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The shortlist is finally here. And the event is completely **SOLD OUT!**

# SHORTLIST ANNOUNCED: BPA Empowering Women Awards 2026

If there is one thing this year's BPA Empowering Women Awards has proved, it's that we are surrounded by extraordinary women. Over the past few months, over 400 hundred nominations from across the country have landed on the BPA Team's desks. In category after category, the

discussions were tough. Not because there weren't enough strong candidates, but because there were so many. The standard has been exceptional. Business leaders. Educators. Healthcare professionals. Entrepreneurs. Community champions. Volunteers. Women quietly changing lives without ever seeking recognition for it.

Continued on  
pages 2 & 3

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# SHORTLIST ANNOUNCED: BPA Empowering Women Awards 2026

## JUDGING PANAL

### BPA Empowering Women Awards 2026



Rizwana Mahmood Ahmed MBE



Sarah Khan Bashir MBE



Rifhat Malik MBE



Dr Saira Ali FLI

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# The shortlist is finally here. And the event is completely **SOLD OUT!**

#### Cover story continued

“What impressed me most wasn't the number of nominations we received. We were ready for that.” said Nadim Hanif – CEO and co-founder, BPA Empowering Women Awards.

“It was the scale of impact behind them. These women are leading businesses,

strengthening communities and inspiring the next generation. Their stories deserve to be seen and celebrated,” he added.

“To all those who have been shortlisted, congratulations – this is an achievement to be truly proud of.”

Andleeb Hanif, Chairperson and co-founder of the BPA Empowering Women Awards said: “The shortlist is more

than a list of finalists. It is a reflection of the extraordinary contribution women are making every day – often without recognition, but never without impact.

“If this year's awards taught us anything, it's that there is no shortage of talented women. The real challenge wasn't finding excellence – it was choosing between it.”

**“To all those who have been shortlisted, congratulations – this is an achievement to be truly proud of.”**

# SHORTLISTED FINALISTS

## BPA Empowering Women Awards 2026

### Outstanding Woman in Arts, Media & Culture

Rumela Bandyopadhyay - Co-Founder New Beginnings  
Safoora Akbar - Director at Moochi Media LTD  
Rabia Patel - Lecturer, Poet, Writer, Mentor  
Eyarun Nessa - Content Creator/Photographer  
Emb Hashmi - Founder of Storytelling for CEOs

### Businesswoman of the Year

Zara Saleem - Co-Founder Delhicious Body  
Olga Ieromenko - Founder Olgish Cakes  
Sofia Younis - COO & Co-Founder of Serenity Specialist Care  
Maryam Iqbal - Director & Founder of Royal Onsen  
Fallaq Ujalla - Founder & CEO of Skylight Lounge

### Community Champion of the Year

Hana Agha - Project Co-Ordinator, Give a Gift Charity  
Fozia Naseem - Partnerships Manager at GiveBradford & MD at Hop On Cycling  
Meena Kumari - Director & Founder of HOPE  
Abrana Malik - Deputy Play Leader, Child Seasons, LCC  
Naz Khan - Co-founder BAK Foundation

### Outstanding Woman in Education

Debbie Anness - Headteacher, Belle Vue Girls' Academy  
Chelsea Wright - Head of Centre & Safeguarding Lead Link AP Academy  
Shaheen Myers - Founder & Director of Balance-ed  
Surraya Patel - Teacher of Science/ Personal trainer  
Dee Mistry Patel - Educational Consultant/Director/Author

### Empowerment Champion of the Year

Shabana Butt - Yoga and Mindfulness Expert  
Lucy Ndlovu - Founder of Progressive Talent CIC  
Sonia Fayyaz - Community Engagement Manager at Active Bradford  
Fatima Zehra - Doctoral Researcher/Lecturer

### Entrepreneur of the Year

Dr Farzana Khan - Doctor in Regenerative Medicine & Womens Health  
Aysha Nazir - Founder & Director Beauty Dreams Salon & Aysha Nazir Clothing  
Sarah Ajeil - Founder & Director of Hamama  
Kiran Khan - Founder of Chakelet  
Aisha Ansari - Founder & CEO MONOS Group

### Healthcare Professional of the Year

Bushra Effendi - Advanced Pharmacist & Menopause Specialist  
Nertila Xhukellari - Healthcare Assistant / Sheffield Teaching Hospital  
Sumayya Nowrin - GP Partner at Woodside Medical Centre  
Dr Aleeza Khan - Assistant Teaching Professor, University of Greater Manchester  
Dr Farzana Khan - Doctor in Regenerative Medicine & Womens Health

### Influential Woman of the Year

Lucy Ndlovu - Founder of Progressive Talent CIC  
Asiya Dawood - Founder South Asian Babyloss Awareness Week  
Tomiwa Dada - Executive Director, Babes of the Most High Global CIC  
Aaliya Khan - Founder & Director Women of Fortitude CIC

### Excellence in the Legal Sector

Saher Tariq - Director & Solicitor at YHM Solicitors  
Nasreen Karim - Founder & Lawyer, Platinum Partnerships  
Eram Malik - Employment Solicitor, Islamophobia Response Unit (IRU)  
Sumayyah Saloo - Associate Solicitor (Child Care Department) - JWP Solicitors  
Amanda Jahangirfard - Solicitor, Tyler Hoffman

### Professional of the Year

Farah Qureshi - CEO & Founder - Global Diversity Practice  
Aalia Ahmed - CEO and Lead VAT Consultant, VAT Genius  
Dounia Bakira - General Manager, AESSEAL Marine plc  
Louise Berwick - Director, South Yorkshire Primary Care Workforce & Training Hub  
Dr Shajara Ul-Durar - Senior Lecturer/Associate Professor in Responsible Management

### Outstanding Woman in Public Service

Rizwana Parveen - Director, Department for Work and Pensions  
Shareena Lee Satti - Senior Project Manager at the National Literacy Trust  
Kiran Bali MBE JP - Global Chair, Prosocial World  
Sajda Shah MBE - Public Service and Communities Leader  
Akeela Din Mohammed DL - Director of Healthy Her CIO

### Sport Champion of the Year

Jamila Karolia - Founder & Director, Samata Pilates  
Nalette Tucker - Founder & CEO of Sunnah Sports Community CIC  
Zuby Hamard - Strategic Lead, Sport & Physical Activity, Bradford Council  
Suffia Hussain - Senior Karate & Self-Defence Coach  
Humera Khan - CEO of Happy Healthy You

### Young Achiever of the Year


Sara Gajra - Young Leader, Making Sparks  
Ehlissay Naqvi - National Trust Youth Literacy Leader & Community Volunteer  
Maryam Jazeem - Founder of Quran30Global & #iWill Youth Ambassador  
Miran Almass - Air Cadet 168 Squadron Leeds  
Hafsa Shahid - Law Student  
Rukhsar Jahangir - Barrister (Unregistered)

### Special Commendations

At the Chair's discretion, the following awards will be announced at the BPA Empowering Women Awards & Gala Dinner, Thursday 25th June 2026.

### Special Recognition Award

Lifetime Achievement Award  
Trailblazer of the Year Award  
Family Legacy Award  
Pioneering Woman in Business Award



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***“This will make a meaningful difference to our students by removing financial barriers that may prevent them from taking part in cricket fixtures and wider sporting opportunities.”***

# Thousands of sports kits donated at Leeds kit swap event

**Over 3,000 pieces of sports kit have been donated to community groups and schools to tackle inequality and improve access to sport.**

The event at John Charles Centre for Sport was organised by the Kit Equipment Exchange Partnership (KEEP) to distribute sports kit and equipment to people across the city who may not have access to or be able to afford it.

The 3,400 of pieces of kit were donated by organisations in the partnership and included sports tops and bottoms, jackets, trainers and sports bras. Some were completely brand new and many barely used.

Three hundred pieces were donated after being left behind at the Leeds Marathon which took place on 10 May.

All of the kits have now been picked up by the over 50 organisations and local residents who attended the kit swap and will support a wide range of people in Leeds, including children and young people, looked after children, women and girls, people attending substance misuse groups and people living in the most deprived areas.

Importantly, the event has also stopped 1,496kg of clothes and equipment going to landfill and is estimated to have saved £57,902, based on average cost per item donated.

The kit swap event ran for the first time in 2025 and was hugely successful from the start with nearly 2,000 pieces donated.

Jonathon Burn who attended on behalf of Dixons Unity Academy

said: “This event has had a hugely positive impact on our community and provided invaluable support for families and young people who need it most.

“We collected a range of sports equipment, including cricket gear and uniforms. This will make a meaningful difference to our students by removing financial barriers that may prevent them from taking part in cricket fixtures and wider sporting opportunities.

“Access to pads, helmets and uniforms ensures that students can participate with confidence, feel included as part of the team, and enjoy the physical and social benefits that sport provides.”

KEEP is made up of several organisations including Active Leeds, Yorkshire Sport Foundation, Zero Waste Leeds, Leeds United Foundation, Leeds Rhinos, Action for Sport, Freedom4Girls, Wear & Share Leeds and Run For All.

Libby Cotter and Megan Greaves from Active Leeds said: “It was amazing to see partners, community leaders, teachers and local residents all in one room, connecting and supporting each other through donated kit. It’s a great example of what we can achieve together, helping people get active while also doing good for the planet.”

Councillor Salma Arif, Leeds City Council’s deputy leader and executive member for economy, said: “It’s great to see the kit exchange event return after the success of the pilot we held last year, with even more pieces of kit donated yet again.

“No one should be put off from



1,496kg of clothes and equipment has been stopped from going to landfill

playing sports or being active because they can’t afford to buy the right equipment. KEEP is doing a great job in removing that barrier for people, whilst also making sure no kit or equipment is going to waste.

“Integral to the Leeds Ambitions is the work we do to tackle inequalities and we will continue working together in this partnership to improve access to sport.”

Councillor Salma Arif



**“It’s great to see the kit exchange event return after the success of the pilot we held last year, with even more pieces of kit donated yet again.”**



# Bradford District Gears Up for World Cup Fever

Football fans across the Bradford district are being encouraged to get involved as venues prepare to screen matches and host special events throughout this summer's FIFA World Cup.

From large fan zones and city-centre big screens to local pubs, markets and family-friendly festivals, residents will have a wide range of options to enjoy the tournament.

The biggest attraction is expected to be the Bradford Live World Cup Fan Park, which will show every England match free of charge on a giant screen. The venue will feature

From large fan zones and city-centre big screens to local pubs, markets and family-friendly festivals, residents will have a wide range of options to enjoy the tournament.

live entertainment, DJs, bands, food vendors and bars, creating a festival atmosphere for supporters.

Meanwhile, Darley Street Kitchen will extend its opening hours to screen the tournament's final stages, while Darley Street Market will host

an Afro-English Cultural Festival featuring live music, workshops, family activities and a screening of the England v Ghana match.

In Keighley, a World Cup Fun Day at Keighley Market will offer free activities including face painting, craft workshops, live music and football-themed

games for families.

Bradford Council's Visit Bradford team has also launched a dedicated online guide listing pubs, bars and venues showing matches across the district.

Councillor Ian Walker said there would be something for everyone, whether fans were looking for a lively matchday atmosphere or family-friendly community events.

To mark England's matches, Bradford City Hall clock tower and other city-centre buildings will be illuminated in red and white throughout the tournament.



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## Star-Studded Line-Up Announced for Bradford Literature Festival

A host of high-profile names from politics, literature, television and the arts will headline this year's Bradford Literature Festival, which returns from 3-12 July with its biggest programme to date.

Among those appearing are Humza Yousaf, Lemn Sissay, Prue Leith, former Emmerdale stars Bradley Riches and Jessie Elland, and writer Fatima Bhutto.

The festival, one of the largest literary events in the UK, attracted more than 187,000 visitors last year and will feature hundreds of talks, performances and interactive events across the city.

Highlights include discussions with political commentator Peter Osborne, broadcaster and DJ Mike Pickering, and music journalist John Robb, alongside family-friendly activities, theatre performances, storytelling sessions and meet-the-author events.

The University of Bradford, a strategic partner of the festival since its launch in 2014, will host a number of events featuring leading academics, including experts in peace studies, artificial intelligence and international affairs.

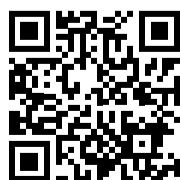
Organisers say the festival continues to strengthen Bradford's cultural reputation while creating opportunities for communities, students and visitors to engage with world-class speakers and ideas.

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Councillor Salma Arif becomes the first Muslim Deputy Leader of Leeds City Council

# From Harehills to history-maker

## Salma Arif's rise sends a powerful message to Britain

Ten years ago, when Salma Arif became one of the city's youngest councillors, she sat down with Asian Express and spoke about growing up in Harehills with honesty, pride and deep affection for the community that shaped her.

"I am the product of Harehills," she said back then. Today, those words feel more powerful than ever.

Because the girl from Harehills who once wondered whether people like her truly belonged in politics has made history – becoming the first Muslim Deputy Leader of Leeds City Council.

And at a time when British Muslims are increasingly facing hostility, suspicion and toxic public rhetoric, her appointment feels about far more than politics.

For many across Yorkshire's Muslim communities, her appointment feels bigger than politics. It feels personal.

Salma's story has never been one of

polished political ambition or carefully manufactured image. It is rooted in family, identity and community – in the everyday realities of Leeds life that so many people across Yorkshire instantly recognise.

Her forefathers arrived in Leeds in the 1930s after serving with British Forces during the Second World War. Like thousands of immigrants who helped rebuild Britain, they came searching for opportunity, stability and a future for the generations that would follow.

**"My forefathers, who first arrived in Leeds in the 1930s, would never have deemed it possible that one of their own would one day hold this position."**

Back then, they could never have imagined that one day their granddaughter would help lead one of the UK's biggest cities.

### Daughter of immigrants

In a deeply personal statement shared following her appointment, Salma reflected on that journey.

"Never in a million years would young me from Harehills have believed this was possible," Salma wrote. I hope young people across our communities can look at this and know that where you come from should never limit

where you can go."

She added: "My forefathers, who first arrived in Leeds in the 1930s, would never have deemed it possible that one of their own would one day hold this position."

There is something deeply relatable about the way she speaks. No political slogans. No performance.

Just gratitude, disbelief and a very real understanding of what this moment means – particularly for communities who often feel overlooked, talked about rather than listened to, and visible only when headlines turn negative.

Since first being elected in 2016 with one of the city's largest majorities, she has built a reputation as a grounded, community-focused politician who remained closely connected to the realities of inner-city Leeds long after entering civic office.

Over the years, she has become



one of the city's most recognisable voices on inequality, youth opportunity, public health and community cohesion.

She has spoken openly about poverty in Harehills during the cost-of-living crisis, warning families were reaching breaking point as food bank queues stretched for hours.

She has championed accessible sport, culture and community investment, including backing major regeneration projects and sports facilities designed to create opportunities for young people in underserved areas.

And during some of Leeds' most difficult moments – including last year's disorder in Harehills – she was among the local figures publicly urging calm, working to reassure residents and protect community relations as tensions escalated.

But perhaps most significantly, Salma's rise comes at a time when many British Muslims feel increasingly alienated from political discourse altogether.

Across the UK, concerns around Islamophobia, online hate, far-right rhetoric and hostile public narratives have intensified in recent years. Muslim politicians, particularly women, have frequently found themselves subjected to abuse simply for existing visibly in public life.

Against that backdrop, Salma Arif's appointment carries symbolic weight far beyond Leeds Civic Hall.

It is a reminder that representation matters – not as tokenism, but as proof that British institutions still have the capacity to reflect the communities they serve.

Perhaps that is why this moment feels so significant.

"Growing up in Harehills shaped who I am," Salma added.

"It taught me resilience, compassion and the importance of fighting for people whose voices are too often overlooked.

"To now be in a position to help lead the city I love is something I will never take for granted."



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The 2026 FIRST LEGO League UK National Final took place at the Harrogate Convention Centre, featuring top regional teams competing in robotics and innovation

# Brick-tastic!

## Dewsbury teens storm UK robotics finals just six months after forming team

**From scratch to the national stage in half a year - a group of Dewsbury teenagers are turning heads after taking on the world's best young robotics talent.**

Team SPARKiiz - a group of Dewsbury teenagers have pulled off what many teams spend years building towards - reaching the UK national finals of one of the world's biggest robotics competitions just six months after forming.

Made up of nine young people, Team SPARKiiz, went head-to-head with more than 60 top teams at the FIRST LEGO League UK finals in Harrogate last month - competing not just nationally, but against international sides from France, Germany, Brazil and Kazakhstan.

Six months ago, the team didn't exist. Today, they are fast becoming some of the country's brightest young engineering minds - designing, coding and programming LEGO-based robots to tackle real-world challenges. Their rise has been nothing short of remarkable.

Starting from the ground up, the team gave up evenings, weekends and school holidays to master robotics, coding and engineering - building their skills brick by brick.

At the regional finals at the University of Bradford, SPARKiiz secured second place and picked up the Best Project Award - beating 20 other

teams to lock in their place at nationals.

From there, it was straight into the big leagues.

The Harrogate finals on 25th April saw the Dewsbury team competing on an international stage, with the overall winners set to represent the UK at the global finals in Mexico.

In a proud moment, coaches Emma from iZWiz Robotics and Riyaz Gajra, founder of Making Sparks, were crowned winners of the national Team Coach Award for the FIRST LEGO League UK UNEARTHED 2026 season.

Riyaz Gajra said the project was always about more than medals: "This was never just about winning," he said.

"It's about showing young people from Dewsbury what they're capable of. To go from no team to a national final in six months is something they should be incredibly proud of."

For Emma, the recognition was the icing on the build. "It was completely unexpected," she said.

"Watching their confidence grow, seeing how they came together as a team - that's been the real reward."

Behind the scenes, the initiative is helping lay the foundations for future careers.

Making Sparks has

been running a wider robotics club alongside the competition team, giving more young people the chance to get hands-on experience - even if they weren't part of the league.

Working with local schools, colleges and employers, the organisation is now focused on building clear pathways into STEM careers.



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# WIN THE PINK POWERHOUSE

If you thought a vacuum cleaner couldn't be a statement piece, think again. The Gtech AirRAM 3 Limited Edition Pink Vacuum is bringing a bold splash of colour to everyday cleaning - and with it, a powerful feel-good factor.

And yes, it's pink. Properly pink. Limited-edition pink. This special-edition take on Gtech's flagship cordless upright doesn't just promise a cleaner home. It's also part of the brand's 'Power Through Everything'

**Bag yourself Gtech's chic AirRAM 3 cordless vacuum worth £399.99 - the limited-edition cleaner that looks fabulous and gives back**



campaign, with 20% of profits from every AirRAM 3 Pink Edition sold going directly to Worcestershire Breast Unit Haven and Cancer Research UK, as Gtech aims to raise

£100,000 through the initiative. At RRP £399.99, it's a premium piece of kit with serious substance behind the style - sleek, striking and designed to make everyday

vacuuming faster, easier and a lot less of a chore.

Gtech Managing Director Jothie Walford says the pink edition is rooted in something far more personal

than product design. "My own breast cancer diagnosis came as a shock, but I quickly realised how many friends and colleagues have a story to tell. I "I'm proud to launch the AirRAM

3 Pink Edition with proceeds going to charity, and hope it inspires people to keep pushing forward for better awareness, education, treatment and a cure."

## Why this one stands out

The AirRAM 3 is Gtech's next-generation cordless upright, built for homes that want power without the faff.

It delivers up to 30 minutes of full-power cordless runtime from its enhanced 20V lithium-ion battery, with no eco mode required, and charges in

under three hours on its base.

It also packs in some genuinely clever features:

- Patented AirLOC technology - picks up larger debris on the forward push and fine dust on the pull-back, helping tackle mess in fewer passes.
- Anti-Hair Wrap brush bar - designed to guide hair into the bin

instead of tangling around the brush. • Auto-cleaning filter - a vibrating filter system that helps reduce maintenance and keep performance consistent.

• Dual edge-clean brushes - rotating side brushes help sweep dirt from skirting boards and corners into the suction path.

• Self-propelled feel - the floorhead helps pull the vacuum forward, making it smoother and lighter to use.

• LED headlights - because dust always seems to hide where the light doesn't reach.

## HOW TO ENTER

To be in with a chance of winning, answer the below question and send via email to [competitions@asianexpress.co.uk](mailto:competitions@asianexpress.co.uk) with the subject line: 'GTECH PINK VACUUM'

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**Question: Which two charities is the Gtech Pink Vacuum supporting?**

## QUICK CLEANING TIPS TO MAKE YOUR VACUUM WORK HARDER

Because a great vacuum deserves better than random zig-zags

1. Start at the edges first  
Dust, crumbs and pet hair love skirting boards and corners. A model like the AirRAM 3 is built for edge work - so use that to your advantage.
2. Slow down on carpets  
One steady pass beats three rushed ones. Let the brush bar do the work, especially on heavier-pile rugs.
3. Empty the bin little and often  
A fuller bin can reduce efficiency. Quick emptying = better pickup.
4. Vacuum in two directions  
Go one way, then across it - especially on carpets. It lifts flattened fibres and catches what the first pass misses.
5. Use the headlights properly  
Sounds obvious, but LED lights are brilliant for under sofas, beds and darker hallways where dust hides in plain sight.
6. Tackle hair before it builds up  
Even anti-hair wrap designs work best when you're staying on top of the mess, not waiting for a full-on fur crisis.



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# WhatsApp scam horror as victims lose £2,400 each in chilling fraud wave

**WhatsApp users are being warned to stay on high alert after alarming new figures revealed victims are losing an average of £2,437 each in a ruthless wave of scams sweeping the UK.**

The popular messaging app now accounts for 21 per cent of all reported fraud cases, according to a 2025 report from Revolut - with losses dwarfing those seen on Facebook, where the average victim loses £478.

Experts say the scams have become so slick that fraudsters are now mimicking the exact tone, grammar and style of the people they are pretending to be - making it harder than ever to spot the con before it is too late.

George Lineker, co-founder of yourbusinessnumber.com, said: "What we are seeing now is that these messages are so well-written that even the grammar and tone match the person they are impersonating, which was not the case even a year ago."

"Understanding how these scams work makes them easier to spot early and helps reduce the chances of falling victim."

Others dangle fake job offers, bogus prizes and giveaway wins in a bid to lure victims into clicking malicious links or handing over personal and financial details.

Another particularly dangerous tactic involves fraudsters asking for a WhatsApp verification code - a move that can allow them to seize control of a victim's account and target even more people.

Lineker added: "Two-step verification is your best friend here. It takes 30 seconds to set up and it is the single easiest thing you can do to stop someone hijacking your account."

"Be cautious if someone says they sent you a code by mistake, and even if the message seems to come from someone you know, do not share the code."

Businesses are also being targeted, with scammers posing as customers, suppliers and even colleagues to gain access to sensitive information.

The warning from experts is blunt: if a message asks for money, personal details or piles on pressure to act fast, stop, check, and do not reply until you are sure it is genuine. Visit [www.yourbusinessnumber.com](http://www.yourbusinessnumber.com) for further information.



**Among the most common tricks is the so-called 'new number' scam, where criminals pose as a friend, relative or colleague, claiming they have changed their phone number and urgently need money or help.**

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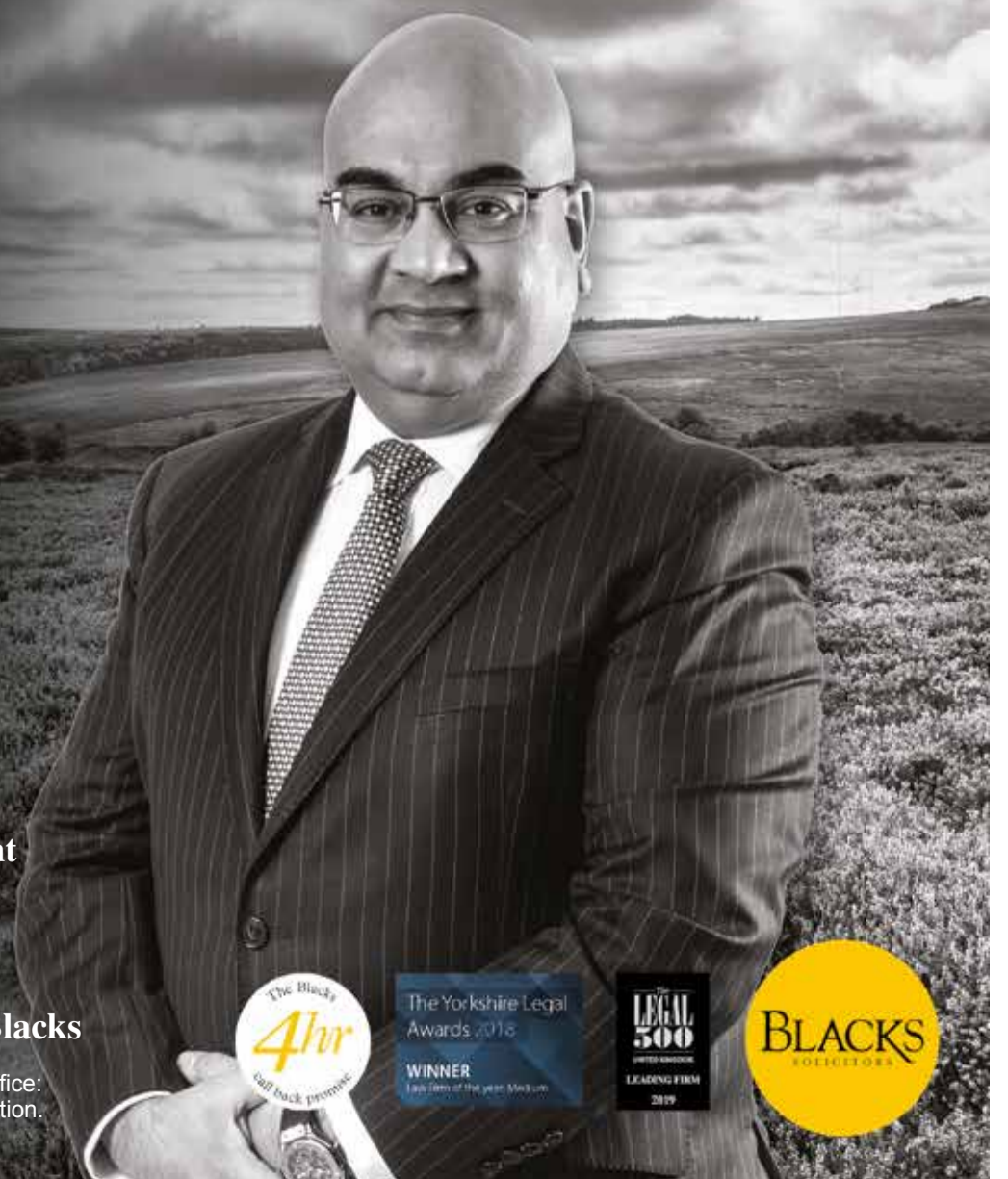
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# Long-awaited settlement agreements land as council begins redress over historic pay injustice affecting thousands

## SHEFFIELD COUNCIL STARTS PAYING OUT IN HISTORIC EQUAL PAY SCANDAL

**Hundreds of women who kept Sheffield's schools running are finally set to see justice - after years of being underpaid for doing work of equal value to men.**

In a major breakthrough, female school support staff across Sheffield who launched equal pay claims will begin receiving settlement agreements this week. Sheffield City Council is finally starting to pay out over a historic equal pay scandal that could ultimately cost around £51 million.

employees across around 260 roles, worth an estimated £36 million.

Combined, the total potential cost of Sheffield's equal pay clean-up is understood to be around £51 million.

Peter Davies, Head of GMB's Regional Equal Pay Unit, said: "This week marks a powerful moment for working people in Sheffield.

"For many of these workers, this money will make a real and tangible difference to their lives. This

in a process that has been months in the making.

For many of those affected, the payouts will come as long-overdue recognition of the value of jobs that are essential to the daily running of schools but too often invisible until something goes wrong.

These are the staff who support classrooms, keep services moving, help children with additional needs, manage admin, provide practical care and hold together the everyday machinery of school life.

**"For many of these workers, this money will make a real and tangible difference to their lives."**

The long-running dispute centres on claims that predominantly female workers - many in vital but often overlooked school-based roles - were systematically paid less than male colleagues for jobs of equal value.

And while the first agreements now begin landing, the scale of the reckoning is enormous.

Official figures previously released by Sheffield City Council show that around 1,600 non-teaching staff in maintained schools were in line for redress offers worth an estimated £15 million.

That sits alongside a wider equal pay settlement affecting more than 3,600 council

progress reflects the collective work between GMB and Sheffield City Council to address historic inequalities.

"We need to ensure that pay injustice is never again something council employees in Sheffield are forced to experience."

The council first confirmed last September that it had reached a landmark equal pay agreement with unions GMB, Unison and Unite to tackle historic claims that had cast a long shadow over the authority.

At the time, the council made clear that the school workforce claims were being handled separately - meaning this week's development marks a significant next step

Yet for years, unions say, many were left on the wrong side of a pay system that failed to reflect the true value of their work.

The political and financial fallout is also significant.

When the broader settlement was announced, Sheffield City Council said the main redress package for council workers would be funded from reserves, rather than through direct service cuts or a council tax hike tied specifically to the payouts.

But more recent budget papers show the authority is still making provision for the ongoing settlement of equal pay claims, underlining that the financial legacy of the issue is far from over.






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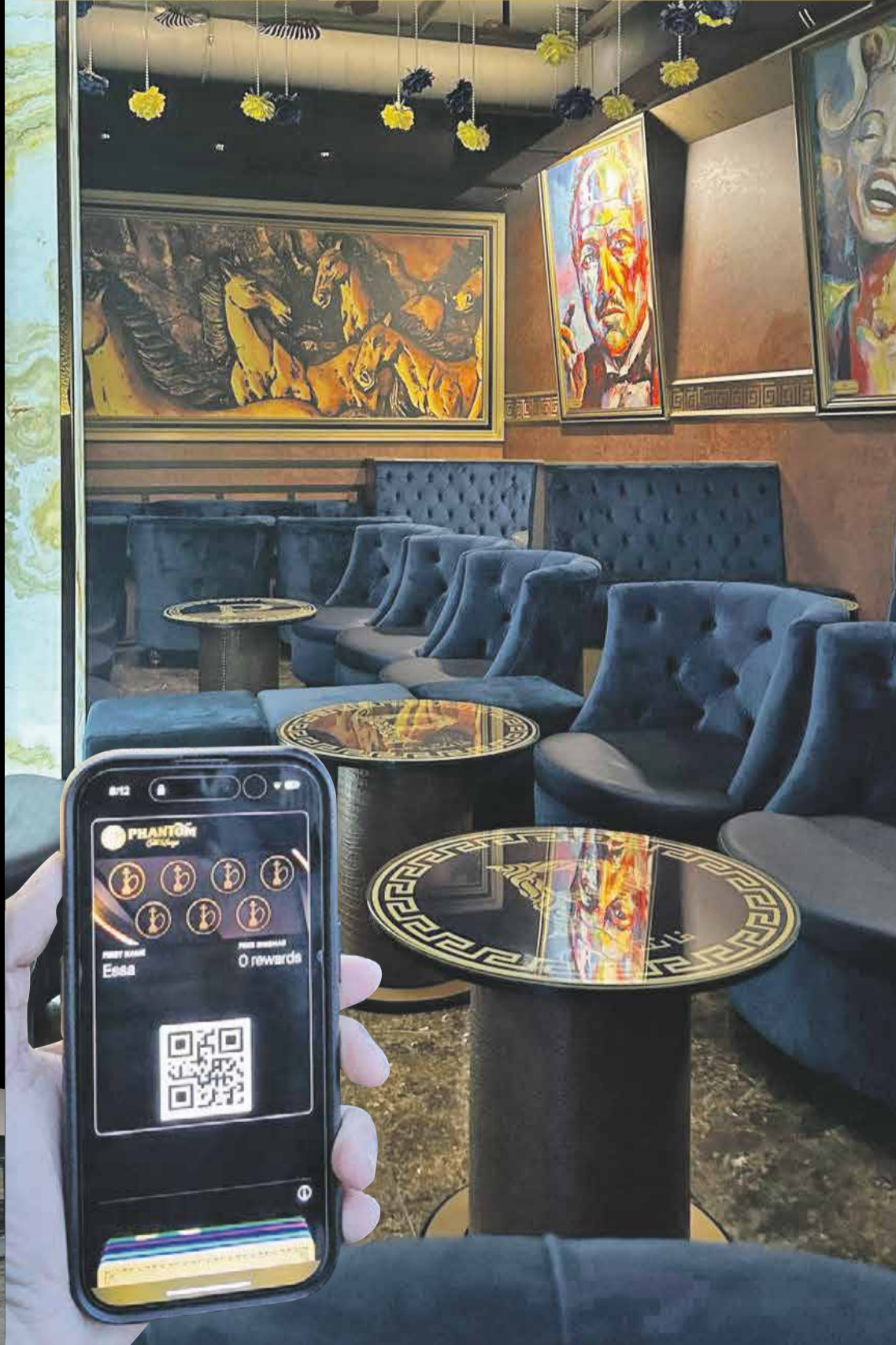
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Meena Kumari is the director of safeguarding and domestic abuse organisation, HOPE

# Identity abuse

**“My photo illegally and wrongly used in high-profile rape Facebook post”**

**“The use of any image purporting to identify a victim - whether accurate or not - is not only reckless, but potentially dangerous.”**

**A safeguarding and abuse awareness trainer who works to protect women and vulnerable people - says a Facebook post falsely implied she was a rape victim after her image was used without consent.**

Meena Kumari said she was left “confused and distressed” after discovering on Sunday, 25th April, that her professional LinkedIn profile picture had wrongly been attached to a post about the recent high-profile conviction of John Ashby - the man jailed over the rape of a Sikh woman he thought was Muslim.

She says, wrongly implied she was the victim in the horrific faith-based rape case.

For a woman whose professional life is dedicated to protecting others from abuse, the impact for Meena was immediate - and deeply personal.

“This was not only factually incorrect - it was deeply harmful,” says Meena, director of safeguarding and domestic abuse organisation, HOPE, which runs training and consultancy.

“Under UK law, rape survivors are entitled to lifelong anonymity.

“The use of any image purporting to identify a victim - whether accurate or not - is not only reckless, but potentially dangerous.”

As soon as she became aware of the post, she contacted both Leicestershire Police and Facebook administrators and demanded it be removed. But despite the seriousness of the issue, she says the content remained online for hours.

When she captured a screenshot at 8.10am, the post had already attracted 44 likes, 67 comments and seven shares. By the time it was finally removed later that afternoon, Meena says the number of comments

had climbed much higher - and she believes the reach would have grown significantly further.

The fallout quickly moved offline.

Meena says between 12 and 14 people - including friends, family members and colleagues - contacted her directly after seeing the post, with many immediately raising concerns about her safety.

Shaken by the ordeal, she also sought independent safety advice from Sikh Women’s Aid, saying she turned to the organisation because of its experience in dealing with such sensitive cases and wanted reassurance from someone she trusted.

that rape survivors are legally entitled to lifetime anonymity and that any attempt to identify them - directly or indirectly - is a serious matter.

Crucially, Meena has chosen not to repost the original content or share screenshots, saying that even with good intentions, doing so risks causing further harm and potentially exposing the real survivor to more distress.

Her message is clear: this was not journalism. It was clickbait - and it came at a human cost.

“Women and girls deserve to feel safe online as well as offline. When platforms fail to act fast in sensitive criminal cases, the consequences can

**“Women and girls deserve to feel safe online as well as offline. When platforms fail to act fast in sensitive criminal cases, the consequences can be devastating.”**

Although the post has now been removed, Meena says the harm did not end there.

“I have been left feeling very confused and distressed,” she said.

“No one should experience what I have experienced - not as the unwilling subject of a post, and certainly not as a survivor of sexual violence whose identity deserves protection.”

She highly praised Sikh Women’s Aid for acting quickly and publicly, issuing a statement reminding people

be devastating.

“It creates a digital space where survivors can be re-traumatised, innocent women can be misidentified, and trauma can be exploited for clicks,” she said.

Meena says she has since received a response from Facebook, and that the timing of that reply will form part of wider questions around how quickly platforms act when harmful content is reported in cases involving sexual violence and anonymity protections.



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# CAR WASH SMUGGLING EMPIRE



## 'Businessmen' jailed for 38-years after running migrant trafficking network from car wash

Two men who posed as successful businessmen running a car wash in south Wales have been unmasked as the ringleaders of a sprawling people-smuggling operation that moved hundreds of migrants across Europe.

Dilshad Shamo, 43, and Ali Khdir, 42, were each jailed for 19 years after a National Crime Agency investigation exposed what prosecutors described as a slick, multi-national criminal enterprise operating behind the façade of an ordinary Caerphilly car wash.

The pair, who were under surveillance for months in 2023, were found to have played central roles in a sophisticated network transporting

migrants from Iraq, Iran and Syria through a dangerous maze of routes across Europe.

Their operation stretched through Belarus, Moldova and Bosnia, before funnelling people into countries including Italy, Croatia, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Germany and France.

Investigators believe the gang smuggled more than 400 people in just six months.

The routes came with a chilling price list.

Migrants were allegedly offered three "packages" - the cheapest involved travelling on foot or hidden inside HGVs and smaller vehicles.

A more expensive option involved

cargo ships or yachts. The premium service? Flights by plane.

Payments were handled through Hawala bankers in Iraq and Istanbul, with deposits released only once smugglers were given the green light to move people along agreed routes and timescales.

The court heard the two men used WhatsApp to stay in constant contact with fellow traffickers across the continent. Other messaging platforms and social media were used to advertise routes, complete with disturbing footage showing families travelling by plane, by boat and crammed into the backs of lorries.

Shamo and Khdir were arrested in April 2023 and charged with

facilitating illegal migration through Europe. Both denied the full scale of their role before eventually pleading guilty part-way through their trial in November.

But prosecutors challenged what they said was an attempt to downplay their senior involvement - and following a Newton hearing, the court sided with the prosecution.

Sentencing them on Thursday 9th April, the judge handed down 19-years each - a combined 38-years behind bars.

NCA Branch Commander Derek Evans said the pair had been "working around the clock" to orchestrate migrant movements while presenting themselves as legitimate

businessmen.

He said: "While on the surface they portrayed themselves as successful businessmen running a car wash from Caerphilly, they were actually leading an entirely separate life as part of a criminal network."

Kate Hurst of the Crown Prosecution Service said the pair had tried to "minimise their leading role" in moving hundreds of migrants illegally into Europe, but the court accepted the prosecution's evidence.

The NCA said the case was supported by Gwent Police and international partners, with officials warning they will continue targeting organised immigration gangs operating at every stage of the route.




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**“Even in death, he found a way to give.”**

# HE WAS OUR HERO

## Family honour son with Down's syndrome whose final act saved three lives

**A Sheffield family are sharing the extraordinary story of their son's final act of kindness - a decision that saved three lives and is now inspiring an urgent call for more families, particularly from ethnic minority communities, to talk openly about organ donation.**

For Eashan Madan, helping others was never something he switched on for special occasions. It was simply who he was.

So when the 27-year-old, who had Down's syndrome, died last summer following complications during surgery for a rare heart condition, his family say the fact he went on to save lives through organ donation felt heartbreakingly fitting.

Eashan had made the decision to join the NHS Organ Donor Register in 2018.

“Knowing Eashan and his personality, he would do anything to help others. It was his final noble act,” said his mother, Suvira, a trauma consultant.

“He was our teacher in every respect. He showed us how to live happily, help others, and see the beauty in everything. Even in death, he found a way to give.”

### **A life that challenged every assumption**

For his family - mum Suvira, dad Sanjeev, an orthopaedic surgeon, and younger brother Rishin - Eashan's legacy is not only one of immense love, but of purpose.

They now hope his story will help challenge lingering misconceptions around disability, organ donation and who is seen as capable of making a lasting impact.



Eashan Madan worked at Sheffield Railway Station



Eashan with his family

Following his death, he donated both kidneys and his liver, giving three people on the transplant waiting list a second chance at life. His pancreas was also donated for research, a further gift that could help many more in years to come.

To those who knew him best, it was a final act that captured everything about the young man they adored.

Far too often, families still wrongly assume that having Down's syndrome may limit a person's independence, their contribution to society or even their ability to become an organ donor. Eashan's life powerfully dismantles every one of those assumptions.

“Adults with Down's syndrome can lead independent lives and contribute meaningfully to society. Eashan

showed that," said his father Sanjeev.

"We also want people to understand that they can give life to others."

And Eashan lived fully.

He attended Talbot Specialist School, where he was twice elected to the student council and took part in the National Shakespeare Festival. He achieved his Silver Duke of Edinburgh Award and a National Citizen Award, before going on to gain qualifications in Maths, English and Catering at Sheffield City College.

**A legacy that now speaks to others**

His younger brother, Rishin, said: "Even though that day was the hardest, every day after is easier knowing he helped others. Eashan's life was guided by honesty, kindness and compassion. He dedicated himself to helping others - at school, at work and among his friends.

"He had no meanness, no selfishness, no jealousy - only goodness. He was a brother to all. Once seen, never forgotten."

Now, his family are using Eashan's story to



Eashan working at Chatsworth

**More than 8,200 people are currently waiting for a lifesaving transplant, including over 2,000 people from ethnic minority communities**

Through Project Choice, he completed an NHS internship. Later, with support from the Down's Syndrome Association's WorkFit programme, he worked at Sheffield Railway Station and the Carriage House Café in Chatsworth. During the Covid pandemic, he also volunteered at a local foodbank - another quiet example of the generosity that ran through his life.

He was organised, independent and deeply proud of his work.

But Eashan was far more than a list of achievements.

He was a talented musician, artist and DJ. He loved music, art, parties and being surrounded by friends. He performed with his Clubland Detectives band, learned to create animated films at Flycheese Studio, made art with Artworks, and DJed at Leadmill Sheffield with support from the Under the Stars team.

Those close to him remember his cheeky smile, his warmth and the way he made people feel instantly seen.

highlight the need for more organ donors from ethnic minority backgrounds.

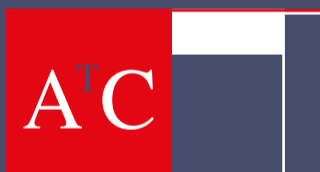
Across the UK, more than 8,200 people are currently waiting for a lifesaving transplant, including over 2,000 people from ethnic minority communities. Yet last year, Eashan was one of just 80 people from ethnic minority backgrounds who donated organs after death.

For many patients, matching by ethnicity can improve transplant outcomes - making those conversations within South Asian, Black and other minority communities even more important.

Anthony Clarkson, Director of Organ Donation and Transplantation at NHS Blood and Transplant, said it is stories like Eashan's that show the life-changing power of one decision.

And for his family, that is what remains strongest through the grief: the knowledge that in their darkest moment, Eashan still gave others hope.

"Even after death," said Suvira, "he continues to help mankind and save lives through organ donation. Eashan is our hero."



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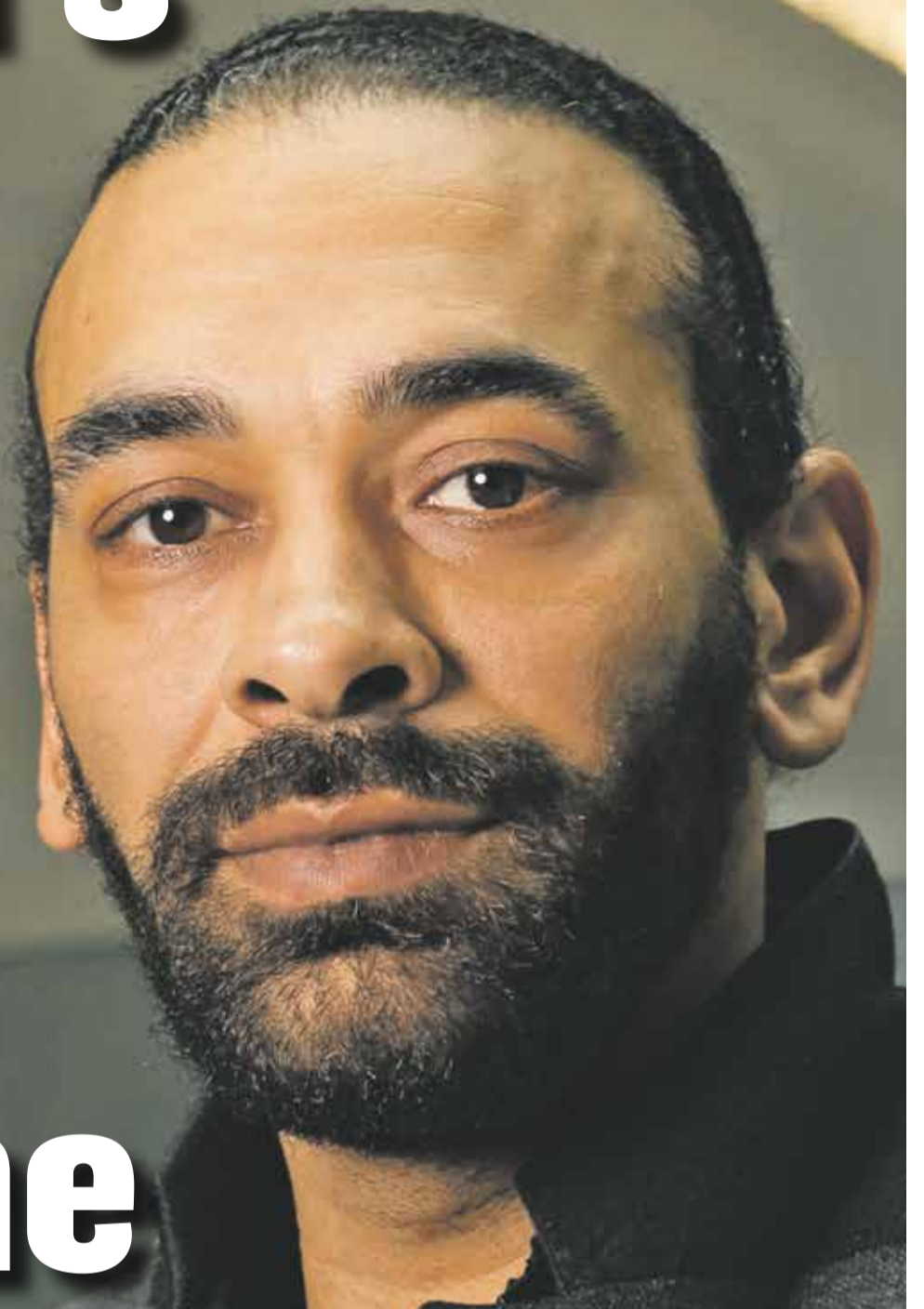


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# Bradford's culture future just got a major new name



**Council hires top arts boss after blockbuster 'City of Culture' year - as David Watson vows to keep Bradford 'shining brightly' across the North**

**Bradford Council has appointed a new senior culture chief to help turn the city's UK City of Culture success into a long-term legacy.**

The authority has confirmed David Watson as its new Assistant Director for Culture, Policy and Events - a key leadership role that comes just as Bradford looks to build on the momentum of its landmark UK City of Culture 2025 year.

And in a powerful first statement, Watson hailed Bradford's recent rise as something far bigger than a one-off title.

"Bradford's moment in 2025 has been powerful to witness... ensuring Bradford continues to shine brightly within the constellation of creative excellence across the North."

The appointment lands at what council chiefs describe as a defining moment for the district, with culture now firmly positioned as a serious driver of growth, opportunity, participation and civic pride.

Watson brings more than 20 years of

experience as a senior cultural leader, consultant and creative producer, having worked across the UK on arts, culture and heritage strategies, major programmes and audience development.

and further develop the strategy that sits at the heart of Bradford Built Different - the council's recently launched 10-year growth plan.

The role is expected to focus on attracting top cultural talent, major

sustainable way.

Lorraine O'Donnell, Chief Executive of Bradford Council, said: "Growth is one of our key priorities for the District, and this role will be central to ensuring culture and creative industries

to drive ahead with our ambitions for cultural legacy following 2025."

Watson, meanwhile, made clear he sees the job as being about much more than maintaining momentum.

David Watson commented: "Bradford's moment in 2025 has been powerful to witness. It's the result of years of ambition, graft and belief from people right across the district. What's been achieved didn't happen overnight, and that's what makes this next chapter even more meaningful.

"I'm delighted to be part of what comes next, building on that energy and momentum to create something that continues to transform opportunities and deliver real impact in people's lives.

"For me, it's about sustaining the arts and the infrastructure that supports them, keeping people and place at the heart of the work, and ensuring Bradford continues to shine brightly within the constellation of creative excellence across the North."

**"Bradford's moment in 2025 has been powerful to witness. It's the result of years of ambition, graft and belief from people right across the district."**

His background spans strategic planning, programming, marketing and brand, digital innovation and income generation - making him one of the key figures now tasked with helping shape what Bradford's cultural future looks like after 2025.

Working closely with Bradford Culture Company, he will help steer the district's long-term cultural ambitions

events and long-term investment into the district, while also strengthening partnerships across organisations and services to ensure delivery is joined-up, responsive and built around local need.

There will also be a strong emphasis on supporting homegrown creativity - from nurturing local talent and opening doors for young people, to helping the wider cultural sector grow in a

play a major part in delivering this.

"One of the real benefits of our year as UK City of Culture has been the levels of participation and access to cultural activities. Engagement with culture enables our communities to come together, to connect, and be stronger and more cohesive.

"David will bring a wealth of experience and knowledge to Bradford

business

# power

# DULHAN



## GRIT & GLAMOUR

From housewives to high street: the Bradford women who built Dulhan from scratch

See page 27



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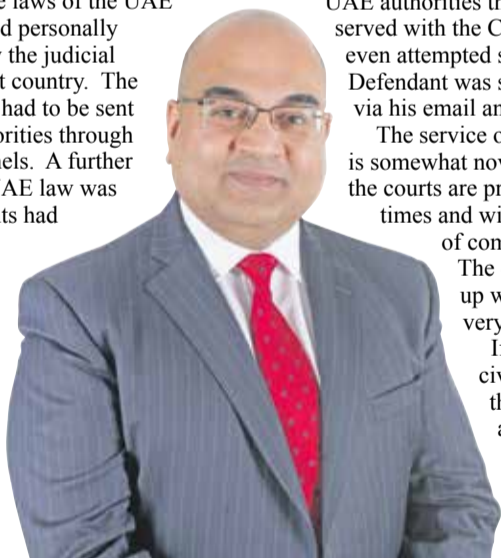
## Service by Instagram

**U**nder the Civil Procedure Rules (the court rules that govern civil claims), a Claim Form must be served on an individual at his usual or last known address. In respect of claims against companies, this must be served at the registered office address of the company or its principal place of business. Alternatively, if the Defendant's solicitors confirm that they are authorised to accept service on behalf of the Defendant, then the Claim Form can be served on those solicitors. The Claim Form must be served within four months from the date the claim was issued by the Court.

However, what is the position in respect of Defendants who reside or, in the case of companies, operate outside of England and Wales? In that scenario, the Claimant would need to obtain permission from the Court to serve the claim out of the jurisdiction before the Claim Form can be served and the time limit for serving the Claim Form is increased from four to six months.

Blacks Solicitors are currently acting for a Claimant who is pursuing a claim against a Defendant who is domiciled in England but resides in Dubai, in the United Arab Emirates ("the UAE"). The Defendant's solicitors were invited to accept service on behalf of their client but, not surprisingly, refused to do so. The Claimant therefore obtained permission from the Court to serve the claim out of the jurisdiction.

However, the Claim Form could not simply be served on the Defendant by post but instead, under the laws of the UAE it had to be served personally served on him by the judicial authorities of that country. The court documents had to be sent to the UAE authorities through diplomatic channels. A further requirement of UAE law was that the documents had to be translated into Arabic and therefore the Claimant had to provide two sets of the court documentation, one in English and the other in Arabic for the UAE



authorities.

All of this meant that it was not possible for the Claimant to serve the Claim Form on the Defendant within the six-month time limit and the Claimant had to apply to the Court to extend that period.

Even after overcoming these procedural hurdles, the Claimant still faced the possibility that the Claim Form would not be served on the Defendant by the UAE authorities because they would only make one attempt to serve him and there was a risk that the Defendant would not be present at the time service was attempted by the authorities.

In view of this potential pitfall, the Claimant applied to the Court for alternative service of the Claim Form, namely that the Claim Form be served on the Defendant either by email or via his Instagram account as the Defendant was active user on social media. In order to obtain permission to serve the Defendant by these methods, the Claimant had to provide for the Court an opinion from an expert on the laws of the UAE confirming that these methods of service were permissible under UAE law given that the Defendant was a resident of Dubai at the time he was being served.

The Claimant was duly granted permission by the Court to serve the Claim Form on the Defendant either by email or via his Instagram account but only after a set period of time for the UAE authorities to personally serve him had expired and service had not been effected by then. Ultimately, the Claimant received no notification from the UAE authorities that the Defendant had been served with the Claim Form or that they had even attempted service and therefore the Defendant was served with the proceedings via his email and Instagram accounts.

The service of proceedings by Instagram is somewhat novel and demonstrates that the courts are prepared to move with the times and will allow modern methods of communication to be used.

The court are finally catching up with the digital age, albeit very slowly.

If you are involved in any civil or commercial dispute, then Blacks Solicitors can assist. Please contact Luke Patel on 0113 227 9316 or by email at "LPatel@LawBlacks.com"

## Leeds Bradford Airport gets major signal boost with major mobile networks upgrade



Brendan Hourihane, Senior Director at Freshwave

## No more blackspots

**Passengers flying from Leeds Bradford Airport can now expect far fewer signal blackspots after a major mobile connectivity upgrade brought reliable 4G coverage from all UK network operators across key parts of the terminal.**

In a move set to make life easier for holidaymakers ahead of the busy summer getaway season, Leeds Bradford Airport has partnered with connectivity specialists Freshwave to roll out improved indoor mobile coverage across its refurbished terminal and newly opened extension.

The upgrade means passengers can now use travel apps, browse online, check flight details and stay in touch with family and friends more easily - no matter which UK mobile provider they use.

It is also expected to improve communication for airport staff, helping support smoother day-to-day operations behind the scenes in one of Yorkshire's busiest travel hubs.

Freshwave has already delivered coverage across 85,000 sq ft of the airport's new terminal extension, spanning three floors as part of the first phase of Leeds Bradford Airport's long-running regeneration programme.

That includes major passenger areas such as baggage reclaim, new food and drink spaces and retail zones including World Duty Free.

The next stage will see the technology expanded across a further 44,000 sq ft, including the airport's new security area - ensuring even more passengers benefit from strong, reliable signal inside the terminal.

Airport bosses say the upgrade has come at a crucial time, with Leeds Bradford preparing for increasing passenger demand in the years ahead.

Adrian Rollins, Head of Information Systems at Leeds Bradford Airport, said: "We're pleased to have worked with Freshwave to bring our passengers and staff reliable mobile coverage ahead of the busy summer period.

"With passenger numbers expected to reach

seven million by 2030, this upgrade is a vital part of future-proofing our airport and getting the most out of digital systems that depend on mobile.

"Freshwave have been a trusted partner, expertly delivering the mobile system within a live, fully operational airport environment."

The airport - Yorkshire's main airport serving more than 80 destinations - is currently undergoing a major multi-million-pound transformation designed to modernise facilities and improve the overall passenger experience.

The wider regeneration project includes new retail and dining areas, upgraded passport control, more security lanes and improvements to immigration facilities.

At the heart of the scheme is the airport's three-storey X25 extension, which opened in June 2025, alongside a wider refurbishment of the existing terminal.

Once complete, the project will increase overall floor space by 38% and boost seating capacity by 83%.

The regeneration programme is due to be completed by the end of 2027.

Freshwave says the airport has chosen an "all-operator neutral host solution", meaning the infrastructure supports all major UK mobile networks rather than relying on one provider.

Brendan Hourihane, Senior Director at Freshwave, said: "We're proud to play a small part in Leeds Bradford Airport's future vision by delivering mobile coverage to its regenerated terminal.

"By investing in an all-operator neutral host solution, Leeds Bradford Airport have put the needs of their passengers and staff first, assuring signal no matter which network they use.

"Up to 80% of mobile data traffic occurs indoors; Omni Network is an energy and cost-efficient solution that gives everyone the coverage they need with an approach that can easily be replicated by other regional airports."

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# business power

Nazia and Zaibun



## From housewives to high street: the Bradford women who built Dulhan from scratch

**Fifteen years ago, with no business experience to their name, two housewives took a leap of faith - driven by determination - that would change their lives forever.**

Nazia and her best friend Zaibun weren't trained in retail, and they weren't backed by investors. What they did have was instinct - and a clear understanding of what women around them were looking for when it came to special occasions. They began modestly, with a small collection of clutch bags and heels, carefully selected and sold with pride.

With the unwavering support of Zafar, Zaibun's husband, that small idea quickly gathered momentum. What started as a side venture soon turned into something more serious, culminating in the opening of their first shop on White Abbey Road in Bradford.

It was a bold step, taken without guarantees, but grounded in belief and a willingness to work for it.

The early days were demanding.

Like many first-time founders, they had to learn every aspect of the business from scratch - managing stock, understanding customer behaviour, handling finances, and building a reputation in a competitive market. There were challenges and moments of uncertainty, but they met each one with resilience, choosing to adapt rather than step back.

Over time, that persistence began to show results. Customers returned, word spread, and trust grew. What they were building was more than a retail space - it was a relationship with their community, shaped by consistency, care, and an appreciation for the significance of the occasions they were serving.

That relationship became their strongest foundation. It also became their name:

Dulhan. Today, Dulhan stands as a recognised destination in Bradford for brides and families

preparing for life's most important celebrations. Known for its quality, style, and personal approach, the business has earned its place not through scale, but through trust - built steadily over fifteen years.

Now, the founders are marking a new chapter. Their original store has been newly refurbished, offering a refreshed space that reflects both how far they've come and the direction they're heading in. And as a new generation of customers walks through the doors, many are following in the footsteps of those who came before them.

That sense of continuity speaks volumes.

From a modest beginning to a respected name on the high street, Nazia, Zaibun and Zafar have built something that extends beyond business. Their journey is a testament to what can be achieved through determination, partnership, and the courage to begin - even when the path ahead is uncertain.



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# ...life & style



## You don't need a fortune to make buyers look twice

**In a market squeezed by higher costs, economic nerves and rising competition, the smartest homes are not always the most renovated - they're the most thoughtfully presented**

For many households, moving home in 2026 feels less like an exciting next step and more like a financial obstacle course.

Even before the first box is packed, sellers and buyers alike are staring down a familiar list of costs: Stamp Duty, legal fees, surveys, removals and the

wider drag of economic uncertainty. Confidence remains fragile, budgets are tighter, and in many parts of the country the margin for error has narrowed.

And yet spring remains the season when the housing market traditionally stirs. The days are longer. Gardens begin to look forgiving again. Viewings rise. Buyers reappear. But so does the competition.

That is the tension at the heart of this year's spring market: more opportunity, yes - but also more pressure to stand out.

The good news is that sellers do not necessarily need to pour thousands into expensive upgrades to attract serious interest. In a more price-conscious market, the homes that perform best are often not the ones with the most dramatic renovations, but the ones that feel well-kept, well-priced and easy to imagine living in.

In other words, presentation matters - but so does restraint.

Continued on pages 30 & 31

# Selling this spring?



## Life-saving 'fat jab' for 1 million people at risk of heart attack and stroke

More than one million people in England will soon be offered the weight loss jab Wegovy on the NHS to help stop heart attacks and strokes.

The move marks a major shift in how the drug is used.

Until now, many people knew Wegovy as a treatment for obesity. But health experts now say it can do far more than help people lose weight.

The drug's active ingredient, semaglutide, has been shown to lower the risk of serious heart problems in people with cardiovascular disease - even when weight loss is not the main factor.

That means the jab is now being seen as a life-saving treatment, not just a weight loss aid.

The decision follows new guidance from the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE).

NICE says the NHS in England must start offering semaglutide to patients who meet the rules. The guidance also applies in Wales.

People may be eligible if they: have a BMI of 27 or above; have already had a heart attack or stroke; or have severe complications linked to peripheral artery disease. The jab is taken once a week.

**People may be eligible if they: have a BMI of 27 or above; have already had a heart attack or stroke; or have severe complications linked to peripheral artery disease.**

Doctors will prescribe it alongside healthy eating, exercise, and standard heart medicines such as statins or blood pressure tablets.

Health experts say the change could save many lives.

Heart and circulatory disease remains one of the biggest killers in the UK. For many patients, the risk of a second heart attack or stroke is a constant worry.

Clinical trials found semaglutide can cut the risk of another major cardiovascular event. Crucially, researchers found the benefit was not only linked to weight loss.

That is why the drug is now being treated as an important new tool in heart care.

Semaglutide is already used on the NHS in other ways.

Wegovy is available through specialist weight management services for some people living with obesity. Ozempic, which contains the same active ingredient, is also widely used to treat type 2 diabetes.

Dr Sonya Babu-Narayan, Clinical Director at the British Heart Foundation, welcomed the move. She said: "So-called 'weight loss drugs' like semaglutide have proven benefits beyond reducing the number on the scales - they are now considered important medicines for preventing deadly heart attacks and strokes.

"Today's guidance will no doubt help save lives as cardiovascular disease is still one of the country's biggest killers."

# Selling this spring?

Continued from page 29

### The myth of the costly makeover

There is a persistent idea that selling well means spending heavily first: new kitchens, bathroom refits, costly landscaping, statement décor. Sometimes that works. Often, it simply eats into margins without guaranteeing a stronger sale.

A better approach is usually more pragmatic: fix what is broken, remove what is distracting, and make the home feel calm, clean and cared for.

That starts outside.

Buyers often make up their minds faster than sellers like to believe. A tired front door, overgrown garden, cracked fence panel or dirty windows can subtly frame everything that follows. None of these are catastrophic on their own. Together, they can suggest a home that may come with hidden jobs and future costs.

By contrast, a tidy frontage, clean glazing, a swept path and a well-kept entrance send a simple but powerful message: this property has been looked after.

### Declutter is not a cliché - it is strategy

Estate agents have said it for years because it remains true: clutter sells badly.

Not because buyers are judging people's taste, but because clutter makes rooms feel smaller, darker and harder to read. It interrupts the imagination. A buyer should be picturing their own life in the space - not mentally editing yours out of it.

Kitchens and bathrooms are particularly unforgiving. Crowded worktops, toiletries spilling across surfaces, pet smells, poor lighting or signs of wear can all undermine confidence. A deep clean, neutral presentation and as much natural light as possible are still among the cheapest and most effective interventions available.

Fresh air matters too - especially in homes with pets, heavy cooking

odours or rooms that have been shut up over winter.

### Repairs first, cosmetics second

If money is limited, spend it where it protects the transaction.

A dripping tap, cracked tile, loose handle, damaged gutter or weather-worn fence may seem minor, but buyers notice. More importantly, surveyors notice. Small defects can quickly become leverage in price negotiations, or worse, trigger delays once a sale is underway.

This is where sellers often get it backwards. They spend on styling, but ignore the small practical faults that can quietly erode buyer confidence.

In a cautious market, buyers are not just looking for charm. They are looking for reassurance.

### Why the right agent still matters

For all the talk of online listings and DIY platforms, choosing the right estate agent remains one of the most financially important decisions a seller can make.

Pricing a home too high can leave it languishing and stale. Price it too low and you risk sacrificing value before negotiations even begin. A qualified, experienced agent does more than list a property: they shape the strategy, manage expectations, keep communication moving between parties and, crucially, help hold fragile transactions together.

That last point matters more than ever in a market where chains can wobble and buyers are quicker to pull back.

Mary-Lou Press, president of NAEA Propertymark, says spring still offers a key window for sellers, but argues that the fundamentals remain unchanged: "Presentation, preparation and the right professional support can make all the difference."

She adds that simple, cost-effective improvements can help create a stronger first impression and increase buyer interest, while competitive pricing and strong marketing remain essential.

## 7 budget-friendly ways to improve saleability this spring

- Use a qualified estate agent and get the pricing right from day one
- Tidy the front garden and refresh kerb appeal
- Declutter every room, especially kitchens and bathrooms
- Deep clean thoroughly and maximise natural light
- Touch up paintwork in neutral tones



- Fix minor repairs before surveys expose them
- Get key paperwork ready early, including EPC and warranties



## The Mirror in the Morning

How Acne Quietly Damages Mental Health

By Prity Farooq

Prity Beauty & Aesthetic, Bradford

**F**or many people, acne is dismissed as “just a skin problem.” A few spots. A teenage phase. Something that makeup, time, or confidence should fix.

But for millions of young people and adults across the UK, acne is not just visible on the skin — it lives deep inside the mind.

Dermatologists and mental health experts have increasingly warned that severe acne can trigger anxiety, depression, isolation, and even suicidal thoughts in some sufferers. Studies published by organisations including the and show a strong connection between chronic skin conditions and emotional distress.

For 22-year-old university student Aisha Khan, the emotional pain began long before treatment.

“People only saw my face,” she says quietly. “They didn’t see how scared I became to leave the house.”

At her worst point, Aisha stopped attending lectures. She avoided photographs. She cancelled birthdays and family events because she feared being judged. Even simple comments — “Have you tried washing your face more?” — felt humiliating.

“I knew people thought it was vanity,” she explains. “But it wasn’t vanity. It was shame.”

Mental health charities say this experience is common. Acne often strikes during adolescence and early adulthood — the very years when identity, confidence, and social belonging are

forming. Social media has intensified the pressure, flooding screens with filtered faces and unrealistic beauty standards.

Dr. Emma Wedgeworth, consultant dermatologist and spokesperson for the , has spoken publicly about the emotional burden carried by acne patients. Research has found that some individuals with severe acne experience levels of psychological distress comparable to those living with chronic illnesses.

For some, the pain becomes invisible suffering.

Teenagers report bullying in schools. Adults describe being treated as “unprofessional” in workplaces. Others say they avoid relationships entirely because they no longer feel worthy of love or attention.

“It changes the way you see yourself,” says Daniel, 28, from Manchester. “You stop making eye contact. You stop feeling human.”

The emotional impact can also create a vicious cycle. Stress worsens acne, and worsening acne increases stress. Many sufferers become trapped between mirrors, medications, and self-doubt.

Mental health professionals now urge families and schools to take skin-related distress seriously instead of dismissing it as insecurity or overreaction.

The advises people struggling emotionally because of acne to seek both medical and psychological support, especially if they experience low mood, anxiety, or social withdrawal.

There is hope. Treatments continue to improve, and awareness around skin positivity is growing. More celebrities and influencers have begun sharing unfiltered photos and speaking honestly about acne, helping others feel less alone.

But campaigners say society still has a long way to go.

Because behind every inflamed scar or hidden face may be someone fighting a battle far deeper than skin.

And sometimes, the cruelest wounds are the ones no one can see.



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# Seen at last?



British-Kashmiri artist Haseebah Ali

Women in art, especially British Asian and Muslim creatives, are still fighting to be seen

**In the art world, talent has never been the problem. Access has.**

For years, women artists have created bold, original and culturally important work – yet many still remain underrepresented in galleries, collections and major exhibitions.

London's art market is one of the most international in the world. Artists from the Middle East, South Asia and across the global diaspora increasingly live and work in the city.

Only five per cent of London galleries achieve gender parity. The Tate's own published research, and the Freelands Foundation's Representation of Female Artists in Britain report, found that 78 per cent of London's major commercial galleries represent more men than women, with female artists and their estates making up just 32 per cent of artists represented.

However, breaking into established gallery systems often requires visibility, contacts and confidence navigating an industry built on relationships as much as artistic ability.

The issue is widely recognised. The change, far less so. That is why Women in Art Fair, returning to London on 9th and 10th May 2026, matters.

"Sometimes people will pigeonhole your artwork into a certain box, especially if you come from a certain background or culture," says Haseebah Ali.

Founded by Jacqueline Harvey, the fair was created to challenge a system that too often rewards networks over ability.

In an industry shaped by connections, collector confidence and who gets introduced to whom, many women – especially those from diaspora backgrounds – can struggle to get through the door.

The fair provides a platform where that first barrier is removed. Artists are seen first for their work rather than their connections.

For younger artists especially, seeing people who share their background or experience exhibited publicly makes participation feel possible.

Inequality in art is rarely deliberate. It is often

structural and reinforced over time. Curators select artists they know, collectors invest in familiar names and galleries manage financial risk. Without intervention, the cycle repeats.

The result is not a lack of talent. It is a lack of visibility.

"We are not waiting for the art world to fix itself," says Jacqueline Harvey.

"We are building the platform that should already exist."

It is a powerful line – and an important one.

Because for many British Asian and Muslim women, the barriers are not just professional. They can be cultural, social and deeply personal too.

For Haseebah Ali, a British-Kashmiri artist based in the UK, that experience feels all too familiar. "The challenges I have faced as a Pakistani woman trying to exhibit in Britain have been quite a lot," she says.

"A lot of creative events have alcohol and trying to navigate that as a Muslim woman can be extremely difficult.

"People assume you will give up on your career a few years in. And sometimes people will pigeonhole your artwork into a certain box. It can feel claustrophobic."

For Haseebah, that is exactly why the fair matters.

"Women in Art Fair seems to be the kind of opportunity where these barriers are being pushed down. Starting out as an artist seven years ago, seeing that would have made me feel so included and less anxious about my creative path."

This year's fair includes a Creative Health and Wellbeing Day in partnership with Crystal Clear Health. The 2026 edition will also introduce new prizes, including the Christian Levett Prize and a collaboration with Hunger Magazine.

Women in Art Fair 2026 takes place in London on 9th and 10th May. Venue details are due to be confirmed by organisers. For updates, follow Women in Art Fair online: [www.womeninartfair.com](http://www.womeninartfair.com).



Jacqueline Harvey, founder of the Women in Art Fair

# GILIT

## Entertainment

THE LATEST ENTERTAINMENT AND CELEBRITY NEWS FROM BOLLYWOOD & HOLLYWOOD

# 'Dil Majboor'

# DIL MAJBOOR

Singer, Lyrics & Composition

**MAZ BONAFIDE**

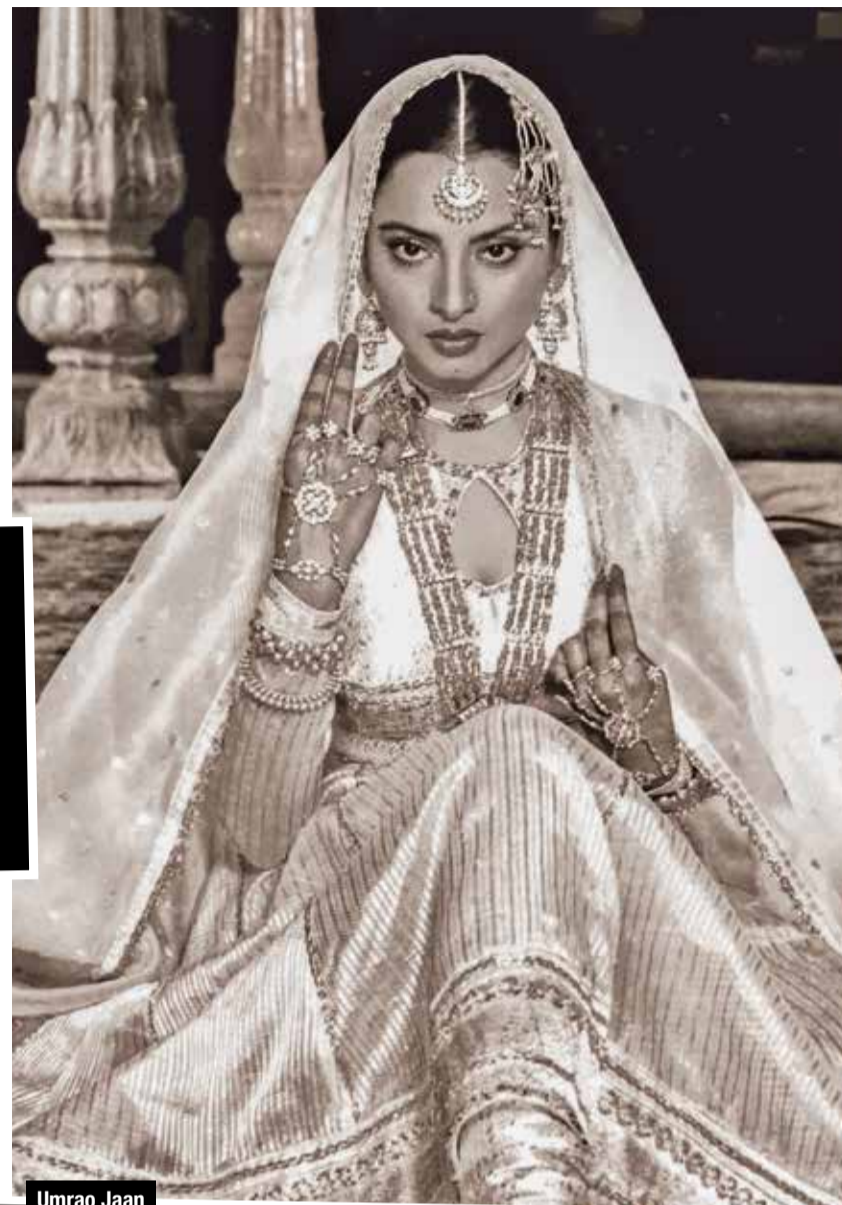
Music

**YEAH PROOF**

**Maz Bonafide is back - and this time, he's brought heavyweight firepower with him**

**SEE PAGE 35**

# What stories still bind us together?



Umrao Jaan

**UK Asian Film Festival** returns for its 28th edition announcing Pakistani film **'Ghost School'** as opener

Ghost School



Director Seemab Gul

**UK Asian Film Festival – the world’s longest-running South Asian film festival outside the subcontinent, renowned for its bold, thought-provoking programming, has announced the Opening and Closing films and festival theme for its 28th edition.**

Taking place across venues in London, Leicester, Warwick and Cumbernauld from Friday 1st to Sunday 10th May, UK Asian Film Festival is presented by Tongues on Fire and is supported by the BFI Audience Projects Fund, awarding National Lottery funding. The UK Asian Film Festival is powered by broadcast partner, Lyca Radio.

This year’s programme, “Stories That Bind Us”, explores how connection is forged, tested and reimagined across borders, generations and belief systems. Through bold, socially engaged cinema, the festival brings together political and social ideas with compelling storytelling, inviting audiences to connect, reflect and be entertained.

The Opening Film will be the UK Premiere of Ghost School

(Pakistan, 2025; Dir: Seemab Gul; Language: Urdu with English subtitles), taking place at BFI Southbank, London on Friday 1st May.

This magical-realist tale follows 10-year-old Rabia in rural Pakistan as she sets out to uncover the mystery behind her village school’s sudden closure, revealing layers of corruption, superstition and the struggle for education through her determined perspective.

The screening will be followed by a Q&A with director, Seemab Gul, who says about the film: “Being part of the UK Asian Film Festival is truly meaningful to me, as it creates space for urgent, underrepresented stories to be seen and heard.

“Set against the reality of ‘ghost schools’ in rural Pakistan, the film shines a light on a system that fails its most vulnerable, while holding onto the hope that even the smallest voice can challenge it. I’m honoured to share this story with UKAFF audiences, who continue to champion bold, socially conscious cinema.”

The Closing Film will present the UK Premiere of Shadowbox (India, 2025; Dir’s: Tanushree Das, Saumyananda Sahi; Language: Bengali with English subtitles) on Sunday 10th May at BFI

Southbank, London, followed by a Q&A with lead actor, Tillotama Shome.

Marking the striking directorial debut of Das and Sahi, this intimate and thought-provoking drama follows a woman as she navigates the complexities of domestic life; her husband’s struggle with PTSD; and the shadow of suspicion surrounding a murder case.

Set within working-class India, the film offers a nuanced exploration of mental health, resilience and the quiet tensions that shape family life.

Directors, Das and Sahi say: “We are thrilled to screen our film ‘Shadowbox’ in UKAFF, the longest running South Asian film festival, under the theme of ‘Stories that Bind Us’.

“While our film is rooted in Barrackpore, a suburban area of Kolkata where Tanushree grew up, we have been overwhelmed by how audiences around the world have responded personally to Maya and Sundar’s story. At a time of war and genocide in the Middle East, we are all feeling the distressing and tragic reverberations. In its own small way, our film talks of the residues of violence and the struggles of a family to heal.”

A Special Screening will showcase the timeless



Shadow Box

classic *Umrao Jaan* (India, 1981; Dir: Muzaffar Ali; Language: Hindi with English subtitles), featuring Rekha's National Award-winning performance as the courtesan-poetess navigating love and loss in 19th-century Lucknow.

The film will be presented in its restored 4K version, restored by the NFDC-National Film Archive of India, offering audiences a rare opportunity to experience this iconic work with enhanced visual and sound quality on the big screen, followed by a Q&A with director, Muzaffar Ali, on Monday 4th May at BFI IMAX, London.

The UK Asian Film Festival presents a diverse programme of films each year, complemented by a dynamic line-up of lectures, audience workshops, live performances, visual arts exhibitions and masterclasses.

The festival also hosts its annual Short Film Competition, celebrating outstanding cinema connected to South Asia while spotlighting the depth and diversity

of South Asian arts and culture.

UK Asian Film Festival Founder and Director, Dr Pushpinder Chowdhry MBE, says: "In these uncertain and often divided times, cinema reminds us that storytelling is our common language of connection and hope. With this year's theme 'The Stories That Bind Us', UK Asian Film Festival celebrates narratives that carry the South Asian diaspora's creativity, resilience, and courage across borders.

"We have curated films and spaces that are both safe and challenging, where audiences can confront the realities of displacement and injustice while also discovering moments of solidarity and hope. We invite audiences to lean into discomfort, to listen, to be open to changing their minds, and to seek out films from our specially curated programme that will surprise, challenge, entertain - and stay with them long after the credits roll."

Find out more: [www.ukaff.com](http://www.ukaff.com)



# 'Dil Majboor'

**Maz Bonafide is back - and this time, he's brought heavyweight firepower with him**

**The UK Punjabi star has teamed up with acclaimed Indian producer Yeah Proof for "Dil Majboor", a glossy new release already landing with all the ingredients of a breakout hit.**

Written and composed by Maz Bonafide, 'Dil Majboor' leans into what he does best - heartfelt Punjabi lyricism, commercial instinct and a melody that gets under your skin fast.

Emotional enough to hit, polished enough to repeat, and catchy enough to soundtrack your summer, this is the kind of track that doesn't just drop - it lingers.

And if the audio delivers, the visuals don't hold back either.

The music video, shot at Maz Bonafide's own luxury wedding venue Mayfair Grand, brings serious glamour to the release, serving up a rich, cinematic backdrop that feels every bit as lavish as the record sounds.

Adding extra screen presence is Sasha Vadher, whose on-screen chemistry and striking visuals give the story even more pull.

This isn't just another single. It's a statement collaboration.

Yeah Proof arrives with serious credentials. The producer has become one of Punjabi music's most recognisable sonic architects, with credits

spanning some of the scene's biggest names. He is widely known for his work with Karan Aujla, and is credited as producer on the viral 2024 track "Tauba Tauba" from the Bollywood film *Bad Newz*.

That matters - because it tells you exactly what kind of calibre 'Dil Majboor' is playing with.

Maz Bonafide, meanwhile, has long held his own as one of the UK Asian music scene's most consistent names - a proven hitmaker with a knack for turning relatable emotion into crowd-pleasing records.

And with 'Dil Majboor', he sounds like an artist still evolving, still ambitious, and still very much in the conversation.

What makes this release especially exciting is the cross-border chemistry. UK songwriting finesse meets Indian studio muscle. Emotion meets edge. Romance meets replay value.

In short? Maz Bonafide hasn't just released a song - he's delivered a mood.

And if early buzz is anything to go by, 'Dil Majboor' could be the one that travels far beyond the core Punjabi circuit.

'Dil Majboor' is out now on all major streaming platforms.

# WHAT'S ON

in cinemas this month

## Michael

**Starring:** Jaafar Jackson, Nia Long, Laura Harrier, Juliano Krue Valdi, Miles Teller, Colman Domingo  
**Director:** Antoine Fuqua

**Cert:** TBC

**Genre:** Biography/  
 Drama/History

**Release Date:**  
 2/04/2026

Michael is shaping up to be one of 2026's biggest and most talked-about releases - a major-screen biopic charting the life, fame and legacy of the late King of Pop, Michael Jackson.

Directed by Antoine Fuqua and written by acclaimed screenwriter John Logan, the film promises an ambitious and emotionally charged portrait of the global superstar whose influence reshaped music, performance and pop culture.

Rather than focusing on a single chapter, Michael is expected to span key stages of Jackson's life - from his early years as the breakout child star of the 'The Jackson 5' through to the solo era that produced landmark albums such as 'Off the Wall', 'Thriller' and 'Bad'.

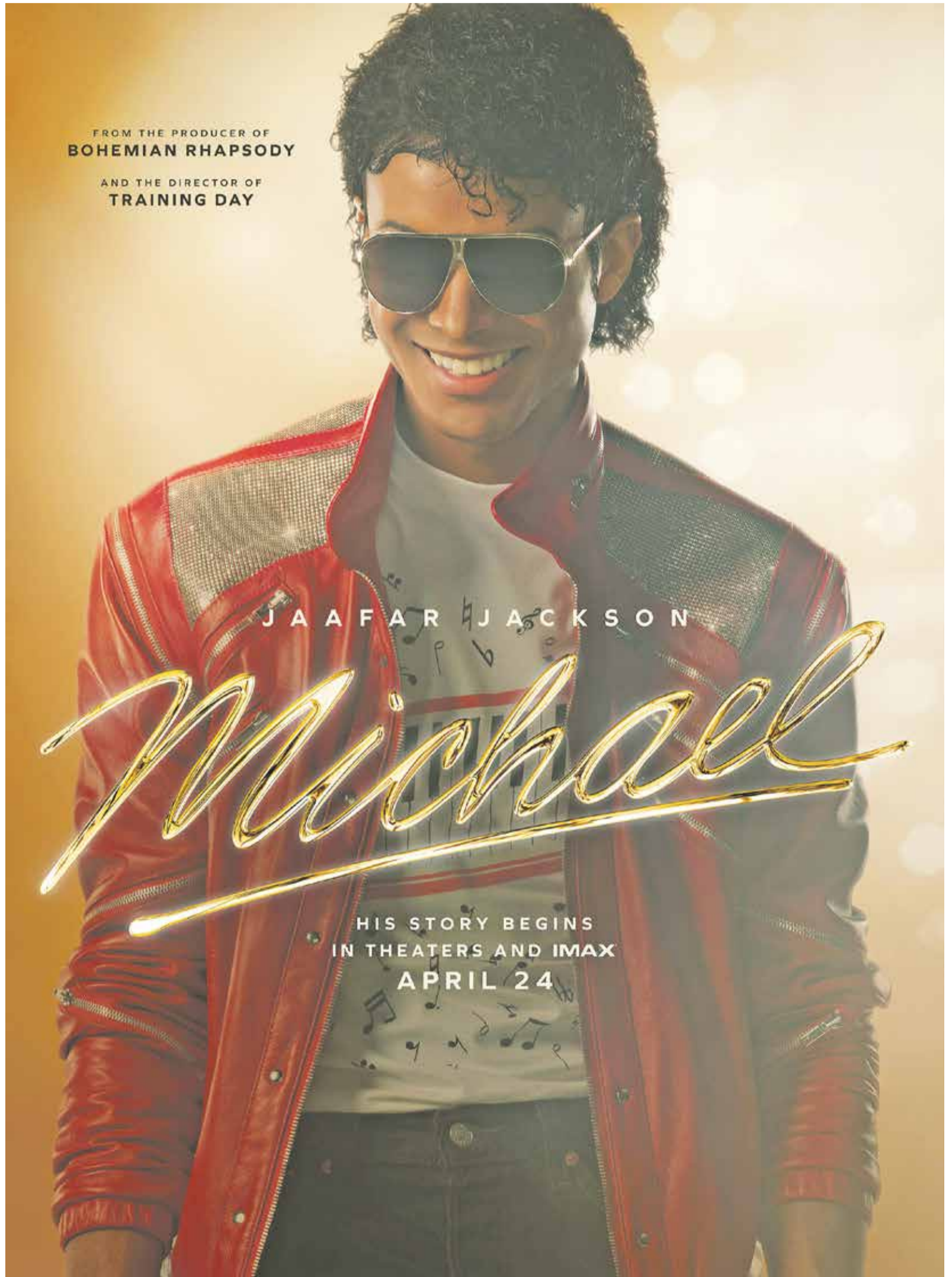
At the centre of the film is a performance from Jackson's real-life nephew, Jaafar Jackson, making his feature film debut in the title role - a casting choice that has already sparked huge curiosity among fans.

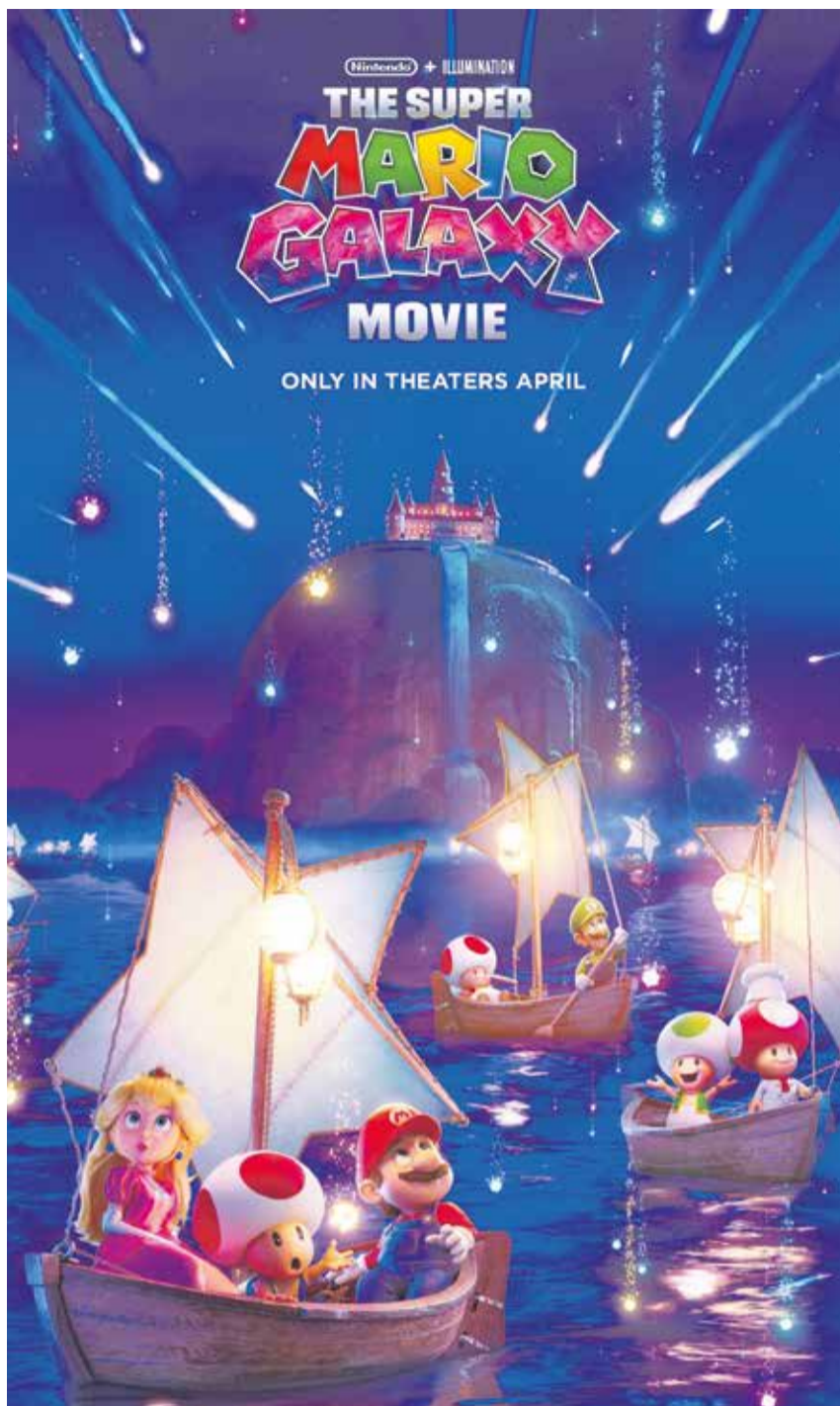
The supporting cast also adds weight, with Colman Domingo as Joe Jackson, Nia Long as Katherine Jackson and Miles Teller among the ensemble.

With a runtime of just over two hours, the film looks set to blend concert spectacle, behind-the-scenes drama and the personal pressures of unprecedented fame.

Expect lavish period detail, recreations of defining musical moments and a closer look at the machinery of superstardom that both elevated and consumed him.

More than just a greatest-hits retelling, Michael is being positioned as a big, glossy and emotionally loaded portrait of an artist whose brilliance, contradictions and cultural power still dominate conversation decades later - making this one of the year's standout event movies for music fans and biopic audiences alike.





## The Super Mario Galaxy Movie

**Starring:** Chris Pratt, Anya Taylor-Joy, Charlie Day, Jack Black, Keegan-Michael Key, Benny Safdie, Kevin Michael Richardson, Brie Larson

**Directors:** Michael Jelenic, Aaron Horvath

**Cert:** PG

**Genre:** Action/Animation/Comedy

**Release Date:** 1/4/2026

Join Mario, Luigi and a whole host of new friends as they venture into space, explore cosmic worlds and tackle new galactic challenges far from the familiar Mushroom Kingdom.

The Super Mario Galaxy Movie blasts Nintendo's beloved plumber brothers into their biggest adventure yet, swapping pipes and castles for planets, starships and intergalactic danger.

When a powerful new threat emerges far beyond the Mushroom Kingdom, Mario and Luigi are forced to team up with Princess Peach, Toad and a host of new cosmic allies to save entire worlds from collapse.

As they race across dazzling galaxies packed with gravity-defying obstacles, strange creatures and high-stakes battles, the brothers must rely on courage, teamwork and a little classic Mario chaos to survive.

Bursting with colourful animation, fast-paced action and plenty of nods for longtime fans, this family-friendly sequel expands the Mario universe on a much grander scale.

With familiar faces, fresh characters and plenty of laugh-out-loud moments, The Super Mario Galaxy Movie is a lively, space-hopping adventure built for younger audiences, nostalgic gamers and anyone after a fun-filled cinema trip.

## Lee Cronin's The Mummy

**Starring:** Jack Reynor, Laia Costa, May Calamawy, Natalie Grace, Veronica Falcón

**Director:** Lee Cronin

**Cert:** TBC

**Genre:** Fantasy/Horror

**Release Date:** 17/04/2026

Lee Cronin's *The Mummy* gives the classic monster tale a dark, unsettling overhaul, reimagining one of horror's most enduring legends for a new generation.

Fresh from the success of *Evil Dead Rise*, writer-director Lee Cronin swaps camp spectacle for psychological dread in a twisted desert-set nightmare.

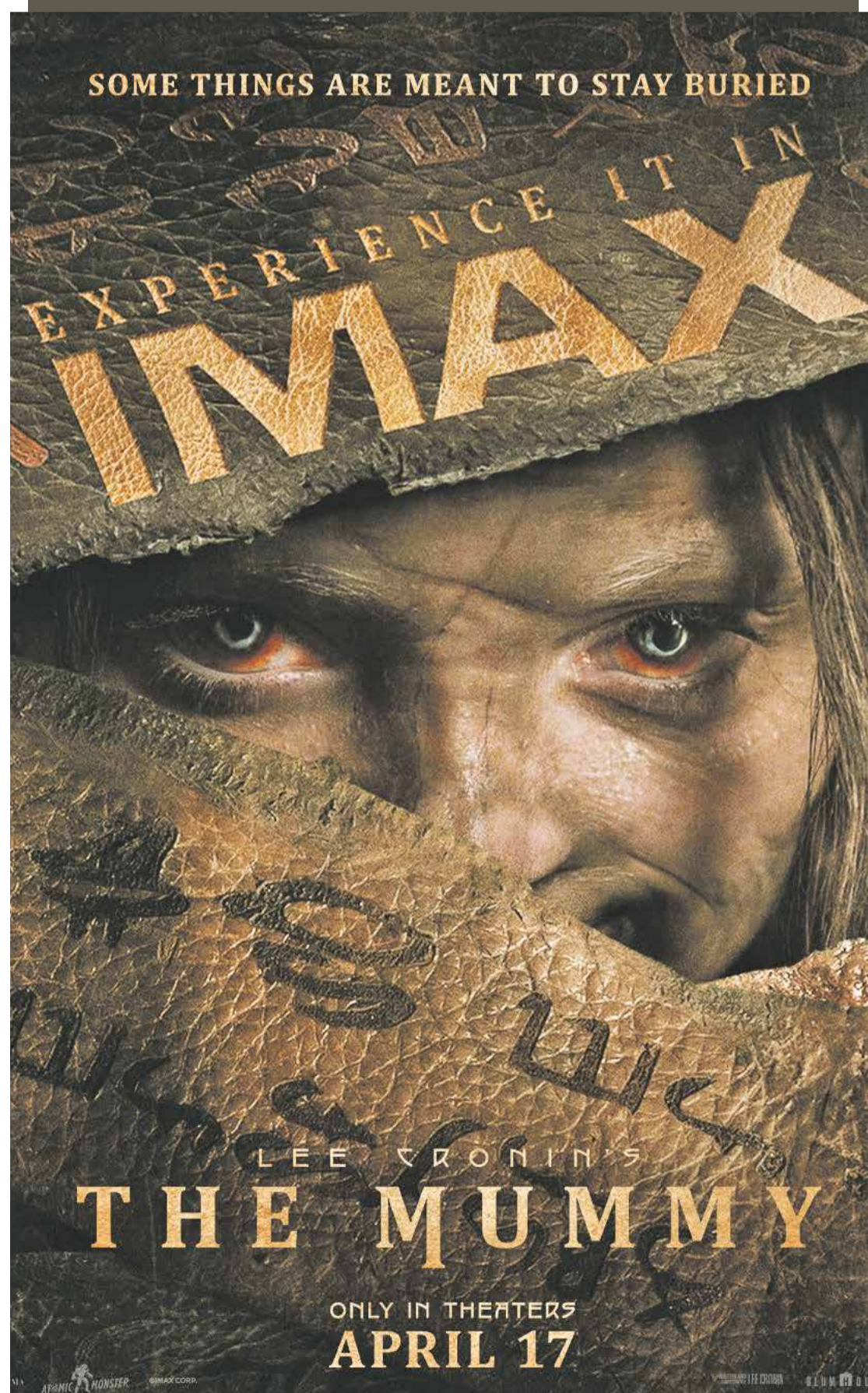
The story begins when the

young daughter of a journalist vanishes without trace in the wilderness.

Eight years later, she is suddenly returned to her devastated family - but what should be a miracle reunion quickly turns into something far more terrifying. As buried trauma resurfaces and the truth behind her disappearance begins to emerge, the family

is pulled into a chilling spiral of supernatural horror and emotional collapse.

With Jack Reynor, Laia Costa and May Calamawy leading the cast, and horror heavyweights James Wan and Jason Blum producing, Lee Cronin's *The Mummy* looks set to be a darker, more disturbing and emotionally brutal reinvention of a familiar cinematic icon.



# WHAT'S ON

in cinemas this month



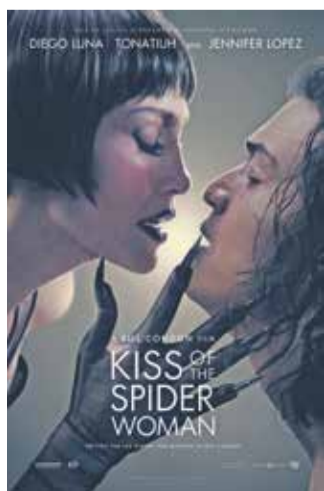
## Kiss of the Spider Woman

**Starring:** Jennifer Lopez, Diego Luna, Tonatiuh

**Director:** Bill Condon

**Cert:** 15 **Genre:** Drama/Musical

**Release Date:** 17/04/2026



Kiss of the Spider Woman is a bold, emotionally charged musical drama that blends fantasy, politics and old-Hollywood glamour into one of the year's most distinctive cinema releases.

Directed by Dreamgirls and Beauty and the Beast filmmaker Bill Condon, the film follows Valentín, a political prisoner, and Molina, his flamboyant cellmate, who forms an unlikely friendship with him inside a brutal prison cell.

To escape the harsh reality around them, Molina retells the story of a dazzling screen musical

starring his beloved silver-screen idol, Ingrid Luna, played by Jennifer Lopez.

As fantasy and reality begin to blur, the pair's bond deepens in ways that are moving, complex and dangerous.

Based on the acclaimed Tony Award-winning stage musical, Kiss of the Spider Woman promises striking visuals, strong performances and a darker emotional edge than the average movie musical - making it a compelling watch for fans of intelligent, character-led drama with theatrical flair.

## Surviving Earth

**Starring:** Stuart Martin, Slavko Sobin, Olive Gray, Ann Ogbomo, Arthur McBain, Brian Bogdanovic, Natalie Dunne, Rosa Escoda, Toni Gojanović

**Director:** Thea Gajic

**Cert:** 15 **Genre:** Drama/Music

**Release Date:** 24/04/2026

Surviving Earth is a gritty, emotionally charged drama about exile, trauma and the difficult search for belonging.

Set in Bristol, the film follows Vlad, a man who fled military conscription during the Yugoslav conflict and is now trying to build a meaningful life far from the war he left behind.

Working as a drugs counsellor and fronting a chaotic, high-energy Balkan band, he appears to have created a new sense of purpose and community.

But the past refuses to stay buried. As old wounds resurface and the pressures of family, identity and survival begin to close in, Vlad is forced to confront the emotional cost of starting over.

Directed by Thea Gajic, Surviving Earth blends music, memory and raw personal struggle into an intimate character-led story about resilience, displacement and the long shadow of conflict - offering a thoughtful, hard-hitting watch for audiences drawn to socially rooted, emotionally honest drama.

# motors Express

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# GET READY

## China's fastest-rising car brand just hit a million - and now Omoda and Jaecoo want your driveway

**Omoda and Jaecoo - the sibling automotive brands owned by Chery International, have blasted past one million global sales in under three years.**

Having rolled out the all-new Omoda 4, showed off a car that can park itself while you stand there looking smug, it's made it abundantly clear that Britain is central to the next phase of their grand plan.

There was a time when a new car brand arriving in Britain meant a polite launch, a couple of dealer boards and maybe a cautiously optimistic sales target. Omoda and Jaecoo, however, appear to have skipped all that and gone straight to world domination.

At Auto China 2026 in Beijing, the Chery-owned brand house confirmed it has

now shifted more than one million cars globally in under three years - an absurdly rapid rise that it says makes it the fastest automotive brand house to reach that milestone.

And while plenty of Chinese car firms are currently circling Europe like gulls around a seaside chip tray, Omoda and Jaecoo are the ones already landing punches in the UK. March 2026 alone saw the brand deliver 61,254 vehicles globally, up 210 per cent year-on-year, while New Energy Vehicle sales hit 39,716, a frankly daft 471 per cent jump over the same month in 2025.

That matters because this isn't just a big number in a shiny press release.

**Continued on page 40**



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## China's fastest-rising car brand just hit a million - and now Omoda and Jaecoo want your driveway

It's evidence that Omoda and Jaecoo have moved from "interesting Chinese newcomers" to something far more irritating for the old guard: a genuine disruptor with scale, speed and enough confidence to start behaving like they own the place.

And then there's the car. The Omoda 4 - now officially confirmed for a UK launch in Q4 2026 - made its formal production-line debut on 26th April, rolling off the line in China as the brand's latest attempt to lure younger, gadget-hungry crossover buyers away from the usual suspects.

It was shown in SHS-H full hybrid form, complete with the sort of "Cyber Mecha" design language that sounds like it was coined during a late-night gaming binge, but in practical terms means sharp creases, aggressive lighting and a cabin pitched at people who think a car should feel more like an iPad with cupholders.

If that sounds familiar, it should.

Omoda isn't inventing a new market here - it's aiming squarely at the bit of the British market that still hovers up Nissan Jukes, Ford Pumas and

anything vaguely premium-looking with a raised ride height and a finance deal attached.

**But the bigger story isn't the styling. It's the strategy.**

Because while legacy brands are still debating how quickly to electrify without frightening shareholders, Omoda and Jaecoo have turned up with a neatly packaged answer: hybrids first, big tech second, price aggressively, move fast.

Their proprietary Super Hybrid System has become the centrepiece of that pitch - and at Auto China it was flanked by a party trick called Valet Parking Driver (VPD), which is exactly what it sounds like: an intelligent parking system designed to let the

car shuffle itself into awkward spaces while you pretend you meant to do that all along.

At the brand's Wuhu strategy event, Omoda and Jaecoo said the system supports one-touch remote summoning and autonomous parking, with demos focused on ultra-tight bays and dead-end spaces.

Which, frankly, is either the future of urban motoring or a marvellous way to make supermarket car parks even more annoying.

Still, there's no denying the UK is now central to this push. The company says it has a 124-strong dealer network here already, and its recent momentum has been hard to ignore. Reuters reported this week that Chery's

international offensive is being driven in part by OMODA and JAECCOO, with the firm targeting huge overseas growth and citing the JAECCOO 7's surge up the UK sales charts as proof that its formula is working.

That's the bit traditional brands should be sweating over. Because Omoda and Jaecoo aren't trying to win by building the best driver's car in the segment. Not yet, anyway. They're winning by understanding modern showroom psychology: give buyers a chunky shape, lots of screen, enough hybrid range to calm the fuel-bill panic, a sense of "premium" that feels expensive but isn't, and wrap it all in the thrill of something new.

And in 2026, that's proving

alarmingly effective.

So yes, one million sales is impressive. Yes, the Omoda 4 looks like another serious swing at Britain's crossover addiction. And yes, self-parking tech is catnip for launch-event demos.

But strip away the Auto China theatre and the real headline is much simpler: Omoda and Jaecoo are no longer the curious newcomers. They're now the Chinese challengers that established brands can't laugh off anymore.

And if the Omoda 4 lands here with the right price, the right spec and the right finance offer?

Don't be surprised if Britain buys it in very silly numbers indeed.

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BMW's new 7 Series is not just a facelift. It is a full-blown flagship reset.

Revealed at Auto China 2026, the latest version of BMW's range-topping saloon is being billed as the most extensive model update the company has ever carried out.

That is a bold claim, but the substance is there. The new 7 Series brings a wave of Neue Klasse technology into BMW's current line-up, gives the all-electric i7 a major range boost, and turns the cabin into something closer to a private lounge than a traditional luxury car. For buyers in this segment, that matters.

Because the battle at the top end is no longer just about comfort, badge appeal or rear legroom. It is about who can make the smartest, most desirable tech-laden limo on the road.

The styling has changed too - and BMW clearly wants people to notice.

The new 7 Series adopts a cleaner, more sculpted look inspired by BMW's upcoming Neue Klasse design language. The shape is more monolithic, the front end has been sharpened with a reworked kidney grille and ultra-slim daytime running lights, and the rear now features a full-width light signature. It is a bolder, more modern look, but still recognisably 7 Series.

## BMW'S NEW 7 SERIES IS A LUXURY LIMO WITH A VERY BIG BRAIN

BMW is also pushing personalisation harder than ever. Buyers can choose from an expanded BMW Individual palette with more than 500 possible exterior colour combinations, alongside new crystal headlights, larger wheel options and a world-first dual-finish paint treatment. It is all very dramatic, very premium and very much aimed at people who want their luxury car to feel bespoke.

Inside, BMW has leaned hard into theatre.

The cabin is more minimalist, more modern and packed with new digital kit. The biggest talking point is the arrival of BMW Panoramic iDrive, powered by BMW Operating System X, which helps bring the company's next-generation interface into its current flagship.

The 7 Series also gets the first-ever BMW Passenger Screen as standard, plus an upgraded 8K BMW Theatre

“The new 7 Series isn't just a luxury saloon anymore - it's a boardroom, a cinema and an electric muscle car in a very expensive suit.”

Screen in the rear, now paired with Dolby Atmos sound. And because apparently the office must now follow you everywhere, BMW has also added integrated video conferencing. It sounds excessive, but that is exactly the point. In this class, excess is often the brief.

BMW says it has not forgotten the person behind the wheel either.

This may be a car many owners will be driven in, but it still needs to feel like a BMW. Standard kit includes adaptive two-axle air suspension, Adaptive Chassis Control and Integral Active Steering, all aimed at making this large luxury saloon feel smoother, sharper and more composed.

Buyers can also add Adaptive Chassis Control Professional, which brings extra roll stabilisation for even more comfort and control. In simple terms, the new 7 Series should still

float when asked, but tighten up when the road demands it.

For many UK buyers, though, the real headline is electric range.

BMW says the new i7 line-up benefits from Gen6 cylindrical battery cells, helping deliver a meaningful jump in efficiency and usability.

The key figure is the BMW i7 50 xDrive, which now offers up to 452 miles (WLTP) on a single charge. In a large luxury EV, that is a serious number. It gives the i7 stronger long-distance credibility and makes it an even more convincing option for buyers who want flagship comfort without range anxiety.

Two more all-electric versions will also arrive in the UK from September 2026: the BMW i7 60 xDrive and the range-topping BMW i7 M70 xDrive, which produces 680hp and can hit 0-62mph in 3.8 seconds. That is super-saloon pace in a car built to pamper.

BMW is not abandoning hybrids either.

Two plug-in hybrid models - the BMW 750e xDrive and BMW M760e xDrive - will follow later in 2026, giving buyers a broader choice as the market continues to shift. All versions of the new 7 Series will be built at BMW's Dingolfing plant, with the UK launch starting in September 2026.



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<b>AA55RIT</b> £8,995 ONO TEL: 07779 324 610	<b>ASII AHS</b> £3,000 (A SHAH) TEL: 07815 114 201	<b>BO55 KHN</b> OFFERS TEL: 07985 429 490	<b>C14 SSE</b> £7,500 (CLASSY) TEL: 07815 114 201	<b>EAS5TLE</b> OFFERS T: 07740 784 983 privateplates@hotmail.co.uk	<b>FAZ44L</b> £5,500 TEL: 07867 861 193	<b>HAI3 ZAH</b> OFFERS OVER £5,000 TEL: 07973 165 474	<b>JVIIJAY</b> £10,000 (J VIJAY) TEL: 07985 455 057	<b>LAI4BBA</b> £675 ONO (LAIBA) TEL: 07779 324 610	<b>MEIITAB</b> £18,000 (MEHTAB) TEL: 07985 455 057	<b>MYIISHA</b> £995 (MY SHISHA) TEL: 07834 531 683	<b>NYIISUF</b> £15,000 (N YUSUF) TEL: 07985 455 057	<b>PHIIFOX</b> £29,000 (PHIL FOX) TEL: 07985 455 057	<b>SIIIFAF</b> £15,000 (P YUSUF) TEL: 07985 455 057
<b>AAIIS</b> £1,500 TEL: 07733 244 444	<b>ASII AKS</b> £1,500 TEL: 01274 414141 MON - FRI: 9-5.30	<b>BO55Y BO</b> £5,000 T: 07740 784 983 privateplates@hotmail.co.uk	<b>C 5KY W</b> £999 ONO TEL: 07427 677 989	<b>EAS7S</b> REASONABLE OFFERS TEL: 07974 179 156	<b>FAZ 786</b> OVER £10,000 TEL: 07765 555 786	<b>HAI7 GEL</b> £8,000 ONO TEL: 07908 472 121	<b>JVIIJAY</b> £10,000 (J VIJAY) TEL: 07985 455 057	<b>LAI4BBA</b> £675 ONO (LAIBA) TEL: 07779 324 610	<b>MEIITAB</b> £18,000 (MEHTAB) TEL: 07985 455 057	<b>MYIISHA</b> £995 (MY SHISHA) TEL: 07834 531 683	<b>NYIISUF</b> £15,000 (N YUSUF) TEL: 07985 455 057	<b>PHIIFOX</b> £29,000 (PHIL FOX) TEL: 07985 455 057	<b>SIIIFAF</b> £15,000 (P YUSUF) TEL: 07985 455 057
<b>AAIIS</b> £1,500 TEL: 07733 244 444	<b>ASII GER</b> £2,000 TEL: 01274 414141 MON - FRI: 9-5.30	<b>BII NAA</b> OFFERS TEL: 07557 472 855	<b>CAIISHA</b> £9,000 (C AISHA) TEL: 07985 455 057	<b>EBIAT T</b> £7,000 (E BHATT) TEL: 07985 455 057	<b>FAIIBACK</b> £7,000 (F BLACK) TEL: 07985 455 057	<b>HAI3 GEL</b> £8,000 ONO TEL: 07908 472 121	<b>JVIIJAY</b> £10,000 (J VIJAY) TEL: 07985 455 057	<b>LAI4BBA</b> £675 ONO (LAIBA) TEL: 07779 324 610	<b>MEIITAB</b> £18,000 (MEHTAB) TEL: 07985 455 057	<b>MYIISHA</b> £995 (MY SHISHA) TEL: 07834 531			

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<b>SHIOAEB</b> £4,000 ONO TEL: 07828 695 464	<b>SOII BYA</b> £2,000 TEL: 01274 414141 MON - FRI: 9-5.30	<b>TAIIMAD</b> £10,000 (T AHMAD) TEL: 07985 455 057	<b>TYIISAF</b> £15,000 (T YUSUF) TEL: 07985 455 057	<b>VY55 HNU</b> £3,500 TEL: 07588 326 444	<b>WGIPTA</b> £6,995 (W GUPTA) TEL: 07985 455 057	<b>XYIISAF</b> £15,400 (X YUSUF) TEL: 07985 455 057
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<b>SHIOKET</b> £OFFERS T: 07754 852 402 no withheld numbers	<b>STIIGGG</b> £20,000 ONO TEL: 07796 510 000	<b>TAI3BYS</b> £1,600 ONO TEL: 07557 387 547	<b>UAIIMAD</b> £10,000 (U AHMAD) TEL: 07985 455 057	<b>W2I JAS</b> £1,200 ONO TEL: 07925 757 677	<b>WMIILES</b> £7,500 (W MILES) TEL: 07985 455 057	<b>Y5IILMA</b> £4,000 ONO (SALMA) TEL: 07969 598 969
<b>SHIOKUT</b> £OFFERS T: 07754 852 402 no withheld numbers	<b>SUR87IT</b> £1,500 (SURBJIT) TEL: 07985 589 631	<b>TA55LYM</b> £4,895 ONO TEL: 07779 324 610	<b>UDIIEEP</b> £7,000 (U DILEEP) TEL: 07985 455 057	<b>W33DDY</b> £5,000 ONO TEL: 07779 994 695	<b>W5IISAN</b> £7,500 (W SUSAN) TEL: 07985 455 057	<b>Y55ANA</b> £OFFERS TEL: 07835 316 786
<b>SHII AED</b> £1,000 TEL: 01274 414141 MON - FRI: 9-5.30	<b>SVIISAF</b> £15,400 (S YUSUF) TEL: 07985 455 057	<b>TA55TEE</b> £5,000 T: 0740 784 983 privateplates@hotmail.co.uk	<b>UKIIRD</b> £OFFERS TEL: 07522 199 997	<b>W33DY K</b> £5,000 ONO TEL: 07779 994 695	<b>WYIISAF</b> £15,400 (W YUSUF) TEL: 07985 455 057	<b>Y9 ALT</b> £30,000 TEL: 07525 817 453
<b>SHII AFS</b> £1,500 TEL: 01274 414141 MON - FRI: 9-5.30	<b>SVIISUF</b> £15,000 (S YUSUF) TEL: 07985 455 057	<b>TA55TYE</b> £5,000 T: 0740 784 983 privateplates@hotmail.co.uk	<b>UMM444R</b> £4,995 TEL: 07707 747 776	<b>W33NTD</b> £1,800 (WANTED) TEL: 01202 877 038	<b>WYIISUF</b> £15,000 (W YUSUF) TEL: 07985 455 057	<b>YAIIMAD</b> £10,000 (Y AHMAD) TEL: 07985 455 057
<b>SHIAHZ</b> £5,000 TEL: 07921 576 971	<b>TOYSR</b> £15,000 ONO TEL: 07973 787 934	<b>TA67 ETS</b> £5,000 ONO TEL: 07908 472 121	<b>UYIISAF</b> £15,400 (U YUSUF) TEL: 07985 455 057	<b>W4JLD</b> £1,995 TEL: 07954 389 874	<b>X3 SINGS</b> £3,500 (SINGHS) TEL: 07833 333 870	<b>YAIYAA</b> £15,000 (YAYAA) TEL: 07985 455 057
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<b>SHII OBY</b> £1,000 TEL: 01274 414141 MON - FRI: 9-5.30	<b>TI9 ARX</b> £OFFERS (TIGER X) TEL: 07837 780 981	<b>TDIIEEP</b> £7,000 (T DILEEP) TEL: 07985 455 057	<b>V 4RFN</b> £1,000 TEL: 07967 193 033	<b>WAIIEEM</b> £15,000 (WAHEEM) TEL: 07985 455 057	<b>X BAIG</b> £50,000 TEL: 07947 979 777	<b>YKIIMAR</b> £15,000 (Y KUMAR) TEL: 07985 455 057
<b>SHIIPER</b> £15,000 (SHIPER) TEL: 07985 455 057	<b>TILI 786</b> £1,500 ONO TEL: 07974 179 156	<b>TERIK</b> VALUED AT OVER £60K TEL: 07792 413 695	<b>V 44MJD</b> £850 ONO TEL: 07839 012 253	<b>WAIISHA</b> £5,000 (W AISHA) TEL: 07985 455 057	<b>X K04SER</b> £OFFERS TEL: 07811 146 312	<b>YUIONES</b> £OFFERS T: 07754 852 402 no withheld numbers
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EXCLUSIVE LOOK

# Rugby's Asian gap

Why one of Britain's biggest communities is still locked out of the game

By Tom England,  
UK Rugby Content Coordinator

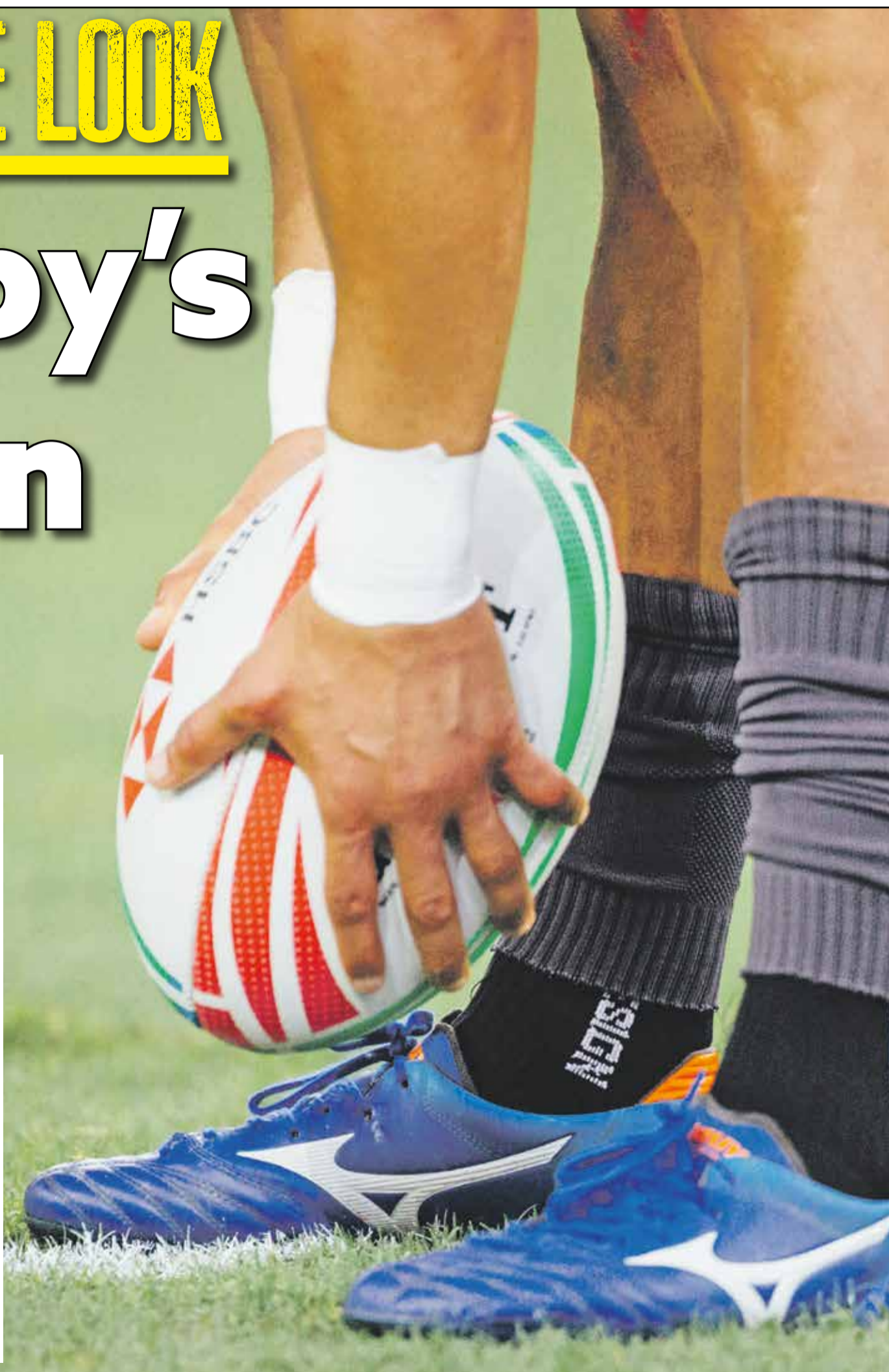
**British South Asians are everywhere in modern Britain - but still barely visible in rugby. So why has the sport failed to keep up?**

Rugby loves to talk about inclusion. About values. About belonging. But for Britain's South Asian communities, the reality has long looked very different.

Despite making up one of the UK's largest and most visible demographics, British Asians remain strikingly underrepresented across rugby union - from grassroots participation right through to the professional game.

In a sport that claims to reflect teamwork, community and opportunity, that absence is glaring. And it is no longer something the game can ignore.

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## Rugby's Asian gap

### Why one of Britain's biggest communities is still locked out of the game

Continued from page 45

The numbers may be hard to pin down - reliable data on South Asian participation in rugby remains frustratingly thin - but the picture is clear enough. Very few British South Asian players have broken through in rugby union, and even fewer have reached the elite level.

#### The pioneers

One of the rare exceptions is Tajiv "Tosh" Masson, of Indian heritage, who made 45 appearances for Harlequins in the late 2000s, including in the European Rugby Champions Cup - still a notable breakthrough in a sport where South Asian representation remains painfully scarce.

And he is far from the only trailblazer whose story exposes the scale of the gap.

Manjinder Nagra, the first Sikh woman selected for England, has spoken openly about the isolation of being the only Asian woman on her team for much of her career - an experience that later led her to found British Asian Women in Rugby.

Then there is Dr Ikram Butt - the first Muslim to represent England in either code back in 1995. That should have been the beginning of real change. Instead, more than 30 years on, it still stands as a reminder of just how slowly rugby has moved.

#### So why has the sport struggled?

Part of it is cultural. In many British Asian households, football and cricket have long dominated the sporting conversation. Rugby simply never built the same emotional or generational connection.

But culture is only part of the story.

For many families, rugby clubs can still feel like inherited spaces - shaped by tradition, class and familiarity - rather than environments built to welcome newcomers. If you didn't grow up around the sport, it can feel like a closed

world.

Add the cost of kit, travel and club membership, and the barriers become even steeper.

That is why the organisations doing the real work matter.

#### Breaking down barriers

The British Asian Rugby Association, founded by Dr Butt more than two decades ago, has been one of the strongest and most consistent forces for change across both codes. Through youth programmes, community outreach and long-term engagement, it has spent years taking rugby into communities the sport too often failed to reach.

And while the institutions have often been slow, momentum is building.

The RFU's Rugby United programme and Premiership Rugby's Project Rugby have brought some official backing to the inclusion drive.

More recently, the British Asian Rugby Awards delivered a long-overdue moment of recognition - shining a spotlight on the players, coaches, volunteers and pioneers pushing the sport forward.

But celebration is not the same as transformation.

Because until British South Asian children can look at rugby and see themselves - not as exceptions, but as part of the game's natural future - the sport's inclusion message will ring hollow.

This is bigger than optics. Bigger than a campaign. Bigger than a one-off diversity push. It is about whether rugby is genuinely willing to look like modern Britain.

Rugby union speaks loudly about inclusion and belonging, and sustained investment in grassroots access and culturally informed outreach. But visible representation will determine whether those values translate into genuine, lasting change for South Asian communities across the country.

# Game changers

## Sporting Equals Awards put inclusion centre stage



Continued from page 48

For Itoje, it marked another landmark moment in a career already making history.

The Saracens and England lock has become the first Black player to captain the British & Irish Lions - a breakthrough with huge significance in one of the UK's most tradition-bound sports. His Sporting Equals award recognised not just his performances on the pitch, but the wider impact of what that leadership represents.

"I'm deeply honoured and humbled to accept this award for the second time," Itoje said.

"I love Sporting Equals and everything the organisation does. Many thanks to the team at Sporting Equals and please continue all of your outstanding work to encourage equality and inclusion in sport."

It was also a major night for women's rugby.

Kabeya, one of the brightest

and most formidable talents in the game, was honoured for her performances and growing influence in the sport. Her win underlined rugby union's strong presence on the night - and the continued rise of a player increasingly seen as one of England's standout figures.

#### Lifetime honours for trailblazers

Two of the evening's most emotional moments came with the Special Lifetime Achievement Awards, presented to Maggie Alphonsi and Roland Butcher - two names whose impact on British sport stretches far beyond medals, caps or appearances.

Alphonsi, widely regarded as one of the most influential figures in women's rugby history, used her moment to recognise those who paved the way before her.

"Many, many thanks to Sporting Equals and I am extremely grateful to be nominated for my Special Achievement Award," she said.

"It's especially meaningful to

follow in the footsteps of one of my sporting heroes Denise Lewis.

I would also like to acknowledge the trailblazers who went before me in the world of women's rugby who have enabled my journey to be possible."

Butcher, the first Black man to play cricket for England, was also honoured for a legacy that remains hugely significant in English sport.

"I'm delighted and truly honoured to be nominated for a Special Lifetime Achievement Award and alongside Maggie Alphonsi," he said.

"It's also great to be joining Linford Christie, Denise Lewis, Sol Campbell and Jason Robinson, such a prestigious group who have received this special award."

#### A bigger message for British sport

Now in its ninth year, the awards



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recognise individuals, organisations and grassroots initiatives working to increase opportunities for ethnically diverse communities in sport and physical activity.

While the big names grabbed the spotlight, the night's strongest message came from the people speaking about the current climate in sport.

Sporting Equals chair Dr Howard Haughton said the awards celebrate those "actively shaping a more inclusive future, not just for sport, but for society as a whole".

And Phil Smith, executive director of partnerships at Sport England, issued a stark warning.

"These awards feel especially meaningful right now," he said.

"Across England, the values of diversity, equity and inclusion are under pressure. Progress that once felt secure is being questioned, resources are tighter, and in too many places the importance of representation and fairness is being misunderstood or challenged.

"That makes the work we're celebrating this evening not just important - but essential."

## Full List of Award Winners

**Peloton Gamechanger Award – Joel Fearon**

**Flowhession Young Sportsperson of the Year – Eva Okaro**

**Sporting Equals Lifetime Achievement Award – Roland Butcher**

**Sporting Equals Lifetime Achievement Award - Maggie Alphonsi MBE**

**The FA Community Champion of the Year - Salma Bi BEM**

**England Athletics Coach of the Year – Krumesh Patel**

**Sport England Community Sports Project of the Year – Tigers Engage**

**Swim England Aquatics Champion – Badu (Empowering Black Women Through Tri Programme)**

**LTA Tennis Foundation Community Tennis Award – Together Tennis CIC**

**Major Pro Kabaddi League Sportsman of the Year – Maro Itoje**


**The Voice Sportswoman of the Year – Sadia Kabeya MBE**

**Mind Wellbeing Award – Sporting Souls**

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## Sporting Equals Awards put inclusion centre stage



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# Game changers

British sport's most powerful voices gathered in London for an awards ceremony that did far more than hand out trophies. Held at the Royal Lancaster Hotel, the 2026 Sporting Equals Awards brought together athletes, community leaders and sporting

organisations for a night that celebrated excellence - but also delivered a timely reminder that diversity, equity and inclusion remain under pressure across the sector. Among the headline winners were England and British & Irish

Lions captain Maro Itoje, who was named Sportsman of the Year, and England rugby star Sadia Kabeya, who picked up Sportswoman of the Year. **Continued on pages 46 & 47**



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