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gourmet

volume 17, issue 2



MAN OF ACTION

Chamil Sanjeewa, the Sri Lankan Cluster Executive Chef of Radisson Blu Yas Island not just survives but thrives amid challenges

CULINARY EXCELLENCE

Exclusive interview with **Mazen Khadour**, the Syrian Cluster Executive Chef of Wyndham Ajman



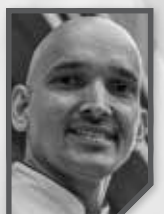
THE STAR OPENER

Indonesian Executive Pastry Chef **Arief Mochammad** of Taj Dubai, shares his passion for desserts



CHEF OF THE MONTH

Bijendra Ramola, Jumeirah Creekside Hotel's Indian Head Chef embodies the true spirit of hospitality





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Dear fellow chefs, ladies and gentlemen,

Welcome to the February issue of our Gulf Gourmet.

Hope everyone is well and busy like the ECG Team, which was engaged with projects both big and small. We are working hard to keep you chefs busy.

We are just finalizing new books for our longtime partner – IFFCO. Can't wait to see the finished product. If you visit the IFFCO team at Gulfood, you may have a chance to get your hand on a copy.

We just finished the competition with Canadian ingredients "A Journey of Canadian Excellence". Do not miss it. Check it out on the Emirates Culinary Guild YouTube Channel and watch all the winning recipes.

The next project has just been launched "Canned Legumes from Europe". This is a virtual competition, and your recipe must be created using canned legumes from Europe. Contact the Emirates Culinary Guild Office at emiratesculinaryguild@gmail.com for more information and registration.

I look forward to great videos ranging from amazing stews and soups to wraps, salads and more. Good luck everyone, there are great prizes to be won.

We are also working with the DMG Team, the organizer of the Hotel Show at Dubai World Trade Centre in May for The Chefs Table Competition. As in the previous years, this great competition will happen in the middle of the Hotel Show, do not miss it.

And of course, our biggest projects take place in Abu Dhabi in 2022.

We will have 7 events under 1 roof:

1. Worldchefs Congress
2. Global Chefs Competition
3. Billy Gallagher Young Chef Forum
4. Young Chef African Cup
5. Expo Culinaire



6. Salon Culinaire
7. Education Corner

We look forward to these amazing events and welcoming chefs from around the world. I am really looking forward to show case our Emirati culture and food and at the same time learning from colleagues.

Please pass the word around, we still have spaces for the Exhibition, contact the ECG at emiratesculinaryguild@gmail.com or Purple Kitchen at joanne.cook@purple-kitchen.com directly to book your space, don't miss it. We are expecting chefs from more than 100 countries to be with us.

The Congress registration is open now at worldchefscongress.org.

Please visit gulfgourmet.net to

browse through previous issue of this magazines. Visit emiratesculinaryguild.net to see latest happenings on the events calendar. And visit facebook.com/wacsyoungchefs for young chefs to be in contact with over 4,000 chefs across the globe.

Please do not miss the company profile of our corporate members. We really do appreciate your support. Also do look at the Friends of the Guild pages to check all our supporters.

Thank you to Chef Diyan Manjula De Silva and the Radisson Blu Hotel DDC Team for hosting the January meeting.

Culinary regards,
Uwe Micheel

President of Emirates Culinary Guild

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Your first steps towards a culinary career.

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editor'snote

email editor@gulfgourmet.net



One of the best parts of my job as Editor of Gulf Gourmet – besides the fact that a foodie gets to be surrounded by experts in food creation – is the chance to meet people from different cultures. Dubai is a global melting pot of cultures and cuisines and even cities in the West cannot match the true cosmopolitan nature of the metropolis.

Your accent and the colour of your passport have even lesser importance today as quality and talent gain more and more importance. Our issue this month has interviews and features covering four Heads Chefs and Cluster Executive Chefs; and each one comes from a different part of the world.

We have in this issue a Syrian, an Indian, an Indonesian and a Sri Lankan to read about, learn from and be inspired by.

And they are true leaders who know not just their craft but are great people managers wanting to promote young chefs in their hotels.

This multiculturalism is also reflected in the inaugural 50 Best Restaurants in MENA list we were made privy to at the time of the magazine going to print. We have featured the entire list in this issue. UAE, as expected, bags 19 of the spots on the list and 16 of these are from Dubai.

This includes 3 Fils which was a pleasant surprise at the No. 1 spot. Another pleasant surprise was to see Chef Himanshu Saini's two restaurants make it to the Top 20.

They say uneasy lies the head that wears the crown and I only hope that the winning chefs focus on the passion and creativity that got them on the list rather than worry about how to remain on this list.

For many of our young chefs reading this magazine, a big priority is making it to the top of the career ladder as an Executive Chef. But the challenges that come with it are hardly ever spoken of. Our columnist Rohit Bassi touches upon the topic in his latest piece in this issue.

We have great stories and some amazing images in here and we also bring you exclusive details on how you could win a trip to Italy. We haven't forgotten the young chefs and there is the ChefID Young Chef Competition featuring a dynamic duo and their recipes from Asha's restaurant.

All this and more in the edition you currently hold in your hands.

Until next time, enjoy the read and keep cooking with passion.

Aquin George
Editor

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The tomato revolution
from Italy

A trademark, a territory and its people: how a pride of Italy is born.

It all began in 1982, when a company in the province of Parma who had specialized in processing tomatoes since the beginning of the century, and whose presence in the market dates back to the first half of the nineteenth century, applied for the first time ever, new production technologies for the packaging of Pomi tomato sauce.

◆ Pomi Passata: increasingly a classic

Fresh, creamy and dense, the first tomato sauce is never forgotten. The original taste of a classic always ready to use. Ideal for preparing sauces and dishes with a genuine taste and balanced nutritional values.

◆ Pomi Organic: Naturally different

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◆ Pomito Chopped Tomatoes: Heavenly fresh

Combines the advantages and smoothness of the passata with chunks of fresh-peeled Italian tomatoes. This is 100% authentic Italian masterpiece ideal for pizza.



newsbites

Inaugural 50 Best is a mix bag

The highly anticipated launch of Middle East & North Africa's 50 Best Restaurants 2022 list clearly has a pattern that favours Japanese cuisine, steaks, and of course, creativity that pushes the boundary of accepted culinary practices.

What surprised most is the willingness to give the top spot to 3 Fils, an arguably deserving candidate. The UAE has 19 out of the 50 best restaurants with Dubai housing 16 of these. Two of Chef Himanshu Saini's Indian restaurants, Tresid and Tresind Studio have made it to the top 20. Brands like LPM and Coya saw its name featured twice for its outlets in multiple cities. Here are the top 50 restaurants in MENA.

1. 3 Fils, Dubai
2. Zuma, Dubai (Chef Pawel Kazanowski)
3. OCD, Tel Aviv
4. Trèsind Studio, Dubai (Chef Himanshu Saini)
5. Sachi, Cairo
6. Orfali Bros Bistro, Dubai
7. Fakhreldin, Amman
8. LPM, Dubai
9. George & John, Tel Aviv
10. Gaia, Dubai
11. Il Borro Tuscan Bistro, Dubai
12. Baron, Beirut
13. Coya, Dubai
14. HaBasta, Tel Aviv
15. Myazu, Riyadh
16. Reif Kushiyaki, Dubai (Chef Reif Othman)
17. Animar, Tel Aviv
18. Trèsind, Dubai
19. Kazoku, Cairo
20. Mimi Kakushi, Dubai
21. Liza, Beirut
22. Em Sherif, Beirut
23. Lowe, Dubai
24. Pescado, Ashdod (Chef Yehi Zino)
25. Hakkasan, Abu Dhabi (Chef Lee Kok Hua)
26. La Grande Table Marocaine, Marrakech (Chef Karim)
27. 13C Bar in the Back, Amman
28. No.28 Tawlet Mar Mikhael, Beirut
29. No.29 Amazonico, Dubai
30. No.30 Marble, Riyadh
31. Mirai, Manama
32. Ilioli, Casablanca (Chef Yusuke Furukawa)
33. BB Social Dining, Dubai (Chef Alex Stumpf)
34. Coya, Abu Dhabi
35. Indochine, Dubai (Chef Steve Nguyen)
36. Cut by Wolfgang Puck, Doha
37. Porterhouse, Riyadh
38. Zooba (Zamalek), Cairo (Chef Moustafa El Refaey)
39. Fusions by Tala, Gulf Hotel Bahrain (Chef Tala Bashmi)
40. Milgo & Milbar, Tel Aviv
41. Sufra, Amman
42. LPM, Riyadh (Chef Durga Misra)
43. White Robata, Kuwait City (Chef Mateus Coelho)
44. Hoseki, Bulgari Dubai (Chef Masahiro Sugiyama)
45. Izakaya, Cairo
46. La Closerie, Tunis
47. Clap, Beirut (Chef Renald Epie)
48. Butcher & Still, Four Seasons Abu Dhabi
49. +61, Marrakech, Chef Andrew Cibej
50. Tokyo, Riyadh

Chef Juan moves to MasterChef, the TV Experience

MasterChef, the TV Experience has a new menu thanks to a new Executive Chef. Chef Juan Ramon Sobero Llaca was in the news last year when he took up the role of Executive Chef at Casa de Tapas.

Hailing from Valencia, Chef Juan has previously worked as Head Chef at Vegamar Bodegas in Valencia, The Tapas Bar at J by Jose Andre in Mexico and Quisitas, and Westin Excelsior in Florence.

He has been in the Middle East since 2017 after taking up the role of Executive

Chef in both La Liga Lounge in Doha and Mercado Andaluz, and St Regis in Amman, Jordan says the press release.

His new menu for the outlet features appetizers such as Romesco with Padron Peppers, made up of fried padron peppers, himalayan salt and a romesco tomato-based sauce.

Also on the menu are new mains including the likes of Cod Au Gratin with Honey aioli, consisting of a slow cooked piece of cod, stewed vegetables and piquillo sauce.





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A new culinary powerhouse at Sofitel

Sofitel Dubai The Palm has strengthened its culinary team with multiple new appointments and promotions. This includes the appointment of Diego Solis as Executive Sous Chef and internal promotion of Chef Akshay Batra from Pastry Chef to Executive Pastry Chef.

Chef Kevin Fleming, Executive Chef said, "Looking forward to a very busy and exciting 2022 I have handpicked the best candidates available to make an already strong culinary team even stronger. Each appointee will bring his own skills and abilities individually and collectively as a team we are ready to push the culinary offering in the hotel to the next level".

Executive Sous Chef, Diego Solis, started his hospitality career 21 years ago in 2001 and holds a Technical College

Diploma in Professional Quality Control of Food. His culinary career took off when he joined Brick Hotel Brasserie (Mexico) as a Sous Chef in 2009, later moving to Grosvenor House Dubai as a Sous Chef. He then moved to China as Chef de Cuisine for Hyatt Regency Dongguan and returned to U.A.E in 2017 as Chef de Cuisine for St Regis Dubai. In his last role, he was the Executive Sous Chef at Hilton Habtoor Palace and was assisting the Executive Chef to manage the overall kitchen operations as a successful independent profit center, ensuring maximum guest satisfaction, through planning, organising, directing, and controlling the kitchen operation and administration.

"I am delighted to be a part of the Sofitel Dubai The Palm team, a brand I have always admired for excellence and

luxury. It's going to be an interesting journey ahead and I am really looking forward to working with the F&B team and ensuring smooth operations in the culinary departments," added Chef Diego Solis, Executive Sous Chef.

Chef Akshay Batra is an award-winning Pastry Chef of the Year 2021 with more than 15 years of experience and a proven track record along with a wide variety of specialties in the F&B and culinary industry. At Sofitel Dubai The Palm, he will now lead and oversee the dessert and bakery division of all the restaurants and lounges including Porterhouse Steaks & Grills, Manava, Moana, The World Eatery, Maui, Zoya by Maui, Olivier's and Laguna as the Executive Pastry Chef along with all other details when it comes to aspects of the dessert offering, setting the culinary pace for the year ahead.



Washoku World Challenge Announces Six Finalists

Washoku World Challenge, the international Japanese cuisine contest organised by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries of Japan has announced its global finalists for its 9th edition. This includes Wing Chan of Kiyoi Inc in the US, Mike Chu of Mizutani at Alva Hotel By Royal in Hong Kong, Evandro Kawanami from Yunagi Edomae-Zushi in Brazil, Lee Hyeon Jeong of Nakamura Academy in South Korea, Paride Pasetti of Maru in the U.K. and Yang Peishih from Tsukiyo-iwa in Taiwan.

The final tournament in Tokyo has been replaced with a special online lesson with a top Japanese Chef, where they will receive advice on the recipes and dishes they each submitted in the video screening round of the contest.

The filmed comments from Head Judge, Yoshihiro Murata and another film featuring photos of the finalists and their culinary creations, together with comments on each of the dishes from the judges are available to view online for free on the Washoku World Challenge YouTube channel.

And while you are at it, don't miss the Emirates Culinary Guild YouTube channel either. There is a competition happening now that allows the winner a trip to Italy. Check out the details on page 48 of this issue.



Hilton launches Waitographer programme

You have heard of waiters and of photographers. Hilton in the UAE have combined the two to create a waitographer and we are curious to see how it works out in the long term.

Rushed smartphone photographs or awkward selfies seem to be a problem with diners and this is a solution to that challenge.

Hilton is training its waiting staff in smartphone photography so they can record guests' celebrations with sharp, colourful and vibrant images that display the correct composition.

The innovative initiative sees renowned Middle East photographer Roger Moukarzel guide Hilton waiting staff through a rigorous workshop that will hone their photographic skills. After completion of the training programme, team members will receive a certificate and a badge so that hotel guests can easily identify Waitographers while in a Hilton property and ask for their assistance when they wish to have their picture taken.

"We all love to take photos when we're with friends and family to capture the

memories we are making," says Gurmej Bahia, Vice President of Marketing and Loyalty, International, at Hilton. "However, nine times out of 10, the picture has to omit one person so they can take it or we attempt a selfie, which doesn't always work, or we ask for a waiter or a random passer-by to take the photo for us. The Waitographer programme will enhance our guests' experiences at Hilton and help them to save all their treasured memories."

Emma Banks, Vice President, F&B Strategy & Development, Europe Middle East and Africa (EMEA) at Hilton commented, "Not only does the Waitographer scheme reinforce Hilton's focus on empowering and upskilling its team members, but also ties in with our ambition to create human connections for guests during their stay," she said. "Our Waitographers are really excited to interact with guests and start snapping photos that will create memories that last forever."

The Waitographer programme is up and running with almost 100 Hilton team members having already passed through Roger Moukarzel's photography workshop, and more scheduled to receive their training soon. What do you think?

To get your chef or company related news featured in this section, email editor@gulfgourmet.net

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The Journey From **LOATHING TO LOVE**

Our Pastry Mastery this month, Executive Pastry Chef **Arief Mochammad** of Taj Dubai, shares his life story and how he turned a corner when it comes to passion for cooking

“Cooking and being in the kitchen were never my favorite activities as a child,” says Chef Arief Mochammad, the Executive Pastry Chef working with the Taj Hotels and Resorts Group in Dubai.

Despite his mother's repeated requests, the Indonesian chef persistently refused to assist her with cooking tasks. “I was against cooking right until I worked as a chef with the opening team at Hyatt Regency Bandung in 1997,” he says with a smile that expresses both love for his mother and a bit of regret for not doing it back then.

What he avoided then he has since made up for in droves. He completed a formal training in catering and received a diploma from the Trisakti Hotel Management in Indonesia. The journey has taken him to multiple countries since and helped him be a part of the pre-opening for many a luxury property.

“My passion for the field has led me to the opening for Radisson Blu Muscat, Kempinski Mall of the Emirates, Ritz-Carlton Pacific Place Indonesia, The Address Downtown, Armani Hotel, The Address Dubai Mall, The Address Dubai Marina, and Taj Hotels,” he says.

However, getting to this juncture in his culinary career was not easy. Chef Arief admits that the first year of his career was a challenge. It is only after spending a considerable amount of



I was against cooking right until I worked as a chef with the opening team at Hyatt Regency Bandung in 1997

time in the kitchen, that he was able to see beyond the hard work and understand the joy of creativity.

“When I started considering the importance of artistic presentation in food, I felt motivated to do my best,” he says.

Chef Arief began his culinary career as a pastry cook for the Singaporean franchise of Cafe Oh La La. He was there for almost two years before receiving the opportunity to work in bigger operations such as hotels and catering.

“At the Hyatt Regency Bandung Indonesia, I was hired as the commis for the bakery and pastry department. It is here that several opportunities were presented to me to learn and advance my career,” he says.

In the years that followed, he was given another opportunity in Oman to manage a private bakery and coffee shop, and the business was successful. “This was

my first exposure to the Middle Eastern region, culture and customs. Later, I had another opportunity to work with Ritz Carlton Pacific Place in Indonesia on banqueting and events for a large number of clients,” he says.

In 2008 The Address Downtown Dubai was opening, and he found the opportunity to come work in the UAE.

Over the next five years he was tasked with being part of various property openings including The Address Dubai Mall, Armani Hotel, and The Address Dubai Marina.

“In 2015 I received yet another exciting opportunity to join the pre-opening team of Taj Dubai as Executive Pastry Chef. I took the role without hesitation,” he says.

Ask him about the challenges of being an Executive Pastry Chef and he says, “Every job has its ups and downs, and the biggest part of success depends on your passion, determination and hard work. There is always an uncertainty as to whether ingredients will be available, or if they fit into a perfect flavour bouquet when experimenting with textures and products. But that is the beauty of the culinary process.

“It is also important to be aware of the staff's ability to endure pressure, fast pace of workflow and develop a strong character when it comes to advancement and expertise,” he says.



Talking about his current employer, he adds, "To me, Taj Dubai is a beacon of legendary Indian hospitality in the heart of Dubai. The hotel has a very organic blend of Indian heritage and contemporary style that keeps attracting guests from all over the world since the opening year in 2015. The hotel is home to six restaurants, bars and lounges, 296 beautiful and spacious rooms and suites and impressive events facilities.

"We are right by the Burj Khalifa – so from our luxurious suites you get to enjoy impressive views of the world's tallest building and everchanging Downtown skyline. And you are only a short walk away from the Dubai Mall, a fashionista's paradise boasting over 1,200 stores and trendsetting venues.

"It is important for me to add that none of it would be that great without an amazing team that works at Taj Dubai. They are my family here," says Chef Arief.

As the Executive Pastry Chef, he works closely with the Executive Sous Chef and Chef de Cuisine of various outlets at the hotel, including Indian designer kitchen Bombay Brasserie, British gastropub The Eloquent Elephant, the famous outdoor lounge and bar Treehouse, international eatery Tesoro.



It will not always be easy, but if you love what you do, then every moment will be filled with either valuable lessons or joy from creating, in my case unforgettable desserts

As part of his work, he looks after organizing and hiring staff for the pastry and bakery department to cater to all F&B outlets, all-day dining, and events/function rooms, introducing and developing new menus and improving the team's understanding of products.

He says, "I am responsible for all pastry and bakery production across all F&B outlets, events and function rooms along with outdoor catering. Taj Dubai has an exceptional outdoor catering service and I am leading a team who prepares

all breads, chocolates, cookies, and base desserts for outdoor events, in-house restaurants and banquets, as well as create menus for all outlets, determine costs, and plan sales strategies."

When talking about life outside of work, he says, "I have a wonderful family – a gorgeous wife who supports me in my culinary endeavors, a talented daughter who is far from the hospitality world and a cheerful and happy son who keeps the whole family entertained."

For our readers, Chef Arief has created a recipe specially for Valentine's Day. I called it "True Love".

It features cherry ivoire, blood orange jelly, creamy cheese with cherry compote, raspberry tuile and raspberry crumble. The delicate combination of cream cheese and cherry in this dessert are sure to be a great hit with the couples.

His advice to young chefs is to stay focused on your goals and enjoy your work. He says, "It will not always be easy, but if you love what you do, then every moment will be filled with either valuable lessons or joy from creating, in my case unforgettable desserts." That's advice as sweet as his creations.

Creamy Ivory Cheese with Cherry compote, Raspberry Chocolate flakes and Raspberry Crumble

CREAMY IVORY CHEESE

Arla Pro Cream Cheese	100gr
Granulated Sugar	40gr
Egg yolk	1
Orange Juice	3 g
Gelatin Leaf	3 g
Vanilla Essence	1 g
Arla Pro Whipping Cream	105 g
White Chocolate	25 g

Method

- ◆ Boil sugar with some water to reach

100°Celsius

- ◆ Add it to egg yolk to make sabayon and add in the gelatin
- ◆ Beat cream cheese, mixed with sabayon and white chocolate
- ◆ Mix all ingredients and pipe half round into a cake mold

CHEERY GEL

Granulated Sugar	10 g
Pectin	12 g
Cherry Puree	250 g
Invert Sugar	10 g
Gelatin leaf	4 g

Method

- ◆ Soak gelatin in cold water
- ◆ Lightly cook puree, granulated sugar,

pectin and invert sugar

- ◆ Add gelatin leaf and bring to a boil

SABLE BRETON

Egg yolks	2
Granulated sugar	96 g
Arla Pro Butter	96 g
Salt	3 g
All-purpose flour	130 g
Baking powder	36 g

Method

- ◆ Whisk egg yolk and granulated sugar until it turns pale
- ◆ Add unsalted butter and make it creamy
- ◆ Add flour and baking powder
- ◆ Place on cake ring with thickness of 1cm
- ◆ Bake for 180°C for 12 minutes



RASPBERRY CRUMBLE

Arla Pro Butter	100 g
Granulated Sugar	80 g
Raspberry Powder Sosa	10 g
All-purpose Flour	180 g
Red Colour Liquid	10 g

Method

- ◆ Mix all ingredients and bake at 180°C for 8 minutes
- ◆ Let it cool and crush it thereafter

BLOOD ORANGE JELLY

Blood Orange Puree	250 g
Granulated Sugar	50 g
Gelatin	13

Method

- ◆ Boil all ingredients and then let it cool

- ◆ Pour into a small round mold and allow it to set in a refrigerator overnight

RED VELVET TUILE

Icing sugar	50 g
All-purpose flour	50 g
Egg white	50 g
Melted Arla Pro Butter	50 g

Method

- ◆ Mix all ingredients and spread on the baking mat as thin as we can. Bake to 180°C for 5 minutes.

LEMON CURD

Granulated sugar	282 g
Arla Pro Butter	282 g
Lemon Zest	10 g

Egg Yolks	90 g
Lemon Juice	150 g
Gelatin Leaf	2 g

Method

- ◆ In a 2-quart saucepan combine lemon juice, lemon zest, sugar, eggs and butter. Cook for about 6 minutes over medium-low heat until thick enough to hold marks from whisk and just when bubbles appear on the surface.

February 2022 **Gulf Gourmet**

chefID
YOUNG CHEF CHAMPIONSHIP

RISE OF THE FOOTSOLDIERS

One is shy, the other as confident as they come. But this contrast is what makes their personalities bounce off each other. Chefs **Shaikh Soleman** and **Amir Khan**, fellow Indians and colleagues from Asha's Restaurant, are all set to offer some serious rivalry to others at the ChefID Young Chef Championship

SHAIKH SOLEMAN

They say that the apple doesn't fall too far from the tree. Sometimes, this is a good thing. Like in the case of Chef Shaikh Soleman.

His father was a chef at a hotel in the east Indian state of Odisha. His brother is a demi chef de partie at the Jebel Ali Golf Resort in Dubai and his uncle is a chef in the UK. Clearly, the family takes

cooking very seriously, much to the delight of anyone who has sampled the dishes of Chef Soleman.

The 29-year-old commis chef from





SHAIKH SOLEMAN



AMIR KHAN



It's a beautiful place and I also learnt a lot there in the three years that I worked in Munnar

Asha's Indian restaurant specialises in Indian curries and tandoor items. At the restaurant, which is located in Wafi City, he handles the tandoor section. By participating in competitions, Chef Soleman now wants to build upon his skills as well as gain some exposure.

Born in Odisha, a small state in the east

of India, the chef followed his father into the profession when he finished high school. "My first real job was in a different location – Kerala – in the south of India," he recalls. "I started my career at the Club Mahindra Holidays at Munnar." A quaint hill station in the Western Ghats mountain range in Kerala, Munnar used to be a former resort for the British elite during India's colonisation. The charming town dotted with tea plantations is a popular tourist destination. "It's a beautiful place and I also learnt a lot there in the three years that I worked in Munnar."

Fascinated by the beauty of Kerala, Chef Soleman decided to explore other parts of the state. He took up jobs at the Poovar Island Resort in Trivandrum and the Lalit Resort & Spa Bekal at Kasaragod before getting a break in



I have been working here for three years in the biryani section. I specialise in chicken tikka biryani and mutton biryani

Saudi Arabia. "In 2015, I joined the Hotel Altakhasosi Conference Banquet in Riyadh as demi chef de partie. That was my first experience in the Middle East."

Chef Soleman enjoyed his time in Saudi. He also visited the religious sites of

Mecca and Medina while there. After a couple of years in Riyadh, the chef returned to India to work at the ITC Group's Fortune Hotel in Trivandrum. But within a year, he went back to the Middle East, this time with a job at Asha's. "A friend of mine was working here and he helped me get this job."

This was four years ago. Chef Soleman has been with Asha's since.

Sometime in the future, he would like to work in a European country to widen his exposure to the world. The chef has also set a target of becoming an executive chef in the next 10 years.

For now though, he is focusing on showing the judges of the ChefID competition how east and west can come together beautifully on a plate. How's that for bringing a lot of excitement to the table!

AMIR KHAN

Providing the perfect foil to Chef Soleman's dish at the competition is fellow Indian chef Amir Khan. The 21-year-old from Lucknow in North India shares his

name with a very popular Bollywood star. While you are unlikely to see Chef Amir act in the next box office blockbuster, you will definitely see his star power in the desserts he is serving at the ChefID competition. "It's a chocolate dessert with raspberry, blueberry, blackberry, dragon fruit and chocolate crumble," he smiles when you ask him what he has up his sleeve for the competition.

Interestingly, the young chef is not from the pastry kitchen. He actually handles the biryani section at Asha's restaurant. But he dreams of being a master of all kitchens and that's where his pastry expertise comes from. "I have been working here for three years in the biryani section. I specialise in chicken tikka biryani and mutton biryani."

One of the most loved dishes in the Middle East and Indian subcontinent, biryani is essentially spiced rice with meat, egg and potatoes. There are many variations across regions. Often, it is a festival favourite in Muslim homes. So what is Chef Amir's secret to a good biryani? "Garam masala, good-quality meat and my talent," he says with candid

confidence. Instead of using ready spices, he makes them from scratch and that's what makes his dishes special.

Chef Amir is the only professional chef in his family. Even without any culinary role models, he knew he loved food enough to want to make a career in it. After high school, the chef obtained a three-year degree in hotel management from the Institute of Hotel and Tourism Management in Kanpur in North India and then interned at the ITC Group's Fortune Select hotel in the celebrated pink city of Jaipur.

After doing a couple of short stints in Kanpur, he moved to Dubai three years ago with the job at Asha's. Although Chef Amir has no set ambition for his career, he does want to get quick promotions and rise up the ranks in his chosen profession. He is also passionately curious about the industry. This is why, he wants to master every section of a restaurant, be it the hot kitchen or pastry or cold kitchen.

And what does he want from the competition? "Learn new things and have fun doing it," he says.

Pan Seared Saffron Marinated Beef Tenderloin with Coconut Curry Sauce

FOR MARINATION

Beef Tenderloin (Certified Angus Beef)	180 g
Extra Virgin Olive Oil	50 ml
Fresh Lemon Juice	15 ml
Saffron strands	1 g
Tap Water	15 ml
Black Peppercorn, cracked	3 g
Maldon Sea Salt	2 g

Method

- ◆ Mix water and saffron strands for 10 minutes to make saffron water and keep aside.
- ◆ In a small mixing bowl, marinate beef tenderloin, olive oil, lemon juice, saffron water, salt and cracked

black pepper. Marinate for at least 15 minutes.

FOR COCONUT CURRY SAUCE

Coconut Milk Powder	100 g
Tap Water	200 g
Iodized Salt	1 g
Black Pepper, cracked	1 g

Method

- ◆ SIn a small mixing bowl add coconut milk powder, then warm tap water and mix it well.
- ◆ On a small saucepan, add butter, chopped garlic, madras curry powder and sauté it.
- ◆ Add coconut mixture, let it boil and then add cream.
- ◆ Season with salt and pepper to taste.
- ◆ Cook on a slow fire until it becomes medium thick and then keep aside.

FOR MIXED CAPSICUM

Red Capsicum, small dice	20 g
Yellow Capsicum, small dice	20 g
Green Capsicum, small dice	20 g
Purple Cabbage, small dice	20 g
Extra Virgin Olive Oil	50 ml
Lemon Juice	10 ml
Salt	a pinch
Black Pepper, cracked	a pinch
Silver Skin Onion	20 g
Saffron Water	15 ml

Method

- ◆ Prepare all the vegetable cuts as desired.
- ◆ In a small mixing bowl, add all the capsicum and purple cabbage, add olive oil and lemon juice and season with salt pepper. Keep aside.
- ◆ In a small bowl, add saffron water and silver skin onion and mix it well to make yellow pearl onion. In another small



bowl, add silver skin onion and beetroot juice to make red pearl onion.

COOKING AND PLATING

Marinated Beef Tenderloin	180 g
Olive Oil	30 ml
Coconut Curry Sauce	100 ml
Capsicum mixture	60 g
Red Pearl Onion	10 g

Yellow Pearl Onion	10 g
Salt and Pepper	a pinch

Method

- ◆ Heat a small pan and add a bit of olive oil and sear the marinated beef tenderloin until it is done (preferably medium). Let it rest for 3 minutes.
- ◆ Slice the seared tenderloin to a preferred size.

- ◆ Place the cooked coconut curry sauce on the middle of the plate.
- ◆ Top it with sliced seared beef tenderloin.
- ◆ Top with mixed capsicum and place the silver skin onion on the sides of the steak.
- ◆ Garnish with fresh chervil sprigs.



Dark Chocolate Lava Cake, Exotic Fruits, Mango and Berry Coulis

LAVA CAKE MIXTURE

Pasteurized Eggs	5
Unsalted Butter	156 g
70% Dark Chocolate Chips	156 g
Refined Flour	80 g
Sugar White Granulated	156 g

Method

- ◆ In a small mixing bowl add egg and sugar, beat it until floppy using slow speed mixer.
- ◆ Then on a small cooking pan, melt chocolate and butter together.
- ◆ Then add flour on melted chocolate mixture.
- ◆ Then add the chocolate mixture to the egg mixture slowly until it mixes well.
- ◆ Transfer to a container.

RASPBERRY COULIS

Raspberry, frozen	200 g
Sugar White Granulated	50 g

Method

- ◆ In a small pan boil raspberry and sugar

and mix well.

- ◆ Let it cool down before blending it to a smooth paste.

ALPHONSO MANGO COULIS

Alphonso Mango	200 g
White Granulated Sugar	50 g

Method

- ◆ In a small pan boil the mango and sugar, and mix it well.
- ◆ Let it cool down before using a blender to create a smooth paste. Drizzle sugar on top.

INGREDIENTS

Granulated White Sugar	200 g
Tap Water	50 ml

Method

- ◆ Use a small pan to melt sugar on low heat. Add a little bit of water.
- ◆ Place grease proof paper on a working table and using a fork, drizzle the melted sugar into a shape you like.

OREO COOKIES CRUMBLED

Oreo Cookies	60 g
Melted Butter	20 g

Method

- ◆ Crumble the cookies in a small mixing bowl. Add melted butter slowly to form a crumble.

PLATING

Lava Cake Mixture	60 g
Butter	10 g
Granulated White Sugar	5 g
Fresh Blackberry	5 g
Fresh Blueberry	5 g
Fresh Raspberry	5 g
Dragon Fruit	10 g
Alphonso Mango	10 g
Oreo Cookies Crumble	10 g

Method

- ◆ Gather all ingredients and keep aside.
- ◆ Wrap the inner sides of a ramekin with butter paper and add granulated sugar.
- ◆ Then add the chocolate lava mixture and bake it for 10 minutes in a pre-heated oven at 180°C.
- ◆ Avoid overcooking or it could get hard.
- ◆ Plating the dish as shown in the photograph.
- ◆ Topped with red currant sprigs and gold leaf.



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MR NICE GUY

From the shores of Bollywood land to the hallowed halls of Dubai gastronomy, Chef **Bijendra Ramola** has undertaken a journey that most can only dream of. Yet, the head chef of Jumeirah Creekside Hotel remains a humble soul, focused on putting a smile on the faces of both his guests and his subordinates alike...

Life is beautiful. What's even more beautiful is making others' lives better.

This is the simple philosophy that drives Chef Bijendra Ramola, the head chef of Jumeirah Creekside Hotel. In every chef he hires, he looks for a passion for food and a commitment to the culinary cause. And why not? It is these exact traits that have made him one of the best ambassadors of the hospitality industry.

With more than two decades of experience, the 47-year-old chef blends creativity and culinary skills with a strong sense of business and a feel for people. His engaging personality and a sense of community make him a motivational manager, someone who can convince teams to give their best even amid challenges. But all this doesn't even begin to describe Chef Bijendra.

Read on to know more about the chef and his secret sauce for success...

A SIMPLE BEGINNING

Chef Bijendra moved with his family to Mumbai, the land of Bollywood, when he was just two and a half years old. After finishing high school, he wasn't quite sure which way to go career-wise. Hotel management wasn't his first choice. It was simply a term that was thrown around him so often that it got him curious. "At the time, I was also thinking about going into engineering but getting a seat is usually tough because competition is fierce," he says.



Initially, I wasn't sure which section of hospitality I wanted to make a career in. But after going through different sections, I realised my real interest lay in cooking

Mumbai had a famous hotel management college but the selection process was nightmarishly strict, making it difficult to get through. Ever the practical person, Chef Bijendra decided to take the private college route, joining the Hotel Management and Catering Technology course offered by DY Patil Institute of Hotel Management. "Initially, I wasn't sure which section of hospitality I wanted to make a career in. But after going through different sections, I realised my real interest lay in cooking."

Passion for the vocation developed slowly but surely.

As the batch approached passing out, on-campus recruitment began and an excellent door into the culinary world opened. "There were 20 of us shortlisted by Oberoi Flight Services and two of us

were eventually hired. We were lucky to begin with such a marquee brand."

FIRST FLIGHT

Joining the flight kitchen of the prestigious Oberoi Group as demi chef de partie in 1997, Chef Bijendra embarked on a promising culinary journey. The kitchen produced average 4,000 meals a day, catering to domestic and international airlines as diverse as British Airways, KLM and Lufthansa. During peak season, the count would go up to 10,000-11,000 meals a day. Over three years, Chef Bijendra learnt the nuances of a large operation, including portioning and cooking for less-than-perfect storage situations. He also received hands-on education on hygiene concepts and kitchen techniques.

These experiences proved valuable when at the turn of the century, he got an opportunity to work at the flight kitchen of Saudi Arabian Airlines in Riyadh. "It was thrice the size of the Oberoi flight kitchen. At first, it was really exciting but eventually, I realised that there was limited learning because the focus was on mass production." Two years later, Chef Bijendra started searching for a chance to build on his cooking skills and go deeper into the hotels industry.

"A chef I knew from my previous job worked in Dubai. When he came to know that I was looking for an entry into the hotels industry, he offered me a position at the Jumeirah Beach Club Resort & Spa."

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And so began his romance with the Jumeirah group.

GROWING WITH JUMEIRAH

Chef Bijendra joined the Jumeirah Beach Club as demi chef de partie and climbed to the level of junior sous chef. The

five-star resort located at the heart of Dubai has extensive sports and leisure facilities with three dining outlets - Club House Terrace, Prasinos and Sunset Bar. It has around 50 villas and five meeting rooms in addition to banqueting facilities for around 800 people. Chef

Bijendra was deployed at the 120-cover Club House Terrace restaurant, where he mainly handled the banquet operations.

Continuing his upward trajectory, the Indian chef joined the Jumeirah Emirates Tower in mid-2007, slowly



When I joined as chef de cuisine in 2011, my aim was to learn how to set up a hotel from scratch

rising to the position of chef de cuisine of the main kitchen and room service. The property, located on Sheikh Zayed Road, is at the centre of Dubai's commercial business district. The twin towers of the property are separated into an office building and a hotel. The 400-room hotel



has as many as 15 restaurants, lounges and bars. Chef Bijendra's responsibilities included managing the main kitchen with a banqueting operation for 5,000 people. Among the events that his team did the catering for were the Dubai Air show, Dubai Horse Race and several cricket events. The chef also worked for the Italian outlet Mosaico for a year.

Four years later, he seized the opportunity to join the team opening the Jumeirah Creekside Hotel. It's been a decade since and Chef Bijendra cannot imagine being anywhere else. "When I joined as chef de cuisine in 2011, my aim was to learn how to set up a hotel from scratch. In the 10 years that I have been here, I was promoted to executive sous chef, then to head chef."

The five-star property overlooking the Dubai Creek is something of an 'art hotel'. "It has a collection of 480 contemporary art pieces. There are nearly 300 rooms, six restaurants and bars, and 26 meeting rooms." The head chef, who has a team of around 35 staff members, is responsible for three outlets, in-room dining and banqueting. His tasks include a smooth catering experience for events such as the ATP Tennis Championship every year. For the size of the hotel, the banqueting service is pretty impressive. It can cater to almost 1,000 people in the garden area and around 450 people indoors.

"Pre-Covid, my team had more than 80 members. Now it has shrunk to less than half that number. What I like about this property is that it feels like a family-owned property. It's small and charming and everyone knows everyone else. In total, we are 180 employees and we treat each like family. That's why these 10 years feel like just 10 months to me!"

LEADING BY EXAMPLE

Chef Bijendra's management style is rather American. A hands-on head chef, he likes to work alongside his team to keep his cooking skills fresh as ever. "Once you sit in the managerial chair,



Once you sit in the managerial chair, you tend to lose your culinary touch. I try to avoid that

you tend to lose your culinary touch. I try to avoid that."

Being hands-on also serves to motivate his team when they see that their manager is with them no matter how tough the situation is. Given the nature of the industry, challenges come from unexpected quarters but teamwork is the best tool to overcome such issues. Chef Bijendra recalls an incident when shawarma was to be served at an event but the preparatory notes did not include the dish. "Cooking shawarma takes some time. You have to put it an hour and a half before serving time, so it can grill to perfection. The event manager came to me just 45 minutes before the opening time and flagged the issue."

Leaving guests wanting was not an option. So the team got busy trying to find a solution. They cooked the shawarma in small batches. The chicken was cooked partly before being added to the grill, so it would be done by the time the guests trickled in. "We managed to pull it off but it was stressful! Even a simple dish can turn an experience into a bad one if plans go awry. Such is the nature of our profession."

As a cook, Chef Bijendra has always been a multi-cuisine expert. He likes fusion foods and celebrates the fact that even his native Indian cuisine has moved on from just butter chicken to include more international flavours. For eating, he tends to favour Thai food, which he finds very flavourful. "I can eat Thai curry for lunch and dinner. I love it!"

PERSONAL DIARY

So is he the designated cook at home too? "After 10-12 hours in the professional kitchen, no way!" he laughs. Chef Bijendra is father to two sons. His wife works in the IT industry in software development. Sometimes, she also has to work long hours and that's why she is rather understanding of the demands of his workplace. "She knows my pain and I know hers. So we never fight with each other."

Although the chef loves his profession, he discourages his children from following in his footsteps because he knows the challenges of the industry. "But if they do want to be chefs, then of course I won't stand in their way. The main thing is to make them understand that it is tough job that requires absolute passion and dedication. Otherwise, you cannot do it over the long term."



I want to retire by the age of 50 or 52 and then explore the world. I want to give back to society what I have gained through these years of experience

He takes the same approach to screening young chefs while hiring. "The first thing I ask them is why they want to be chefs. Understanding their motivation is important. 'I want to be a chef because my father is a chef' is not a good enough reason. You have to love to

cook, to spend lot of time and effort into honing your skills and developing new dishes, learning from whatever avenues you can. It's not a 9 to 5 job. It can easily take over your entire life."

Even after so many years in the profession, Chef Bijendra's commitment to exploration has not diminished. Ask him about his future plans and he says: "I want to retire by the age of 50 or 52 and then explore the world. I want to give back to society what I have gained through these years of experience. I would love to teach people who cannot afford a formal education and help them build their culinary careers. Even if I can get a few such careers off the ground, it will give me immense satisfaction."

You can see that Chef Bijendra understands the true spirit of hospitality. After all, isn't it all about loving food and people?





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MAZEN AND THE ART OF CULINARY EXCELLENCE

When you work in an industry as demanding as hospitality, it's hard to keep your joie de vivre alive. Except if you are Chef **Mazen Khadour**. The cluster executive chef of Wyndham Ajman sees every single day as an opportunity to make the world a better place through good food and good mood...

What do cows and icecream have in common? Other than the fact that cows supply the milk that icecream is made of, they both came together years ago to set Chef Mazen Khadour down a path of success. A path fraught with challenges but also full of excitement and satisfaction.

Since starting down that road in his teens, the cluster executive chef of Wyndham Ajman has notched up a multitude of experiences – working in

Europe, opening multiple restaurants including his own, running the operations of a big hotel, and leading events and teams to success.

That is just the tip of the iceberg of his real contributions to his chosen industry.

In between setting up high standards for the properties under him and innovating on their culinary and experiential offerings, he also participates in topics that will shape the future of the hospitality industry. He serves on

several panels to reduce food wastage, save energy and bring green initiatives to the industry.

Are you as curious about Chef Mazen as we are? You don't have to wait too long to know him better. In a chat, the Syrian-born chef reveals the shades of the *culinaire*, the leader, the family man, the friend and the colleague in him to *Gulf Gourmet*...

FROM COWS TO COOKING

Chef Mazen's first exposure to the hospitality industry was at a very young age. Growing up in the historical city of Baniyas in Syria, he often accompanied family members to restaurants during the operations of their cow-supply business. "We were not into butchery, but into supplying cows to restaurants. That was our family business," he says while rewinding back to his childhood. Visiting restaurants often made quite an impression on the little boy, who was already a curious soul.

In addition, his fascination with food grew slowly at home. Watching his mother cook for a big family and being her 'official taster' meant he got to learn the nuances of good food, from flavours to combinations. "My mother used to do a lot of cooking because many of our family parties used to be in my house. We are also a very big family, with 11 members including five brothers and



We are also a very big family, with 11 members including five brothers and four sisters. So there was never a dearth of hungry mouths for my mother to feed



Chef Mazen's wife with their two daughters and their newborn son



four sisters. So there was never a dearth of hungry mouths for my mother to feed," he laughs.

To indulge his curiosity when he was in his mid-teens, Chef Mazen decided to take up a part-time job at an icecream factory in Damascus, which also had a famous speciality restaurant only for icecream lovers. "The factory used to sell icecream to supermarkets and restaurants. They also had a very famous restaurant where they served only icecream of all kinds of flavours. It was very popular." At the time, technology was not so advanced and frequent electricity outages made it difficult to make and store such items. "I learnt to make icecream manually – bring the ice, mix it with milk, add flavours. It was a



I learnt to make icecream manually – bring the ice, mix it with milk, add flavours. It was a traditional technique but it was exciting

traditional technique but it was exciting. Even today, they make icecream in the same way and that is part of the charm of their products."

To a young boy, this was a fascinating process. Adding to the excitement was a uniform that he got to don and pretend to be a 'kitchen soldier'. Sometimes, he would bring home these cold desserts for the family parties. "It was a nice time and a great introduction into the world of hospitality," he says fondly.

Later, Chef Mazen joined a restaurant serving traditional Syrian food as a cook. He also went to a hotel management school. As he went deeper into the topic of food, he decided to spread his wings and explore other vistas and foreign shores.

A WORLD FULL OF EXPERIENCES

In the initial years of his career, Chef Mazen worked in Lebanon and Jordan as

well as in Budapest in Hungary. "There was a Syrian restaurant in Budapest and the owner wanted someone to make authentic shawarma. That was how I got the job. Although I was making shawarma there, I also learnt other cuisines such as Italian." Leveraging these skills later on, he went to Lebanon and started an Italian restaurant. "I stayed there for a year and half. I was in my early 20s back then." Subsequently, he went to Jordan as a part of the pre-opening team. The team opened six restaurants, most of them serving Arabic cuisine and one serving Mediterranean cuisine with Italian and French influences. These experiences shaped Chef Mazen's skills in the kitchen and exposed him to international standards.

Towards the end of 2001, he returned to Damascus to join the Al Sham Hotel as demi chef de partie. In 2004, he changed and then left Syria for Dubai two years later, joining the Ritz Carlton Hotel. "I started at the banqueting service, doing Italian cuisine. In some time, I was promoted to chef de partie."

In 2009, Chef Mazen returned to Syria when Dubai was affected by the global financial crisis. That was when he dabbled in the idea of entrepreneurship, opening three restaurants with the help of his brothers. Chef Mazen managed the operations and was also the chef, with his brothers providing support whenever needed. Unfortunately, the war in Syria two years later forced the closure of the restaurants and Chef Mazen returned to Dubai to join the Movenpick Hotel JBR.

Later, he moved to the Ramada Hotel & Suites in Ajman as executive sous chef and eventually rose the ranks to cluster executive chef.

According to Chef Mazen, every day has something new to offer at Ramada, which is why he has been with the brand for nearly a decade. His first project was to bring certain certifications to the hotel. Over the years, he has helped open several hotels and restaurants



under the brand and launch projects to improve operations and service.

AN EXCITING ROLE

As cluster executive chef, Chef Mazen has three Wyndham Ajman properties under his charge - Ramada Hotel & Suites, Ramada Beach Hotel and Wyndham Garden. He is also responsible for the operations of several restaurants under the properties, including Orchid, King's Grill, Gourmet Garden and Seascape. The chef is especially proud of the seafood offerings of these

restaurants. "My role has shifted now to a managerial role rather than cooking. Still, I never miss an opportunity to get into the kitchen." He personally trains his teams and joins them when they are facing challenges to show them how to overcome any issues in the kitchen. He also enjoys working alongside his teams, getting to indulge in the joys of cooking while mentoring younger chefs.

Working 14-15 hours a day is hardly a cakewalk. But when Chef Mazen wears his uniform every morning, he feels a



My role has shifted now to a managerial role rather than cooking. Still, I never miss an opportunity to get into the kitchen

He believes that his chefs “cook from the heart”. Chef Mazen tends to look for chefs from a restaurant background because they have a greater focus on taste and presentation than do chefs from a hotel background, who might have a greater focus on catering to large volumes. Other than the restaurants, the properties that Chef Mazen handles also have ballroom facilities, room service, banqueting facilities and meeting rooms, all of which have to be serviced by his teams.

AN AMBASSADOR FOR AJMAN

Ajman is the fifth-largest city in the UAE. Although it does not quite enjoy the luxury reputation of Dubai and Abu Dhabi, the city is gaining exposure for its culinary offerings. Chef Mazen hopes to further contribute to this reputation with the delicious dishes at the restaurants under him. “I was speaking to the head of tourism in Ajman the other day and I told him that Ajman needs more exposure in media about its F&B offerings. While Dubai has a lot more to offer in terms of experiences, Ajman is not far behind when it comes to the quality and taste of food, especially seafood. The city also has retained its old-world charm, which the bigger cities of the UAE are slowly losing as they become more international.”

Chef Mazen’s team also does the catering for the Ajman University. Sometimes the size goes up to 6,000 covers.

In addition, he is part of several projects

to promote the F&B experiences of Ajman as well as to bring sustainability with regards to environment to the city’s hospitality sector. “From compost machines to recycling waste and building urban farms, there is so much that can be done in this sphere. We aim to be a zero-waste kitchen. This is what I love about working for Wyndham Ajman. Every year we embark on something new. It’s like having a new job every year!”

GETTING PERSONAL

Interestingly, even as Chef Mazen went deeper into the hospitality industry, his family moved on from the cow supply business to a completely different industry – hairdressing. “All my brothers have become hairstylists and some of them work in Abu Dhabi. My wife, Lina, is also a hairstylist.” The couple has three children – two daughters and a son. “My son is just four months old.”

A friendly person, Chef Mazen has a pretty vibrant social life outside work, whenever his schedules allow. However, given his expertise, a lot of it circles around food. “I get many invites for restaurants, even from friends. People want my feedback on dishes for events. In my free time, I enjoy playing cards with my friends and going to shisha bars.” He also mentors chefs who dream of opening their own restaurants. With his past experience, he can offer them not only suggestions on how to set up their businesses but also how to make their business resilient to tough times.

Does he see himself starting a restaurant again? “The equipment from my last entrepreneurial effort are still in storage. I might try my hand at it again but this time, I will open a franchise restaurant instead of doing something completely on my own.”

Even if he does end up opening a franchise restaurant, we have no doubt that Chef Mazen will bring his own signature finesse to the experience.

And that’s worth waiting for!

sense of accomplishment and pride in his profession. He also looks forward to the opportunities the day could present.

Usually, he swings by the kitchens to offer a word or two of motivation to his staff. “Night shifts are especially hard on the staff and giving them encouragement takes some of the edge off. I rose from the lower levels to this level, so I am aware of what a great job my team does. As a manager, I appreciate the value of appreciation to help my staff deal with a demanding job.”

MAN OF ACTION

Challenges discourage most people. But not Chef **Chamil Sanjeewa**. Seeing the demands of a culinary profession as a child did nothing to dampen his enthusiasm for spreading happiness through food. Today, the cluster executive chef of Radisson Blu Yas Island not just survives but thrives amid challenges...

If your father has a demanding professional life fraught with extended work hours, hardly any days off and little time for family, would you follow in his footsteps? Now that would be an obvious 'no', wouldn't it?

Chef Chamil Sanjeewa did not get the memo.

His mother would have preferred him to be a doctor. But she couldn't win against the lure of curing people through good food. After all, it might well have been a part of his genes.

More than two decades later, Chef

Chamil has no regrets. Demanding as it may be, the culinary profession has taken him to shores he would never have dreamed of visiting and won him the love and affection of bosses, colleagues and foodies alike. What more can you want from life?

Chef Chamil's position as the cluster executive chef of Radisson Blu Yas Island is something of a reward for more than a decade of hard work at the hotel chain. He manages two properties – the Radisson Blu by Park Inn, a 200-room property and Radisson Blu Yas Island, a 400-room hotel. In addition, his team handles the requirements of three

signature outlets - Belgium Café Yas Island; Garden, the Italian restaurant; and a Mexican restaurant at the Park Inn property serving south American cuisine. There are also the dining restaurants at the two properties and two pool bars, plus room service. That's a lot of managing to do, work that undoubtedly requires a sharp mind, a disciplined hand and an innovative mindset. But ask Chef Chamil what is the achievement that makes him the proudest and he says: "Including last year, I have done 10 Formula One event catering!"

Meeting the food needs of 5,000-6,000 people is hardly a cakewalk. But with his



Chef Chamil with his wife, two daughters and son

talented and motivated team as well as his inspiring leadership, Chef Chamil pulls it off every single time. But more about that later.

AN UNLIKELY CAREER

If Chef Chamil's mother had her way, he would have been a doctor. Growing up in coastal Sri Lanka where you find the "best Asian corals", he was something of all 'all-rounder' as a kid – good in studies and sports. "I used to walk to school, about 2 kilometres through lush greenery, and I participated in everything from marathon to karate to cricket. In my teen years, I even played for the national team," he says with fond nostalgia. It was a happy childhood, dotted with hanging out by the river with friends, swimming in natural waters and fishing in boats.



Including last year, I have done 10 Formula One event catering!

Although his father was a professional chef, Chef Chamil had no such ambitions during his early years. In fact, he had a rather negative view of the profession, reinforced by his mother's stories about how difficult a chef's life was. "She would tell me how my father hardly slept, worked double shifts and struggled a lot." When his father lost his job, a

teenaged Chef Chamil stepped up to take care of the family. He told his father he wanted to help and asked him how he could do that.

Around the same time, his father got a job in Dubai. "I had just finished school and I started at a hotel school. In 1997, my father moved to Dubai. Three years later, I joined him in Dubai as I got a job as a commis chef at the Horses Beach Hotel, an outlet of the Jebel Ali Golf Resort." Joining as a commis II chef, Chef Chamil learnt the nitty-gritty of international service at the all-dining restaurant for nearly five years. "Later, when a chef I worked with moved to Doha in 2006, to the Movenpick Hotel Tower and Suites, he asked me if I would like to join him as the sous chef." After getting married in 2007, Chef Chamil moved to Movenpick Doha in 2008. "My chef colleague was so nice that he even got my wife a job as a kitchen secretary. We worked there for more than a year. Then, my chef needed to move to Tunisia so he recommended me to one of his friends. I came back to Dubai to open the Radisson Blu Yas Island in 2009."

A FRIEND FOR LIFE

Chef Chamil has been with the Radisson group since. Around four years after joining the group, he was promoted to executive sous chef. He opened a property for the chain in Oman but was called back in 2017 as the Radisson Blu Yas Island team was struggling with catering.

The experience served to build upon Chef Chamil's skills. While the Oman property was a single property, the Yas Island is more diverse and had greater needs. "I have two teams but we function as one team of nearly 95 people. It's quite an experience." The hotel has a catering capacity of 5,000-6,000 people. It does many signature events in Abu Dhabi, such as Formula One and World Tennis Championship.

The menu is created by Chef Chamil's team. As an expert in various cuisines,





“

I used to walk to school, about 2 kilometres through lush greenery, and I participated in everything from marathon to karate to cricket. In my teen years, I even played for the national team

he offers up Italian, Mexican, Belgian, Dutch and German cuisines, with chefs from these nationalities bringing their traditional nuances to the menu.

When it comes to opening new hotels, Chef Chamil is Radisson Blu's go-to guy. "Whenever a new Radisson property is planned in the UAE, I have to support them in setting up the brand standards. It's rather fulfilling."

Every time Chef Chamil sets up a new property, it takes him back to his first pre-opening experience in Oman. "It was quite a challenge. Setting up Radisson Sohar took me around two and half months of umpteen meetings and events, banquets, ballroom weddings, beach parties and so on. They didn't have any catering. So I had to set up the catering. Slowly, we built it up to a capacity of 700 people for weddings and events."

The ballroom capacity at the time was



I have two teams but we function as one team of nearly 95 people. It's quite an experience

1,000, so the team also did a couple of corporate events to increase visibility. Another event was for the Oman police, featuring 500 covers.

Chef Chamil was then asked to develop the menu for a famous night club in Muscat, which he did, bringing it to the high standards of the Radisson group.

More excitement came in the form of

the opening of Louvre museum in Abu Dhabi. "We did the opening. It was 14 days of catering from scratch for a grand ceremony. Almost 30,000 meals. People were sceptical about my abilities first because they thought I didn't know the UAE market well. But the general manager was supportive and that made all the difference." Another memorable event at Yas Island with almost 4,000 covers over three days.

Successfully closing these events gave Chef Chamil immense confidence in his abilities. "The key is planning ahead. If you know what you are doing, it gets easier."

YOUNG BUT MATURE

Perhaps it's these skills that helped the Sri Lankan become an executive chef at a rather young age of 40. Was it difficult to get people to take him seriously as a young senior manager? "Not really. Maybe because I am very transparent about how I want things to





Whenever a new Radisson property is planned in the UAE, I have to support them in setting up the brand standards. It's rather fulfilling



be done. People see merit in my strategy and execution and that automatically convinces them of my abilities to lead.”

It helps that he manages to flawlessly execute events even when the situation is less-than-perfect. Take for example the Formula One event amid the Covid-19 pandemic. A number of hygiene protocols and movement restrictions made it tougher to move around easily and slowed down the delivery of service. “It was a bit of a nightmare. We had to get the products and disinfect them. Moving between teams was difficult and setting up a VIP buffet with strong attention to hygiene was quite a challenge. It was four sleepless nights for me and my team but we didn’t give up.” Chef Chamil credits his team for always having his back. According to him, their professionalism and enthusiasm make the most difficult situations easy to deal with.

To further enhance his network as well as contribute to the larger hospitality



Setting up Radisson Sohar took me around two and half months of umpteen meetings and events, banquets, ballroom weddings, beach parties and so on

industry, Chef Chamil is an active member of the Emirates Culinary Guild. “I first joined them in Abu Dhabi in 2004. I lend whatever support I can and I also attend the monthly executive chef meetings regularly.” The chef and his team were participants of the Guinness world record for the largest desserts buffet in Abu Dhabi two years ago. “Our Mexican restaurant did 50 kinds of desserts from Mexico. It was thrilling!”

Unlike many chefs who resent the extreme challenges of a hospitality career, Chef Chamil thrives in it. He does not see himself moving into any role that slows his professional life down. That said, having been with Radisson for a long time, he would eventually like to experience the operations of other chains. “This career is a very satisfying career. I would go as far to say it is a noble profession. Few things make people as happy as food and a good experience is something that stays with them forever. I like to spread joy through food.”

A FAMILY MAN

In between delicious food and unforgettable experiences, it is easy to forget that chefs also have a family life and have responsibilities other than those towards their patrons. Although his busy schedules do not allow him the luxury of spending as much time as he would like with his family, Chef Chamil does make it a point to be there for his wife and children when they need him.

“I have two girls and a boy. They were all born in different parts of the Middle East. My first daughter, who is 12 years old now, was born in Doha; my son, who is five and a half years old, was born in Oman; and my second daughter was born in Abu Dhabi. She is just three and a half years old.” Once the children were born, his wife turned her attention full-time to raising them as the demands of the industry make it difficult to raise a family when both parents work.

As for Chef Chamil’s father, who started him off on his culinary journey, he’s now retired in Sri Lanka after 37 years of being in the industry. His older sister lives with his parents and takes care of their needs.

For Chef Chamil, it has been a wild ride, even if it wasn’t a planned one. Given his young age and umpteen achievements, it’s clear that he has much more to offer going forward. We, for one, cannot wait to see what else he has up his sleeve!





Few things make people as happy as food and a good experience is something that stays with them forever. I like to spread joy through food

US\$ 3 billion

what's your GCC market share?

The UAE alone has over 750 hotels.
Each hotel has an Executive Chef.
Each Executive Chef has an annual budget.
It ranges from AED 1 million - US\$ 3 million.

There are over 7,000 independent restaurants in the UAE.
Each restaurant has a Head Chef.
Each Head Chef has an annual budget.
It ranges from AED 100,000 - US\$ 1 million.

Now you do the maths.

The largest body that speaks for this group of Chefs is The Emirates Culinary Guild (ECG).
ECG organises Salon Culinaire at Gulfood Dubai, La Cuisine by SIAL in Abu Dhabi and world-record breaking food events in the city.

Gulf Gourmet is the only magazine endorsed by the ECG.
It also influences non-ECG Chefs across the GCC and is distributed at World Association of Chefs Societies events around the globe.

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REACH

ENGAGE

INFLUENCE

ABOUT GULF GOURMET

- ▶ Most widely read magazine by Chefs & Decision Makers in the GCC
- ▶ Officially supported by the Emirates Culinary Guild
- ▶ Highest circulation in its category at 6,150 copies per month
- ▶ Readership estimates of nearly 11,276 per month
- ▶ Positively influencing the UAE food industry since 2006
- ▶ Recognised by the World Association of Chefs Societies
- ▶ Circulated at top regional and international culinary events

WHO READS IT?

▶ Executive Chefs	23%
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▶ 5-star Hotels	46%
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▶ Food Industry Suppliers	3%
▶ Large & Medium Food Retailers	2%



gulf
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Make a video WIN A TRIP TO ITALY

Emirates Culinary Guild is inviting culinary enthusiasts to a great online competition as part of the "Legumes from Europe" campaign being promoted by ANICAV.

ANICAV is the Italian Association of Canned Vegetables Industries, and the event is co-funded by the European Union. The competition is open to both professional and amateur Chefs.

The star ingredient in the recipes have to be...you guessed it, canned legumes from Europe. These are great products to work with, and a great recipe could do wonders for you.

The organizers are asking you to produce a 4-7 minute video showing you preparing your recipe. At least half of the recipe has to be using canned legumes from Europe.

If you think you have a chance to win the first prize trip to Italy or the even the 8th prize cash certificate worth AED200, then continue reading and check out all the rules and regulations carefully.

You can send multiple videos to create multiple chances of winning!

Prizes

Winner: Trip to Italy certificate

2nd Place: AED 2000 cash certificate

3rd Place: AED 1000 cash certificate

4th Place: AED 500 cash certificate

5th & 6th Place: AED 300 cash certificate each

7th & 8th Place: AED 200 cash certificate each

9th & 10th Place: Product hamper certificate

Rules and Regulations for the



Canned Legumes from Europe Online Competition

RULES

- a. Any professional chef or amateur cook can take part
- b. Show all the ingredients at the beginning of the video, highlight the canned legumes from Europe being used
- c. Send the recipe, ingredients, and method in English on the format supplied by the organizers
- d. Video should be between 4 -7 minutes
- e. Prepare 1 portion of your recipe
- f. The dish can be starter or main course, or can be a soup or wrap
- g. Canned Legumes from Europe must be the main product used in the dish – 50% of the recipe
- h. List of canned legumes from Europe:
 - ♦ Chickpeas
 - ♦ Cannellini beans
 - ♦ Red kidney beans (also organic)
 - ♦ Lentils
 - ♦ Green peas
- i. Video can be made by mobile phone or DSLR camera
- j. Make sure there is sufficient lighting used during filming to enhance the finished video
- k. Film in landscape for YouTube channel
- l. Music is not required, if you use background music make sure the music is free to use

Send your registration to:

emiratesculinaryguild@gmail.com

- ♦ All good videos will be posted on the Emirates Culinary Guild YouTube channel.
- ♦ If your video is selected for the YouTube channel, you will have the opportunity to watch, like and promote it to your colleagues and friends.
- ♦ Extra points will be awarded for the most viewed and liked videos.
- ♦ By sending your videos and recipes you agree that the ECG, ANICAV and their partners reserve the right to use them freely.
- ♦ Registration opens on February 15, 2022 and will close after one month.
- ♦ Competitors can enter multiple videos if they wish.
- ♦ Date of awards will be announced on May 15, 2022.



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February 2022 **Gulf Gourmet**

The Guild Meet

The first Guild meeting of the year was held at the Radisson Blu Hotel Dubai Deira Creek and was hosted by Executive Chef **Diyan Manjula De Silva** and his team. Here are images from the event that say senior chefs, junior chefs and corporate partners enjoy and evening of networking and more







newmembers



Giovanni De Angelis, General Director, receiving Emirates Culinary Guild Membership certificate from ECG President Chef Uwe Micheel

Natures Pearls: Easy to use, Bursting with Health

Following the success of the promotion and information campaign on the goodness of canned tomatoes launched in the USA, Japan, Korea and China in 2019, ANICAV has decided to share with professional and home cooks of the UAE the quality, safety and versatility of European and Italian canned legumes.

These protein packed beans and lentils truly are "Nature's Pearls": nature, as in only minimally processed (without additives) in order to be canned, keeping intact all of the texture and flavour characteristics of fresh and dried, and pearls, because they are a valuable treasure to keep in your kitchen.

Whether they are chickpeas, blackeyed peas, kidney beans, peas or lentils, they are so easy to use, they are practically instant! Just open the tin and add to



salads, soups, stews, sauces, pastas. And they are so versatile and delicious with the seasonal fresh things your garden or the market has to offer. Canned legumes are perfect for traditional dishes such as hummus, past, braises of meat, poultry or fish, bean soups, pilaffs, etc; and are equally terrific to have on hand for innovative and creative cooking: such as pureed for a sauce for shellfish, added to thin pancakes (crepes). If you like Mexican food, refried beans take mere minutes with canned borlotti or pinto beans.

Canned legumes are bursting with health, super high in protein and fibres as well

as many other vitamins, minerals and nutrients. Wonderful for omnivores, even more wonderful for vegetarians and vegans. If you are watching your health and that of your family, these legumes are surely an edible treasure to keep on hand.

Our three-year campaign, part financed by the European Commission, includes a website, promotions in supermarket point of sales, social media postings, as well as competitions with food bloggers and journalists. We will be present at Sial Middle East in December, scheduling press events in both Dubai and Abu Dhabi as well as chef contests in collaboration with ECG.

ANICAV is the National Association of Canned Vegetables Industries; with 90 member companies, it is the largest representative association of vegetable-canning companies in the world. ANICAV will also be present at the EXPO within the M-Eating Italy Pavillion.



Edgard Chalhoub, General Manager, ARAMTEC L.L.C., receiving Emirates Culinary Guild Membership certificate from ECG President Chef Uwe Mischeel

Arabian American Technology LLC (ARAMTEC)

Aramtec Aim to maintain the status of preferred supplier for all the partner brands it represents for UAE market. We believe that customer service and client satisfaction are the key for continuous success.

In UAE, ARAMTEC currently operates from its state-of-the-art office and warehouse facility in Dubai, Al-Quoz (Industrial Area) . The facility is a modern and secure warehouse complex comprising 110,000 sq. ft. of covered area with Temperature control Dry, Chilled, and Frozen storage facilities.

Our delivery fleet of 80 vehicles cover all 7 Emirates making Aramtec's strength its distribution reach. Aramtec has reinvented itself and has shown great strength in the most competitive of markets. Thanks to its well-trained staff of nearly 250 members and excellent management, suppliers



and customers alike will be delighted to call ARAMTEC its partner.

Our Facilities Offices and warehouses in Dubai & Abu Dhabi

- ♦ Dubai warehouse 110,000 sq. ft. of covered area
- ♦ Abu Dhabi warehouse 25,000 sq. ft. covered area
- ♦ Fleet of more than 75 temperature-controlled trucks
- ♦ Frozen, chilled and dry storage
- ♦ HACCP certified practices for food safety and handling 10,000 sq. ft. loading area
- ♦ Highly skilled and well-trained team
- ♦ 24x7 onsite security
- ♦ Computerized reporting system
- ♦ Pastry Demonstration kitchen

- ♦ Butchery
- ♦ Meat Dry-Ager

Proteins Category

- ♦ Aramtec has long-standing partnerships with some of the largest protein producers from USA, Australia, South Africa and Brazil.
- ♦ American Foods Group (AFG) is the 5th largest producer of box beef and provides USDA Prime, Choice & Angus exclusively to Aramtec.
- ♦ Margaret River produces the highest Australian Wagyu Beef through its Wagyu programs.
- ♦ Certified Angus Beef ® (CAB) distributors
- ♦ Certified Japanese Kobe Beef (score 10-12) distributors.
- ♦ Exclusive products to Aramtec : AFG, The Bachelor (JBS), Apeti (JBS), Red Gum (JBS), Yugo Wagyu.
- ♦ Aramtec is the Pioneer in introducing the highest quality U.S, Australian Beef across UAE.



Vijay Belwal, Head Food Service, M. H. Enterprises L.L.C and Rajan V. Veetil, Business Head, receiving Emirates Culinary Guild Membership certificate from ECG President Chef Uwe Micheel

MH ENTERPRISES L.L.C

M H Enterprises has an impressive legacy of partnership with international brands to offer a multitude of choices to our valuable customers

M H Enterprises has an impressive legacy of partnership with leading suppliers and brand representation. The associations with our partners range over one to 39 years and offer customers a multitude of choices in Horeca, distribution, food disposable products and chemical division.

Known as a reputed leader and an innovator, the group's corporate culture is one of dedication, hard work, respect and continuous improvement. As a matter of fact, the company measures its success and growth by customer satisfaction.

The firm has a clear vision for the



future and always looks out for new opportunities in the ever-growing market scenario. It continues to upgrade the internal process systems, business systems besides strengthening the existing core competencies by investing in the development of new capabilities to meet the growing challenges of the market.

M H Enterprises' prime objective and mission is to constantly strive towards

greater heights, to be a leading food and chemical distributor, processor and manufacturer in the GCC.

It will be achieved by the company's commitment to stringent business ideals like social commitment, maximize customer value, improving supplier partnership and becoming a preferred employer. The firm continues to uphold its values to grow and achieve further success.

It is an organization where distribution strength and marketing skills are translated into rapid growth of brands.

February 2022 **Gulf Gourmet**

newmembers



ADVANCED BAKING CONCEPT. LLC

Almost two decades ago, Advanced Baking Concept (ABC- Probake) introduced "fresh-from-frozen" concept to the GCC region that was already well-known and practiced in Europe. This concept not only ensures consistent high quality, flavourful, fresh or extended shelf life, it also allows customers to save time, resources, and money.

Probake is a division of Advanced Baking Concept, a Dubai based frozen food manufacturer. Our 6,000 square-meter production plant has been designed to fully support and adapt to customers' evolving needs. Located in Dubai, our state-of-the art facility has a yearly output of more than 20,000 metric tons.

ABC's commitment to quality and



innovation means that our facility and expertise are in constant evolution, allowing us to offer goods adapted to the needs of different industry professionals.

By investing in advanced freezing and baking technologies, we are able to control every aspect of the production process and crafting a diverse range of products that offers premium quality and practicality. Moreover, highly qualified and experienced French Pastry Chefs and Bakers are dedicated to cater all market requirements

and trends as well as to all HORECA professional's needs

Today, our fresh-from-frozen products have been joined by ready-to-bake, ready-to-thaw, ready-to-serve, and par-baked goods. It is through this approach of continuous advancement that we have built a reputation of excellence over the years and continues to bring to the table the very best the industry has to offer.



TK Gosh, Sales Manager, receiving Emirates Culinary Guild Membership certificate from ECG President Chef Uwe Micheel

RESTOFAIR RAK LLC

Restofair RAK is a joint venture between RAK Porcelain and ECF Group France which is a € 415 M company with 1400 employees, serving 80,000 customers in the HORECA Industry with nearly 140 years of experience, passion, know-how and innovation.

Thanks to the sustained organic growth and strategic acquisitions,

the ECF group can exceed the expectations of the most demanding customer through its distribution network.

Many years of know how and expertise in Europe, had facilitated the opening of Restofair RAK in the Middle East 15 years ago offering quality services to the HORECA industry. Central warehouse in



Ras al Khaimah with our newly opened Dubai Cash & Carry outlet, offices in Ras al Khaimah, Dubai, Abu Dhabi and direct sales agents all over UAE to serve faster, timely manner & without compromising on product or service quality.

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So if you are in Dubai or visiting soon, we welcome you to our 20,000 sq feet factory outlet near to the Mall of the Emirates.

Restofair Dubai factory outlet which carries all the catalogue listed products, where our dedicated customer service team will offer you a personalized service experience.



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Nationality:	Civil Status:	Date of Birth: dd/mm/yy
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Web Address:	Email:	
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Fax Office:	Type of Membership Required: (Please tick one)	
Tel. Home:	Corporate <input type="checkbox"/>	Senior Renewal <input type="checkbox"/>
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Declaration to be Signed by all Applicants

I wish to join the Emirates Culinary Guild. I have read the ECG Constitution and By-laws. I agree to be bound by the requirements of the constitution. If elected, I promise to support the Guild and its endeavors, to the best of my abilities.

Signed:.....

Proposed By:

Sig:.....

Seconded By:

Sig:.....

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Payment received?		
Certificate Given.	Pin Given.	Medal & Collar Given
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Fees:

Young Member: Junior members will receive a certificate.

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Dhs.350/=joining. Includes certificate; member-pin, member medal and ECG ceremonial collar. Dhs.

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Corporate Member Dhs. 20,000 per year

FOUR PAINS THAT LEADERS FACE

With most chefs aspiring to reach the top post in the kitchen, one does forget that with power comes responsibility and in addition, the challenges

Every leader will face rough, tough and scary times. These could stem from both internal and external factors. Regardless of the hotel, size of operation, or location such situations need to be taken care of in a wholesome manner.

A head chef is under ongoing pressure of different kinds. This includes menu development, revenue growth and execution of the business. Adaptability, flexibility, clear communication, and the need for quick decisive action while maintaining calmness under fire are some of the traits a strong Chef needs to exhibit.

Here are four of the pains that leaders face.

Losing Face Syndrome

With all that is happening in the outside world, the leadership team may find it difficult to take the right decision. In that fear, they make poor decisions or no decisions at all. Courage comes from the French word *coeur* which means "HEART".

A leader needs to carry out courageous communication not just with the outside world but with themselves. With their teams, they need to have the courage to be transparent rather than bury their heads like an ostrich in the sand.

Too Much Noise

Information (innovation, technology advancement and much more) is bombarded from everywhere and that is certainly extremely overwhelming for leadership. Chefs have to make decisions to take things forward and hope it works.

At such times, clarity is required from leadership and their teams. In this manner, they are on top of decision-making in the fast-moving environment and especially if the situation is volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous.

MORE THAN A CHEF

**ROHIT
BASSI**



The Blame Game

In any organisation, blame game kills morale, loyalty and productivity. Leadership and their teams need to connect, collaborate thus uplifting performance. Take ownership, take 100% responsibility without playing the blame game.

Conviction is a key necessity for any leadership and its team, which means taking responsibility for actions no matter what the outcomes.

The Darkside

We cannot ignore that every now and then you find a toxic leader. A real leader avoids succumbing to pressure and avoid attributes such as control, arrogance, selfishness, manipulation, aggression, or dishonesty.

Here compassion is the key and that means mindfulness. Developing leadership communication through mindfulness helps in sharpening your mental and emotional states which require you to strengthen your mind.

It is not easy being a leader. But if you overcome these four pain points, the impact will be nothing short of positive success.

Rohit Bassi is a corporate trainer and TedX speaker, who specializes in getting employees to perform better at work. You can reach him at rohit@in-learning.com

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