

Asian
Express
Newspaper

LEEDS ROAD
Festival

**65,000 TURN-OUT AS
LEEDS ROAD FESTIVAL HAILED
A 'MASSIVE SUCCESS'**



8 PAGE FESTIVAL SUPPLEMENT

65,000 turn-out as Leeds Road Festival hailed a 'massive success'



Pictures courtesy of
Israr Ahmed





Bradford's Leeds Road Festival has been hailed a huge success after an estimated 65,000 people packed Bradford Moor Park for a weekend of music, food, dance and culture.

Now in its second year, the festival returned bigger and bolder for 2026, transforming one of Bradford's best-known areas to a colourful celebration of the people, businesses and cultures that call the city home.

And if there was any doubt Bradford knows how to throw a party, the crowds soon put that to rest.

Thousands descended on Bradford Moor Park on Saturday and Sunday for an eclectic line-up spanning Bhangra, Bollywood, reggae, rap, Punjabi folk, Pakistani pop, soul, electronic music and live bands.

Sunday built towards a huge finale, with performances from Jenna Jia, Sher Yar Khan and Nazia Iqbal before Pakistani music superstar Abrar Ul-Haq took to the stage as the festival's headline act.

His closing performance brought the two-day main event to a fitting end. The park was packed as audiences enjoyed some of the songs and sounds that made him one of the biggest names in Punjabi and Pakistani music.

But this year, Leeds Road Festival was about much more than one weekend.

From Bradford Live to Bradford Moor Park

For 2026, organisers expanded the event to a week-long celebration, beginning with a special launch at Bradford Live on Sunday, August 9, bringing together business, civic and community leaders.

Events

continued throughout the week on Leeds Road itself, alongside fringe activities celebrating the businesses, food, culture and communities that helped make the area one of Bradford's most distinctive destinations.

A new addition for 2026 also spotlighted Bradford's foodservice and wholesale sector, bringing manufacturers and supply-chain businesses together to network and showcase the industry's contribution to the city and wider regional economy.

The celebrations culminated in the main festival weekend at Bradford Moor Park on August 15 and 16.

Festival co-founder Saleem Akhtar said organisers had been determined to build on the success of the inaugural event.

"After the immense success of our inaugural festival in 2025, we pulled out all the stops to be back bigger and better for 2026."

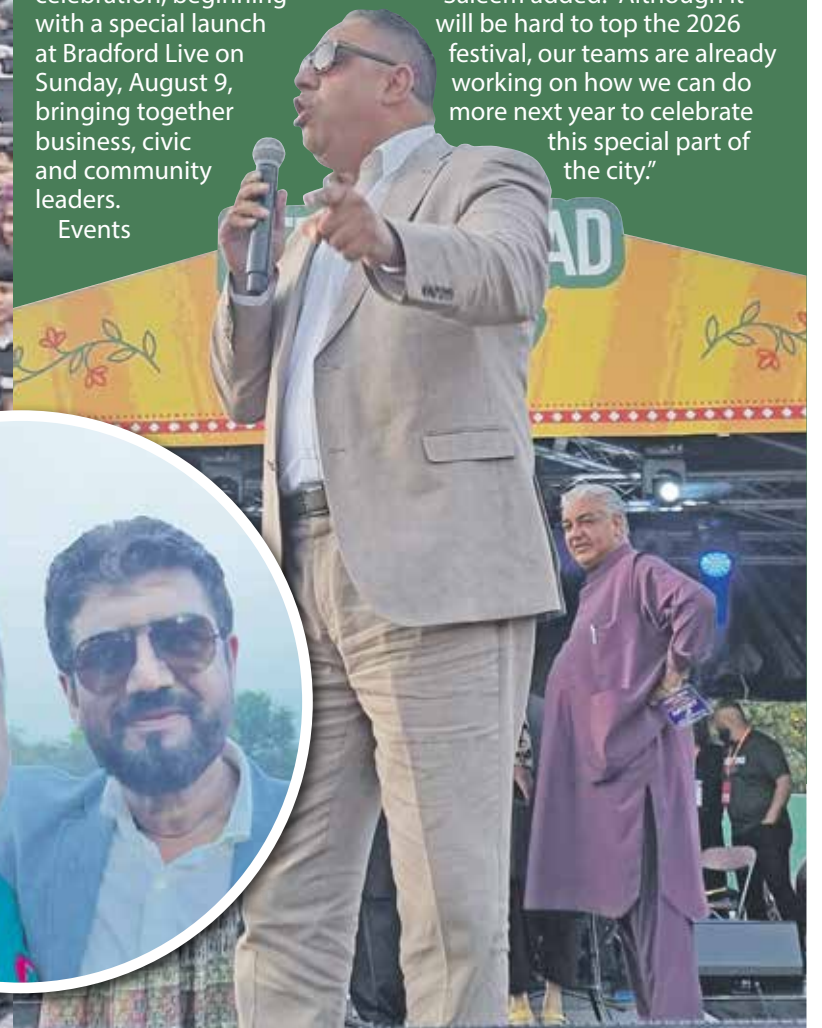
"The crowds that gathered in Moor Park on Saturday and Sunday surpassed our high expectations, a fitting tribute to the Leeds Road area and the immense economic impact it delivers to the city and wider region."

He also paid tribute to the hundreds of volunteers involved in making the event happen, alongside its corporate and civic supporters.

"The festival would not be possible without the hard work, dedication and energy of hundreds of volunteers, who made this year's event something that will stay in memory for a long time."

And organisers are already looking ahead.

Saleem added: "Although it will be hard to top the 2026 festival, our teams are already working on how we can do more next year to celebrate this special part of the city."



More than Bradford's 'curry mile'

For decades, Leeds Road has been synonymous with Bradford's famous food scene.

But the bustling corridor to the city has grown into much more.

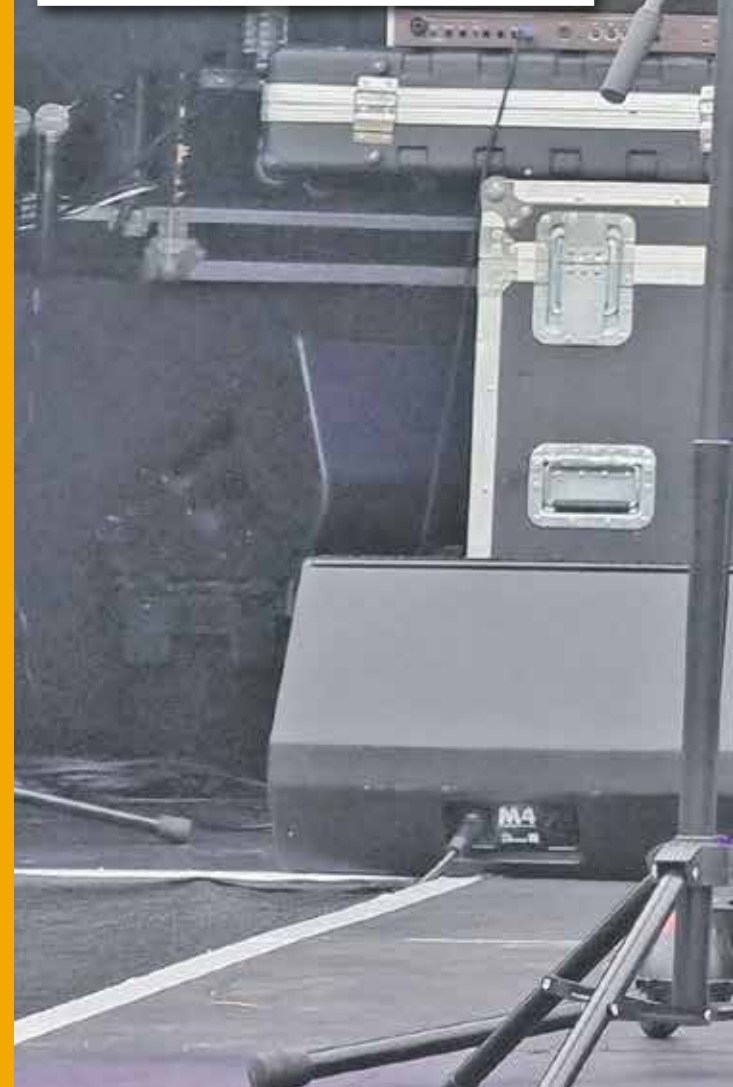
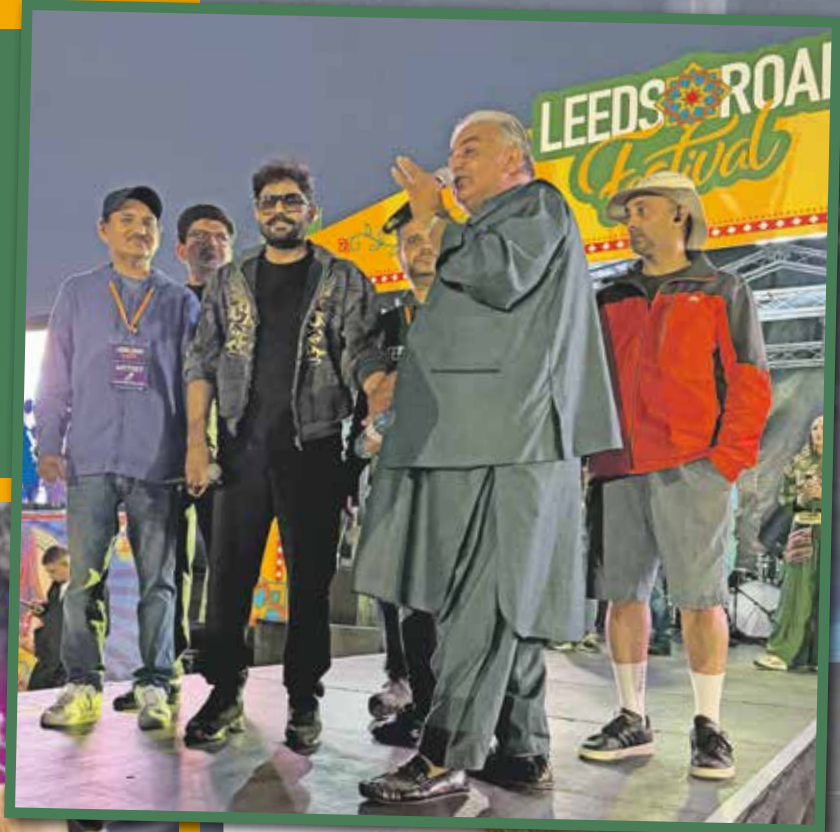
Home to hundreds of independent businesses, restaurants, wholesalers and retailers, it has become a major destination for South Asian fashion and the wedding industry, drawing customers from across Yorkshire and beyond.

The festival was created not only to celebrate that commercial success but to bring different communities together and challenge perceptions of the area.

That spirit was reflected in a line-up that jumped effortlessly between cultures and musical genres across the weekend.

Alongside Abrar Ul-Haq, Jenna Jia, Sher Yar Khan and Nazia Iqbal, audiences saw acts including Signature, Kay Kay & Co, Oojami, Wajid Ali Baghdadi, Tayyba Khan, Natural Rhythm, Third Floor, Wilko Wilkes, Steeldrumsband and Nachde Tapde, among others.

With an estimated 65,000 people attending the weekend events, the numbers suggest the festival, launched only last year, is rapidly establishing itself as a major fixture in Bradford's cultural calendar.





KING OF CURRY'S LEGACY LIVES ON

Akbar's takes centre stage at Leeds Road Festival as family and community pay heartfelt tribute to founder Shabir Hussain



The later Shabir Hussain

Akbar's has once again been at the heart of Leeds Road Festival – with the Bradford restaurant that helped transform the famous thoroughfare hosting one of the weekend's most poignant events: a special tribute to its late founder, and CEO, Shabir Hussain.

Family, friends, business figures and members of the community gathered at the landmark Leeds Road restaurant on Saturday, 15 August, to remember the entrepreneur affectionately known as the 'King of Curry'.

Almost two years after his death, the event celebrated the extraordinary journey of a Bradford businessman who started with a modest 28-seat restaurant in 1995 and went on to build one of Britain's best-known South Asian restaurant brands.

For Shabir's family, Leeds Road Festival has become about much more than a weekend of celebration. The tribute became a passionate rallying cry for the city Shabir called home.

His family acknowledged that Bradford has faced its share of negative headlines – but said

those headlines should never be allowed to define the city

They pointed to a young, diverse city where more than 100 languages are spoken and generations of entrepreneurs continue to start businesses, create jobs and generate opportunities.

And they had a direct message about the Bradford they want the rest of the country to see.

"That is the Bradford we should be talking about. That is the Bradford we should be showcasing. And that is the Bradford our young people should believe in," said Shabir's daughter Samiara.

"The Leeds Road Festival is, for our family and for the Akbar's Group, about much more than celebrating a road. It is about celebrating the life, achievements and legacy of our father."

THE ROAD HE BELIEVED IN

When Shabir opened Akbar's in 1995, Leeds Road was a very different place. Much of Bradford's established South Asian commercial activity was concentrated around Great Horton Road and White Abbey Road.

But Shabir spotted something others had not. "Our father believed in Leeds Road," said his daughter. "He believed in its people, its businesses and its potential." And he backed that belief with investment.

As Akbar's grew, Shabir continued putting

money, time and energy into the road where his journey had started rather than taking his success elsewhere.

His family added: "Through hard work, perseverance and a genuine commitment to the area, he helped play a part in changing the atmosphere and profile of Leeds Road."

Today, the family has three establishments there – Akbar's, Vanilla Rooms, and a couture gold and diamond jewellery business Durrani's.

That deep connection to the area has made Akbar's a natural part of Leeds Road Festival and its celebration of the businesses, food and communities which have transformed the district.

FROM 28 SEATS TO A CURRY EMPIRE

Shabir didn't just build restaurants. He helped change expectations of South Asian dining in Britain.

Akbar's combined authentic Pakistani food with striking interiors, professional service and ambitious presentation at a time when perceptions of the traditional curry house were very different.

And then came perhaps his most famous innovation – the naan tree.

Faced with the problem of Akbar's enormous family naans taking over customers' tables, Shabir came up with the hanging naan stand.

It became synonymous with Akbar's and was subsequently imitated by restaurants across





the country. Shabir would later joke that he wished he had patented it.

But the bigger ambition was always about creating something that could grow far beyond one restaurant while remaining rooted in Bradford.

From those original 28 seats, the Akbar's name expanded across the country and became one of the most recognisable brands in British South Asian dining.

HE BELIEVED IN OPPORTUNITY

Those closest to Shabir say his measure of success wasn't simply turnover, restaurants or expansion. He wanted other people to progress with him.

Staff, suppliers, fellow businesses and young entrepreneurs were part of a philosophy built around collective growth.

new generation.

Central to that is the newly announced Shabir Hussain Foundation, which will support local causes and help young people access skills, projects and opportunities.

The Foundation will aim to turn those values into something practical, particularly for younger generations looking for the chance to develop their skills and ambitions.

'WE WILL NEVER FORGET HIS SUPPORT'

For Asian Express CEO Nadim Hanif, who knew Shabir since he was a teenager, the tribute gathering also brought back memories of a man who was prepared to back other businesses when they were taking their first steps.

"When we started Asian Express 26 years ago, Shabir was one of the first people to back us and support the newspaper," he said.

"At a time when that support mattered, he believed in what we were trying to do.

"We will never forget that.

"I knew Shabir for more than 40 years and what always struck me was his entrepreneurial spirit, but also his willingness to support other people.

"His legacy isn't simply about how many restaurants he opened. It is about the people he encouraged, helped and inspired along the way."

Shabir's contribution to business was also recognised at the Business Power Awards 2025, where he was posthumously presented with the Special Recognition Award.

AKBAR'S NEXT CHAPTER

Now his daughters are pushing ahead with the next phase of the Akbar's story.

Alongside establishing the Shabir Hussain Foundation, sisters Samina, Samiara and Iram are continuing to develop the businesses their father built, while looking at new opportunities for the brand.

The latest expansion will take a taste of the famous Bradford restaurant beyond its dining rooms.

The family has unveiled a new range of Akbar's curry sauces, taking some of the flavours associated with the restaurant into customers' homes.

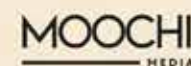
The new Akbar's curry sauce range is expected to launch in September.

"He believed in people. He believed in giving people opportunities. And when he succeeded, he wanted the people around him to succeed too."

General Manager of Akbar's, Sammy, said: "He believed in people. He believed in giving people opportunities. And when he succeeded, he wanted the people around him to succeed too." That ethos is now being taken forward by his daughters Samina, Samiara and Iram, who are carrying their father's business and community legacy into a

LEEDS ROAD Festival

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