has always balanced his personal commitments with his professional and creative passions.

Sports and Political Involvement

An avid football enthusiast, Syed Dulal actively participated in competitive football during his youth. He played for:

- Syed Pur Torun Shongho (1986–1993)
- Jogonnathpur Upazila Team (1990)
- Sunamgonj First Division League
- Brothers Union Football Club (1990–1991 season)

Alongside sports, Syed Dulal was also involved in politics and was elected as a Member of the Sunamgonj Jela Parishad in the 1990s, demonstrating his dedication to community development and local leadership.

Passion for Arts, Music, and Literature
From an early age, Syed Dulal exhibited exceptional creativity and a deep passion for poetry, music, and the arts. He began writing lyrics, poems, and books at the young age of 14.

Syed Dulal

(Continue)

Although he dreamed of becoming a professional singer and performed at numerous events and platforms, Syed Dulal truly made his mark as a lyricist and songwriter. Over the years, he has written approximately 1,500 songs, with around 600 of them televised on mainstream Bangladeshi TV channels worldwide.

Contributions to Bangladeshi Music and Culture

- Member of Sonar Bangla Songit Parishod (North East UK)
- President of Jogonnathpur Cultural Forum UK since 2020
- Wrote the title song for the Bangla movie Jodi Ektu Somoy Aro Petam
- Contributed songs for telefilms, including Biddasrom
- Written numerous songs for Sylheti Natoks (dramas)
- Awarded Best Lyricist for the hit track "Ke Maya Lagailay Re Bondhu" at a prestigious award ceremony in Dhaka.

- Authored two storybooks, two rhyme books, and five songbooks, continuing to inspire budding singers and songwriters.
- Many of Syed Dulal's songs are also used commercially by various companies to promote products and services, highlighting his influence on both culture and business.
- For his outstanding contributions to Bangladeshi arts, music, and literature, Syed Dulal was honoured with a Special Recognition Award at the North East Bangladeshi Awards 2025.

His books, songs, and lyrics are widely celebrated, and his creative works continue to inspire new generations of artists, musicians, and cultural enthusiasts both in Bangladesh and across the Bangladeshi diaspora.

Special Recognition Award

Syeda Chompa Begum

Counsellor – Grief & Bereavement

Founder – Al-Falaq Counselling CIC



Syeda Chompa Begum is a proud single mother of six—two sons and four daughters—and a grandmother to three grandchildren. Three of her children are now married and building lives of their own.

Her life has been shaped by deeply personal experiences of loss, including the breakdown of her marriage, the loss of her family home, and the sudden, devastating death of her father. These moments of profound grief and adversity became the foundation for her healing and the driving force behind her purpose.

In addition to earning her degree and entering the counselling profession, Syeda Chompa Begum has been extensively involved in volunteering, advocacy, social justice, and community support—particularly in areas affecting women’s wellbeing, education, and equality.

Recognising the urgent need for culturally sensitive and faith-conscious mental health services, Syeda founded Al-Falaq Counselling CIC, a community interest company dedicated to supporting women through grief, trauma, and life transitions. While the service is open to all, it places a strong emphasis on assisting underrepresented and marginalised communities who often face significant barriers to accessing care.

Through her work, Syeda Chompa Begum is committed to creating safe, compassionate spaces for healing and personal growth. She actively challenges stigma around mental health, empowers women to reclaim their voices, and strives to make emotional support accessible to all.

Special Recognition Award

Dr. Wali Tasar Uddin MBE



Dr. Wali Tasar Uddin, a renowned businessman, philanthropist, and community leader, has carved a distinguished career spanning decades. Born in Moulvibazar, Bangladesh, in 1952, Dr. Uddin immigrated to the United Kingdom in 1967, where he began his entrepreneurial journey.

Dr. Uddin's entrepreneurial acumen is evident in his successful ventures in the restaurant industry. As the founder and owner of renowned establishments such as Verandah, Lancers, and Britannia Spice, he has consistently demonstrated a keen understanding of the market and a commitment to excellence. His restaurants have received numerous awards and accolades, solidifying his reputation as a leading figure in the industry.

Beyond his business endeavours, Dr. Uddin is deeply committed to philanthropy and community service. He has been instrumental in raising funds for various charitable causes, including disaster relief, education, and healthcare initiatives. His contributions to the development of Bangladesh, both through his own initiatives and his support for organisations working on the ground, have had a profound impact on countless lives.

Dr. Uddin has played a pivotal role in strengthening the Bangladeshi community in the UK and fostering closer ties between the two nations. He has served as a leader in numerous community organisations, including the Europe-Bangladesh Federation of Commerce and Industry (EBFCI), the Bangladesh-British Chamber of Commerce, and the Council for Bangladeshis in Scotland.

Dr. Uddin's exceptional achievements have been recognised with numerous awards and honours. He has received several honorary doctorates, including a Doctorate in Business Administration from Queen Margaret University and a Doctor of Letters from Heriot-Watt University. He was also awarded the title of Member of the British Empire (MBE) for his services to race relations, appointed as the first Honorary Consul-General of Bangladesh in Scotland, and widely recognised for his contributions to the restaurant industry and community service.

Dr. Wali Tasar Uddin's unwavering commitment to excellence, philanthropy, and community leadership has made him a respected figure both in the UK and Bangladesh. As a visionary leader, he continues to inspire and motivate others, paving the way for a brighter future for both nations.

Special Recognition Award

Nakkita Charag MStJ

Member of the Most Venerable Order of St John



Nakkita Charag currently serves as an Artificial Intelligence and Innovation Economist with the Department for Work and Pensions, a role she has held for the past three years. Alongside her professional career, Nakkita's long-standing dedication to volunteering with St John Ambulance is an inspiring story of achievement, leadership, and advocacy, culminating in her appointment as a Member of the Most Venerable Order of St John (MStJ).

Nakkita began volunteering with St John Ambulance at the age of 14 and has since dedicated more than 11 years of service, taking on numerous roles and projects.

As a proud British Bangladeshi woman, Nakkita's cultural background has shaped her work in promoting inclusivity, particularly by encouraging greater participation of Asian girls in extracurricular activities. She has consistently championed Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) measures at first aid events and residential programmes—advocating for the inclusion of prayer times, dietary requirements such as halal and vegetarian options, and the incorporation of the hijab into clinical uniform guidance.

In 2016, following intense competition, Nakkita was named District Cadet of the Year for Northumbria. Clinically, she has supported a wide range of major public events, including football matches at St James' Park, The Hoppings fair, Eagles basketball matches, the Great North Run, and New Year's Eve celebrations, among many others. She has also put her skills into practice in real-world emergencies, providing vital first aid to members of the public.

Nakkita Charag MStJ (Continue)

Beyond her clinical work, Nakkita has made a lasting impact on the organisation through her political contributions and tireless EDI advocacy. In recognition of her commitment, she was chosen to process through Westminster Abbey for the funeral of Her Late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, an event broadcast on international television. She attended alongside Lord Prior Professor Mark Compton and Dr. Ahmad Ma'Ali, CEO of St John Eye Hospital. Following the service, she represented the Order of St John in a live BBC News interview, helping to highlight the organisation's role as the nation's auxiliary service and leading first aid charity.

One of the most significant community engagement projects she contributed to was the "Every Child a Lifesaver" campaign on 27 March 2019, which remains a defining moment in her volunteer journey.

From September 2022 to July 2025, Nakkita also served as Regional Youth Development Officer and Chapter Member for the North East, further shaping the next generation of young volunteers.

Nakkita's journey—beginning as a volunteer in 2014 at just 11 years old and continuing with over a decade of service—demonstrates an extraordinary level of dedication. Her contributions to both the clinical and cultural dimensions of St John Ambulance stand as a remarkable achievement and a source of inspiration to others.

She is a Member of the Most Venerable Order of St John, an order of chivalry of the British Crown dedicated to humanitarian and charitable service.

<https://www.stjohninternational.org/who-we-are/order-of-chivalry/>

The Most Venerable Order of St John
- Royal Leicestershire Regiment

Community Centre of the Year

SUNDERLAND BANGLADESH INTERNATIONAL CENTRE (SBIC)



Overview

Sunderland Bangladesh International Centre (SBIC) provides a welcoming venue for social and cultural events, meetings, training, and community activities. The centre is widely used by voluntary and public sector organisations, as well as local residents. Beyond serving as a venue, SBIC delivers a wide range of projects and services tailored to community needs.



History & Mission

Established in 2000, SBIC was a pioneering project designed to meet the needs of the Bangladeshi community in Sunderland. From the outset, it has promoted the inclusion and integration of Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities into the wider life of the city. Today, the centre plays a key role in community development, education and training, health and wellbeing, and volunteer engagement. Women are well represented both on the Board of Trustees and within the staff team.



Community Centre of the Year

SBIC's

Core Activities & Services

- **Education & Training:** Accredited and non-accredited courses, ESOL, digital skills, youth learning, and leadership programmes. Over 400 learners have achieved NCFE Level 1–3 qualifications, alongside training in First Aid, Health & Social Care, and Information, Advice & Guidance (IAG). The centre also runs a Community Bangla School.
- **Community Development:** A hub for volunteering, social inclusion projects, and activities promoting cohesion across diverse communities.
- **Health & Wellbeing:** Programmes for older people, dementia support, mental health initiatives, and health awareness events delivered in partnership with local agencies.
- **Youth Engagement:** A wide range of programmes offering information, advice and guidance, creative opportunities, and safe spaces for young people.
- **Refugee & Asylum Seeker Support:** Information, integration support, and guidance for new arrivals.
- **Employment & Enterprise:** Skills development, enterprise mentoring, and job search support.
- **Cultural & Venue Provision:** Space hire for community use, cultural and heritage projects, and major community events.

Recent Refurbishment

Between 2023 and 2025, SBIC underwent a £1.3 million infrastructure and accessibility refurbishment funded by the UK Youth Investment Fund. The works created modern, flexible facilities, including upgraded training rooms, enhanced IT and digital provision, a new catering kitchen, dedicated youth “chill-out” spaces, and areas for arts, crafts, and physical activities.

Staffing

SBIC employs between 7 and 12 staff, depending on funding cycles, and is supported by a large team of volunteers. As of 2024, the centre employed 12 staff members.

Shuley Alam Award

Finalist

Shila Laskar



I have been working as a BAME Community Development Worker for over twenty-one years, including my time at Compact for Race Equality in South Tyneside (CREST), as well as through extensive voluntary work. In addition, I work as an interpreter, and I also participate in Bollywood dancing as part of the Bollywood Sand Dancers, performing on stage and at a variety of events.

I am passionate about both gardening and dancing. Recently, I started my own gardening project at my allotment, focusing on supporting BAME and disadvantaged communities. I developed this further by registering it as a Community Interest Company (CIC). As the founder and one of the directors, I established this social enterprise under the name Growing Together South Tyneside.

Through my community work, I discovered that many BAME individuals are eager to engage in activities they enjoy but face barriers to participation. Many are silently suffering from a range of mental and physical health challenges—often without even realising it—particularly women.

Currently, I am working towards a degree while juggling multiple commitments. I have already achieved a Level 3 qualification in Interpreting, as well as certifications in Child Care, Access to Bilingual Employment, and PETAL. Balancing all of this can be challenging, but I am determined to succeed.

In my spare time, I actively engage in community volunteer work, which includes signposting, assisting with official forms, liaising with organisations, translating and interpreting letters, and providing emotional support. I listen to people's concerns and help build their confidence so they can improve their lives. This work brings me great satisfaction—especially when I see them leave with a smile and a sense of appreciation. It means a lot to me knowing I have been able to support disadvantaged community members who often struggle to access mainstream services due to cultural and language barriers, as well as a lack of confidence.

I am married with three adult children—two sons, aged 30 and 27, and a daughter aged 25. My family is a central part of my life, and raising them has greatly enhanced my ability to manage and multitask effectively, both personally and professionally.

I also enjoy keeping fit and regularly take part in gym sessions, yoga, swimming, walking, running, and plenty of gardening and digging at my allotment.

Shuley Alam Award

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Syeda Chompa Begum

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Founder – Al-Falaq Counselling CIC



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Her life has been shaped by deeply personal experiences of loss, including the breakdown of her marriage, the loss of her family home, and the sudden, devastating death of her father. These moments of profound grief and adversity became the foundation for her healing and the driving force behind her purpose.

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Rising Star

Finalist

Enayet Zaman

Budding professional boxer



Nineteen-year-old Enayet was born and raised in Newcastle. He recently completed his studies in Personal Training and Fitness at Newcastle College and is currently employed by Committed Support as a Head Recruitment Agent. This fast-paced role suits him well, allowing him to thrive professionally while also providing the flexibility to pursue his sporting passions, particularly boxing. Alongside his work, Enayet continues to freelance as a Personal Trainer, driven by his deep passion for sports and fitness.

Introduced to Muay Thai by his father at the age of 13, Enayet began training at a local club where he developed valuable skills and discipline. Over time, this foundation led him to discover and nurture a strong passion for boxing.

He began boxing at the age of 18 and currently trains at TKO Boxing Gym, dedicating six days a week to intense training, including regular sparring with various opponents.

Enayet competed in a charity boxing match for Newcastle University, which was streamed live on YouTube and successfully raised a significant amount of funds. During this event, he achieved his first win with a Round 2 TKO stoppage. He is now in the process of obtaining his amateur boxing licence and is determined to progress through the amateur ranks, with the long-term goal of turning professional and proudly bringing Bangladeshi representation to the sport.

Enayet's family originates from Jagannathpur, Sylhet, Bangladesh. He is the youngest in the family and has one elder sister.

In addition to his role as a Recruitment Consultant and his commitment to boxing, Enayet is actively involved in his community through voluntary work. He volunteers at Falcons Rugby Club, where he mentors and coaches young children, helping them to build confidence, discipline, and teamwork skills. His dedication to youth mentoring also took him to Italy, where he continued coaching and mentorship work with children as part of an international youth programme.

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<https://www.stjohninternational.org/who-we-are/order-of-chivalry/>

The Most Venerable Order of St John
- Royal Leicestershire Regiment

Maa Award

Mrs Rehana Hoque



Rehana Hoque is an extraordinary woman whose life is a testament to compassion, courage, and resilience. A proud mother, grandmother, and carer, she has spent decades quietly yet powerfully challenging societal norms and making an indelible impact on her community—particularly within the caring sector and among underrepresented groups.

At the heart of everything Rehana does is her unwavering dedication to her eldest son, who lives with a learning disability. Her life has been profoundly shaped by both the challenges and the joys of caring for him—a role she has embraced with love, patience, and strength.

Rehana's journey as a carer is deeply personal and profoundly moving. Over the years, she has navigated countless emotional, cultural, and practical challenges—not only advocating for her son's needs but also ensuring he lives a life filled with dignity, care, and inclusion. Her devotion goes far beyond the day-to-day responsibilities of caring; it is rooted in a mother's unconditional love, the kind that never wavers, even when the road is long.

This lived experience has made her a powerful voice and a beacon of empathy for other families facing similar circumstances. She brings comfort and understanding to others because she has walked in their shoes.

Rehana began her volunteering journey in the 1990s with West End Befrienders, where she supported Asian carers at a time when cultural barriers often silenced the voices of carers from ethnic minority backgrounds. Her early work laid vital groundwork for many others to follow, helping to ensure that culturally appropriate care and advocacy became a greater priority in local services.

Mrs Rehana Hoque (Continue)

Rehana's dedication evolved into a professional commitment when she worked for a decade with Dekhbal, an Asian carers project, from 1993 to 2003. To this day, she remains a committed volunteer with Newcastle Carers, where she continues to support others by organising and participating in day trips and family support events—offering emotional support, friendship, and a vital lifeline to those who often feel isolated.

Rehana is also a trailblazer in every sense. In the early 1990s, she undertook and successfully completed lifeguard training, a field with minimal representation of Asian and Muslim women at the time. She went on to volunteer, and later work, at Elswick Pool, becoming Newcastle's first female Asian/Muslim lifeguard. Her courage to step into a male-dominated and culturally restricted space inspired many others, particularly young women in her community.

Now 66, Rehana remains a driving force in her community and a role model for women of all ages, proving that age, culture, or gender should never be a barrier to effecting change. Her tireless efforts to challenge taboos, dismantle stereotypes, and build bridges across communities have left a lasting legacy.

Rehana Hoque's life is one of service, strength, and inspiration. Her unique combination of lived experience, voluntary dedication, and fearless pioneering spirit makes her an exceptional nominee for recognition. She is a true champion for carers, a cultural icon, and a shining example of what it means to lead with heart and love without limits. Rehana Hoque is an inspirational woman who truly deserves every accolade that comes her way.

Public Sector recognition award

Finalist

Hasan Kajee

*Transition Director at the NHS
Business Services Authority*



Hasan Kajee is a senior leader whose career spans the NHS, higher education, and community development, with impact at local, regional, national, and international levels.

He currently serves as Transition Director at the NHS Business Services Authority, where he leads the safe onboarding of new services into the organisation following system reforms. The portfolio of services due to transfer exceeds £500 million in value and will directly impact thousands of NHS colleagues across the country.

Hasan has delivered several nationally significant programmes, including the NHS COVID Pass, which enabled safe travel and boosted public confidence during the pandemic, and the £1.7 billion Future NHS Workforce Solution, preparing the NHS for the workforce of the future. These programmes have impacted millions of people across the UK and internationally.

Hasan is also the first BAME Director in the NHSBSA's history, a milestone reflecting his commitment to breaking barriers and creating pathways for greater representation at the highest levels of public service.

In the North East region, Hassan serves as a Board Director at Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust (NUTH), one of the country's largest and most complex trusts, with a budget of £2 billion per year, a workforce of 15,000 staff, and over 2 million patients seen annually. He chairs the Trust's Digital & Data Committee, providing oversight of digital investment, infrastructure resilience, and data-driven transformation.

Hasan Kajee

(Continue)

He is also Vice Chair and Pro-Chancellor at Northumbria University, helping to shape the strategy and governance of a leading university with more than 35,000 students. His leadership across both institutions has driven digital transformation, financial resilience, and inclusive talent development.

Hassan grew up within the Bangladeshi community in the west of Newcastle. Inspired by role models around him, he has dedicated much of his career to coaching, mentoring, and inspiring others, particularly those from underrepresented backgrounds. He has launched leadership programmes for underrepresented groups and co-founded the BAME Network at the NHSBSA, creating pathways for colleagues to thrive and progress. Beyond his professional commitments, he coaches a grassroots football team, Heaton Hawks U21s, supporting young people in Newcastle through sport, discipline, and mentorship.

Hassan's work has also had an international impact through his leadership of the NHS COVID Pass, which became one of the most widely accepted digital health tools globally, supporting international travel and public safety during the pandemic. He continues to shape the future of public services through his work on AI adoption and workforce transformation.

A proud British Bangladeshi, Hassan's journey—from the west Newcastle community where he grew up, to grassroots coaching, to NHS boardrooms—reflects both professional excellence and values-driven leadership. He consistently uses his platform to create opportunities, drive equity, and deliver public value, while inspiring others to follow.

Public Sector recognition award

Finalist

Nakkita Charag MStj

(Member of the Most Venerable Order of St John)



Nakkita Charag currently serves as an Artificial Intelligence and Innovation Economist with the Department for Work and Pensions, a role she has held for the past three years. Alongside her professional career, Nakkita's long-standing dedication to volunteering with St John Ambulance is an inspiring story of achievement, leadership, and advocacy, culminating in her appointment as a Member of the Most Venerable Order of St John (MStJ).

Nakkita began volunteering with St John Ambulance at the age of 14 and has since dedicated more than 11 years of service, taking on numerous roles and projects.

As a proud British Bangladeshi woman, Nakkita's cultural background has shaped her work in promoting inclusivity, particularly by encouraging greater participation of Asian girls in extracurricular activities. She has consistently championed Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) measures at first aid events and residential programmes—advocating for the inclusion of prayer times, dietary requirements such as halal and vegetarian options, and the incorporation of the hijab into clinical uniform guidance.

In 2016, following intense competition, Nakkita was named District Cadet of the Year for Northumbria. Clinically, she has supported a wide range of major public events, including football matches at St James' Park, The Hoppings fair, Eagles basketball matches, the Great North Run, and New Year's Eve celebrations, among many others. She has also put her skills into practice in real-world emergencies, providing vital first aid to members of the public.

Nakkita Charag MStJ (Continue)

Beyond her clinical work, Nakkita has made a lasting impact on the organisation through her political contributions and tireless EDI advocacy. In recognition of her commitment, she was chosen to process through Westminster Abbey for the funeral of Her Late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, an event broadcast on international television. She attended alongside Lord Prior Professor Mark Compton and Dr. Ahmad Ma'Ali, CEO of St John Eye Hospital. Following the service, she represented the Order of St John in a live BBC News interview, helping to highlight the organisation's role as the nation's auxiliary service and leading first aid charity.

One of the most significant community engagement projects she contributed to was the "Every Child a Lifesaver" campaign on 27 March 2019, which remains a defining moment in her volunteer journey.

From September 2022 to July 2025, Nakkita also served as Regional Youth Development Officer and Chapter Member for the North East, further shaping the next generation of young volunteers.

Nakkita's journey—beginning as a volunteer in 2014 at just 11 years old and continuing with over a decade of service—demonstrates an extraordinary level of dedication. Her contributions to both the clinical and cultural dimensions of St John Ambulance stand as a remarkable achievement and a source of inspiration to others.

She is a Member of the Most Venerable Order of St John, an order of chivalry of the British Crown dedicated to humanitarian and charitable service.

<https://www.stjohninternational.org/who-we-are/order-of-chivalry/>

The Most Venerable Order of St John
- Royal Leicestershire Regiment

Catering Business Awards

NEBA 2025 Takeaway of the Year

North Tyneside
Northumberland
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South Tyneside
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Newcastle

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Highly Recommended Restaurant
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South Tyneside
Sunderland
Teesside
Darlington
Durham
Northumberland
North Tyneside
Newcastle

Bangladeshi Women in Leadership

Finalist

Cllr Sajna Ali



Born in Darlington on 26 October 1977, Cllr Sajna Ali is a trailblazer, community advocate, and the first female British Bangladeshi Councillor elected in the North East of England—a historic milestone in representation and inclusion.

Her life is defined by resilience. Despite chronic spinal and serious health conditions—including paralysis and major surgeries—Sajna has never let adversity stand in the way of public service. Her story is one of compassion, strength, and tireless commitment to social justice and community cohesion.

A devoted mother of six, Sajna draws strength from her family, particularly her eldest son, Habib, who inspires her belief that with focus and faith, anything is possible.

Elected in 2018 and now serving her second term, Sajna's political journey began in grassroots activism and has evolved into impactful public service. Her leadership roles include:

- First female British Bangladeshi Councillor in the North East
- Vice Chair, Licensing Committee
- Former Vice Chair, Planning Committee
- BAME Officer, Labour CLP (6 years, elected)
- Member, Adult & Young Children Scrutiny Committee
- Member, County Durham Police Panel
- Chair, BUS Panel (BAME arrests, use of force, stop and search)
- Vice Chair, Darlington Police Unity Group (member since 2014)
- Trustee, Darlington FC Foundation Trust
- NE Female Bengali Representative, Bangla Mother Language Association

Cllr Sajna Ali

(Continue)

Her advocacy has influenced national immigration policy, including helping to prevent a forced marriage. She has also secured funding for culturally inclusive swimming and fitness services, and co-founded initiatives such as the Bengali Aspirations Language School and Darlington Assistants for Refugees, creating opportunities and breaking barriers for minority communities.

In 2018, shortly after spinal surgery restored her ability to travel, Sajna joined Global One in Bangladesh to help build a school and health facility for Rohingya refugees—blending personal recovery with global service.

A passionate volunteer, Sajna leads an annual Christmas Day initiative, serving over 200 vulnerable people with meals, gifts, and care, in partnership with local restaurant Babul's and the Ahmed family.

She also co-led Darlington World Cultural Day, a vibrant council-backed event celebrating inclusion, food, and cross-cultural unity.

Sajna has overcome discrimination, health setbacks, and societal expectations placed on her as a Muslim woman. Guided by the legacy of her late father, Syed Torab Ali, and inspired by local community champions, she continues to uplift others while paving the way for future generations.

She often says: "Everything we do is for the next generation—to be kind, respectful, and part of something greater than ourselves."

As she prepares for further surgery, Sajna remains unwavering in her mission to serve, demonstrating historic political leadership and a lifelong dedication to others.

Bangladeshi Women in Leadership

Finalist

Mrs Latifa Miah

Director of Bayleaf Restaurant



I am the director of my late husband's restaurant, Bayleaf in Cramlington. At its core, it is a family business, and everyone pitches in to keep it running. You will find me doing everything from deliveries and kitchen support to front-of-house duties, taking orders and serving food and drinks to table after table. Behind the scenes, I manage all the paperwork and have learned a great deal about running a business, gaining enormous independence over the years. We started the restaurant in 2020, just before Covid hit, and despite the challenges, we survived as a brand-new business—and in 2024, we are still going strong.

Previously, I ran a small business from home called Modest Hijabs, offering stylish and modern headwear for women. This expanded to selling shawls and abayas, and my business grew significantly when I began setting up stalls at community events and markets. I thoroughly enjoyed this work and hope to resume it in the future if time allows.

Volunteering at the Mill Inn Charity is a big part of my life. Many of my lasting friendships were formed through the wonderful people I met while working to give back to our community. I deeply believe in the importance of social justice and communal action, particularly in empowering the voices of the oppressed and unheard. I have participated in numerous anti-racism marches, as well as campaigns such as Justice for the Rohingya and Freedom for Palestine. Making change together is central to my values, and I will always strive to support those who need to be uplifted. I also serve as a trustee of Rohingya Action North East.

The woman I am today is shaped by my incredible husband, who always supported me to grow beyond my own expectations. He made me strong and capable, and even during his illness—after a painful battle with terminal cancer that ended in February 2023—he remained resilient and continued working every day, even during chemotherapy. He is my heart and soul, and I miss him every day. Together, we have four children, who make me very proud: my son, a mortgage advisor, and my daughters, including a social media influencer, an ISVA (Independent Sexual Violence Advisor), and my youngest, who works in the food industry.

My interests and hobbies include nature exploration, gardening, arts and crafts, problem solving, and always enjoying a giant cup of tea whenever I can.

Bangladeshi Person of the Year

Finalist

Ruhi Akhtar

Founder & CEO

Refugee Biriyani & Bananas



Refugee Biriyani & Bananas (RBB) was formed in response to the Syrian refugee crisis in 2015. The organisation is named after its initial mission: cooking and distributing biriyani and bananas to all residents of a refugee camp in Northern France. Since then, RBB became an independently registered charity in the UK in 2020 (No. 1189561).

RBB has supported over 1 million people worldwide through humanitarian aid, advocacy, and other support services. Since its inception, the charity has raised and spent approximately £1.5 million to provide emergency aid and essential provisions.

Refugee Biriyani & Bananas is a female- and community-led organisation, dedicated to supporting people with varying vulnerabilities worldwide by delivering emergency aid and basic necessities.

RBB's work ranges from food distributions to providing medical assistance, referrals, and campaigning for better global human rights. The organisation has delivered humanitarian aid in refugee and IDP camps, squats, and other unstable settlements along migratory pathways in:

- France
- Greece
- Northern Iraq
- Serbia, Bosnia & Herzegovina
- Turkey
- Poland, Belarus & Lithuania Border
- Ukraine Border
- Palestine

RBB 12-Month Summary

Over the past year, RBB supported more than 173,000 people affected by war and poverty across Gaza, Greece, and Cairo, providing emergency aid through over 188,000 individual distributions.

In Gaza, RBB launched its largest clean water response to date, distributing 380,000 litres of safe drinking water, and continued providing food, hygiene items, and essential supplies. In Greece, RBB remained a trusted presence, supporting people in refugee camps and responding to emergency calls across multiple islands. In Cairo, they assisted Sudanese, Palestinian, and other crisis-affected communities.

Ruhi Akhtar

(Continue)

Global Solidarity & Support

This year, RBB was proud to welcome Greentea Peng, a renowned British musician and artist known for her soulful, socially conscious work, and Gulwali Passarlay, a long-time refugee rights advocate, author of *The Lightless Sky*, and former child refugee from Afghanistan. Both joined RBB on the ground in Greece and Cairo, volunteering alongside our field teams.

Support for RBB has also grown internationally, with fundraising and awareness events held across the UK, Europe, Australia, and the US. These initiatives were organised by former volunteers, artists, community members, and allies who believe in RBB's community-driven model.

In October 2024, RBB's founder and CEO, Ruhi Loren Akhtar, was named North East Bangladeshi Person of the Year, recognising her decade-long commitment to displaced communities and her leadership in building a grassroots, community-led humanitarian organisation.

Most Recent press coverage

Refugee Biryani & Bananas CEO on Challenges with Gaza Aid and Support for Displaced People, Hyphen. December 2024 <https://hyphenonline.com/2024/12/13/ruhi-loren-akhtar-refugee-biriyana-bananas-aid-charity/>

After Greece's Refugee Crisis: The Rise of Hard Borders, Inkstick. December 2024 <https://inkstickmedia.com/after-greeces-refugee-crisis-a-riskier-more-violent-journey-for-migrants/>

BBC Look North. May 2024. Ruhi's Video Interview. Gaza and Greece <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LVzolJ5xmHs&t=4s>

BBC News. May 2024. Written Interview. Gaza and Greece <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c8004z5vyg1o>

BBC Radio Newcastle. May 2024. Radio interview. Aid work, Gaza and Greece. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0j0wsc4>

Refugee Biryani & Bananas Collaboration in Forensic Architecture Investigation on drift backs. January 2024. <https://forensic-architecture.org/investigation/drift-backs-in-the-aegean-sea>

Bangladeshi Person of the Year

Finalist

Cllr Habib Rahman



In his 15th year of service as a Councillor, Cllr Habib Rahman has become the region's longest-serving British Bangladeshi Councillor and a prominent voice for equality, human rights, and anti-racism. Representing not only the Bangladeshi community but the entire Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) community, Cllr Rahman is widely recognised for his tireless advocacy and leadership.

In 2024, Cllr Rahman made history by becoming the first British Bangladeshi to contest a UK General Election as an independent candidate in the North East.

After leaving the Labour Party due to concerns over institutional racism and the party's stance on Palestine, Cllr Rahman's decision marked a significant turning point in his political journey, reflecting his unwavering commitment to principle, justice, and equality.

A passionate campaigner for cultural rights and religious inclusivity, Cllr Rahman successfully lobbied Newcastle City Council to introduce Lotas (water vessels for personal hygiene) in all Civic Centre toilets—a groundbreaking move recognising the religious and cultural needs of Muslim and South Asian communities. He continues to campaign for similar provisions across all council workplaces.

Cllr Rahman has also led and supported numerous campaigns to honour victims of genocide and persecution, including successfully championing the establishment of the UK's first permanent memorial for the Rohingya community, to be unveiled in Bradford in 2025, recognising the atrocities they have endured.

Cllr Habib Rahman (Continue)

- Campaigned for the creation of the Newcastle Peace Garden, where he spearheaded the installation of the first Rwanda Genocide Memorial Stone in 2023.
- Supported the planting of a Cherry Tree in July 2025 in memory of the Srebrenica Genocide.
- Backed the unveiling of a memorial stone in August 2025 to commemorate the victims of the Roma Holocaust.

Cllr Rahman has personally attended and spoken at these significant events, ensuring that the voices of oppressed and persecuted communities are heard, recognised, and remembered.

Known for his anti-racist campaigning, Cllr Rahman continues to challenge hate speech, political propaganda, and misinformation. Despite facing personal attacks and threats, he remains steadfast in his mission to educate communities, protect the vulnerable, and eradicate hate crime. He regularly calls for greater engagement and dialogue to foster understanding and unity.

Cllr Habib Rahman is widely regarded as a role model and an inspirational figure within the British Bangladeshi community and the wider BAME population across the UK.

His work has not only transformed policies locally but has also had a national impact, earning him recognition as one of the leading voices for justice, equality, and diversity in Britain.

2025

'We should be proud' – One year on from Newcastle's huge show of unity in face of riots | Chronicle Live

Newcastle asylum seeker hotel protest: Former lord mayor wants grown-up conversations to mend divisions

Ex-mayor issues plea for 'grown-up conversations' after Newcastle asylum seeker hotel protests | Chronicle Live

BKW residents unite for VE Day picnic with a message of unity and remembrance - Asian Standard Newspaper

<https://yorkshirebylines.co.uk/region/bradford-to-establish-uks-first-rohingya-memorial/>

Bradford to establish UK's first Rohingya Memorial, led by Cllr Habib Rahman - Asian Standard Newspaper

Newcastle City Council embraces inclusivity with 'Lota' facilities in public toilets - Asian Standard Newspaper

<https://www.chroniclelive.co.uk/news/north-east-news/sheila-howe-funeral-newcastle-westend-30793168.amp>

Ex-lord mayor of Newcastle says Home Office at fault for riots - BBC News

Bangladeshi Person of the Year

Finalist

Cllr Abdul Samad

Operations Coordinator at Sage / Newcastle City Councillor / Cabinet Lead for Vibrant City



Cllr Abdul Samad is an accomplished community leader and dedicated public servant, currently serving as an Operations Coordinator at Sage and an elected Newcastle City Councillor. First elected in May 2022, he is one of the youngest members on the council's front benches and proudly holds the role of Cabinet Lead for Vibrant City – a position he has successfully led for two consecutive years. Notably, he is the first British Bangladeshi Newcastle Councillor to achieve this milestone.

In his cabinet role, Cllr Samad oversees a diverse portfolio that includes:

- Culture Strategy and partnerships with visitor economy and destination agencies.
- Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) liaison, including the Newcastle Fund and community asset transfers
- Oversight of libraries, customer services, parks, green spaces, and parish councils
- Leadership on events, sports, leisure facilities, and leisure centre management

Beyond his professional and political responsibilities, Abdul Samad is deeply committed to community engagement and social impact. He has actively supported initiatives such as the Newcastle in Solidarity with Rohingya campaign, participated in local street clean-ups, and consistently worked with residents to address issues that matter most to them.

Previously, Abdul volunteered with Success4All, a local charity dedicated to mentoring and tutoring children aged 8 to 16. His outstanding contributions earned him the Diana Champion Volunteer Award, recognising his dedication to empowering young people through education and mentorship.

Cllr Abdul Samad (Continue)

Born and raised in Newcastle, Abdul lives with his parents, brother, and sister, cherishing strong family values that continue to inspire his personal and professional journey. In July 2025, he marked a special milestone by getting married. He credits his family's unwavering encouragement and guidance for instilling in him the values of education, determination, and perseverance.

Outside of his council duties, Abdul enjoys travelling, exploring new cultures and histories, and spending quality time with family and friends. Passionate about celebrating diversity, he finds inspiration in learning from different perspectives and experiences around the world.

<https://www.wers.org.uk/blog/visit-from-the-leader-of-newcastle-city-council>
<https://www.chroniclelive.co.uk/news/north-east-news/newcastle-council-leader-shuffles-cabinet-29221887>

Bangladeshi Person of the Year

Finalist

Shajidul Haque - MMA Fighter

Aka Shaj 'Superman' Haque



Shaj is a renowned Professional MMA fighter and Head Coach of ACE MMA Martial Arts Centre in South Shields. His remarkable career, particularly from 2022 to the present, solidifies his status as a standout athlete and coach in the MMA world.

In January 2022, Shaj became the Almighty FC Flyweight Champion, showcasing his skill with a TKO victory over Poland's top Flyweight. By June 2022, he defended his title with another TKO win, gaining recognition as one of the best European Flyweights not signed by the UFC.

Stepping onto the world stage in September 2022, Shaj represented England and Bangladesh at ARES FC in France, defeating the number 1 French Flyweight. This triumph earned him the chance to vie for the Cage Warriors World Title.

On New Year's Eve 2022 in London, Shaj secured the Cage Warriors Flyweight World Champion title with a knockout victory, gaining millions of online views and winning the Cage Warriors 2022 KO of the Year award. In July 2023, he defended his World Title in Rome, defeating the Italian number 1 ranked Flyweight.

Currently ranked as the number 1 unsigned European Flyweight and 37th in the world on Fight Matrix, Shaj strives for a UFC contract. Alongside his personal achievements, he established ACE MMA, coaching students who excelled in the UK amateur circuit, earning championships and top rankings.

Shaj's impact extends beyond the octagon; he made history as the first MMA World Champion of Bangladeshi ethnicity, inspiring South Tyneside and the Bangladeshi community. Actively involved in community outreach, he visits schools, community centres, and festivals, sharing his journey and encouraging youth to pursue their dreams.

Shaj's commitment to inspiring and empowering the local youth reflects his belief in the transformative power of hard work and determination, leaving a lasting impact in the MMA world and the communities he touches. the winner of NEBA 2023 Bangladeshi Person of the Year, Shaj won his latest fight In July 2025 defending his undefeated Cage Warriors Flyweight World Champion title.

<https://cagewarriors.com/shaj-haque-retains-title-as-cage-warriors-192/>

<https://mmauk.net/2025/07/12/cage-warriors-192-results-shaj-successfully-defends-flyweight-championship-in-london/>

Bangladeshi Person of the Year

Finalist

Cllr Ehtesham Haque

Mayor of Sunderland

(Youngest Bangladeshi Mayor in the UK)



Cllr Ehtesham Haque has called Sunderland home since the age of 10, when his family relocated from London. He was educated at Richard Avenue Primary School and Thornhill Comprehensive School, later continuing his studies at Sunderland College, the University of Sunderland, and Cambridge University.

Family plays an important role in his life. Recently married, he lives with his wife, parents, and siblings – a younger brother and two younger sisters – in the family home.

Alongside his career as a civil servant, Cllr Haque has always shown a strong interest in politics and a passion for his local community. This dedication led to his election as Ward Councillor for the Barnes Ward in 2023. In his first year as Councillor, he served on the Health and Scrutiny Committee and became a governor at Richard Avenue Primary School, where he was once a pupil himself.

He is committed to continuing his work on council committees, gaining further insight into the issues and opportunities facing Sunderland, and using this knowledge to better serve both his ward and the wider community.

In 2025, Cllr Haque was nominated and elected to the Office of Mayor, becoming Sunderland's youngest-ever Mayor and the city's first Asian Mayor – an achievement he is extremely proud of.

A champion for tackling child and family poverty, Cllr Haque has chosen Hopespring and Love, Amelia as the Mayor's Charities and Good Causes for 2025–2026. He is eager to work with these two outstanding organisations to raise awareness and vital funds so they can continue their life-changing work.

<https://www.sunderlandecho.com/news/politics/council/sunderland-gets-youngest-ever-and-first-asian-mayor-in-powerful-symbol-of-change-after-riots-5142667>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c0j74qe0wejo>

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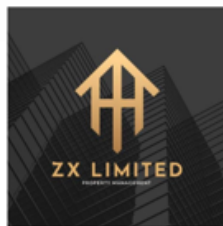
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**Date: Monday
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Time: 5:00PM – 11:00PM

Venue:

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