



ASIAN NETWORK

The BBC Asian Network goes nation-wide, bringing UK Asians their own news and music station in digital sound

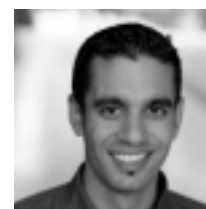
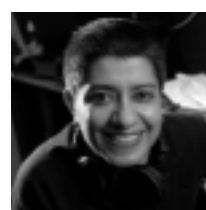
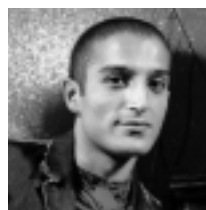
"A one-stop shop for Asian communities where they can get daily national news, top international stories, big consumer stories and music, ranging from the latest in British Asian sounds to old favourites," is how Vijay Sharma, Head of the BBC Asian Network, sees its nation-wide launch as a new digital channel on Monday 28 October.

"We are an outward-looking station whose role is to hold a mirror up to the community, so that people will see things which are truly there to celebrate as well as things which need to be faced," she says. "We will show it as it is – if there is a hot issue to be talked about, we certainly won't shy away from it. In the process, we may annoy a few people, but that's what debate is all about."

A new mid-morning show presented by Sonia Deol, who has joined the station from BBC London, broadcasts from the capital and tackles issues which matter to second- and third-generation British Asians. Sonia's first guests include leading politicians who will be talking to listeners, many of whom are deeply affected by the international situation in relation to Iraq.

Breakfast is presented by Gagan Grewal and sets the agenda for popular British Asian news. With sports, traffic, travel and weather, not to mention the freshest music, the programme is a "must listen" for UK Asians on their way to work.

A late-night programme with Adil Ray showcases the latest music from British Asian and South Asian pop artists. Adil is taking his show out to clubs across the UK, making sure that what's happening there will hit the airwaves first on the BBC Asian Network.



Sanjeet Saund, who presents an afternoon of sport, talking to Asian sporting personalities and drawing on the resources of BBC Sport to provide up-to-the-minute sporting action.

Daytime and weekend programmes mainly use English, while evening programmes offer regional languages such as Mirpuri, Gujarati, Hindi/Urdu, Bengali and Punjabi.

A young audience (20-35) is the prime target of the BBC Asian Network, as the station recognises that second- and third-generation British Asians have been under-served by BBC services up until now.

The station's young talent base helps keep the Asian Network's finger firmly on the pulse of contemporary Asian life. As Vijay Sharma puts it: "My aspiration is that if there's a story which affects the Asian community, if it has an impact on them, or is of interest to them, then we'll be covering it and people will know that we are talking about it."

Weekend programmes include: internationally renowned DJ Ritu, with the latest news and views on Bhangra and Re-mix; Maz Khan, who talks to the stars of Bollywood, Hollywood and Lollywood; and

Programme Schedule

**WEEKDAYS BEGINNING
MONDAY 28 OCTOBER**

Sonia Deol

9.00am-12.00noon



From London, Sonia Deol broadcasts the only national show to give Asian Britons the chance to discuss the big news or social issues of the day via phone, e-mail, letter and text messaging. Movers and shakers in Asian communities are questioned in depth by Sonia and her audience. With competitions and the latest music, the programme is fun, interactive and fast-moving.

Top 10 With Ray Khan

12.00-2.00pm

From the network's Leicester HQ, Ray Khan explores the news agenda set by *Breakfast With Gagan Grewal* and broadens the range of stories aired. Ray picks the Top 10 news stories for listeners and plays the Top 10 album tracks.

Navinder Bhogal

2.00-4.00pm

From Birmingham, Navinder Bhogal explores British Asian cultural life. Featuring film,

literature, theatre, poetry and interviews with entertainers, the show is primarily in English with some Hindi/Urdu.

Drive With Sameena Ali Khan

4.00-7.30pm

Also broadcasting from Birmingham, Sameena Ali Khan gives Asians travelling back from work the chance to catch up with how the day's main news stories have developed and to e-mail her with their comments. The programme also features music, the latest sports news, traffic, travel and weather.

National programmes in regional languages

7.30-10.00pm

Language programmes sustain the cultural heritage of the UK's different Asian communities, offering community-specific music, news and features about issues affecting them.

Broadcasting from Birmingham, the launch week's line-up includes:

Monday – Mirpuri with Zarina Khan

Tuesday – Bengali with Shwakat Hashmi

Wednesday – Gujarati with Nirmala Parmar and Dev Parmar

Thursday – Hindi/Urdu with Sanjay Sharma

Friday – Punjabi with Neelu Kalsi.

Adil Ray

10.00pm-12.30am

This late-night programme with Adil Ray showcases the latest music from British Asians and Asian pop artists. Adil is also taking his show out to clubs across the UK

to bring listeners live sessions from artists and DJs.

BBC World Service

12.30-5.00am

The BBC Asian Network broadcasts UK and international news from the World Service, along with half-hours from the Bengali, Hindi, Urdu, Pashto, Persian Swahili and Arabic services, throughout the night.

Devotional Sounds

5.00-6.00am

Devotional sounds for Hindus, Islamic, Sikh and Christian Asians.

Breakfast With Gagan Grewal

6.00-9.00am

Gagan Grewal sets the agenda for popular British Asian news with stories as they break. Combining the latest news with music, sports, traffic, travel and weather, the programme provides everything British Asians need on their way to work.

SATURDAYS

Devotional Sounds

5.00-8.00am

Devotional sounds for Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus are presented by Zeb Qureshi, Ravinder Kundra and Ashwini Malhi.

Breakfast With Mo Dutta

8.00-10.00am

Mo Dutta starts the weekend with entertainment and events news, the latest music and top news stories, with a full service of travel, sport and weather.

Take Two With Rajni Sharma

10.00am-12.00noon

Rajni Sharma brings listeners music and chat with the stars of Hollywood, Bollywood and Lollywood. On-set reports, gossip, reviews and news from the film world all feature, and listeners also get the chance to talk to their favourite stars.

BBC Asian Network Top 20 With Mike Allbut

12.00-2.00pm

Mike Allbut takes listeners through the BBC Asian Network's official Top 20 pop chart, featuring music from the UK and South Asia.

Saturday Sport With Sanjeet Saund

2.00-6.00pm

Sanjeet Saund broadcasts this sport and music programme from Leicester. Calling on the vast resources of BBC Sport, the programme brings listeners sports news as it happens, along with interviews with Asian personalities in the world of sport.

Sound Selection With Kanwal Qazi

6.00-8.00pm

Broadcasting from Leicester, primarily in Hindi/Urdu, Kanwal Qazi offers listeners the chance to e-mail, phone or write in with requests for their favourite piece of music.

National programmes in regional languages

8.00pm-12.00midnight

From 8.00-10.00pm, Daljit Neer presents an entertainment-based programme in Punjabi.

From 11.00pm-12.00midnight, Mira Trivedi broadcasts in Gujarati.

SUNDAYS

BBC WORLD SERVICE

12.00midnight-5.00am

The BBC Asian Network broadcasts UK and international news from the World Service, along with half-hours from the Bengali, Hindi, Urdu, Pashto, Persian Swahili and Arabic services, throughout the night.

Devotional Sounds

5.00-8.00am

Zeb Qureshi, Ravinder Kundra and Ashwini Mahli present devotional sounds for Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus.

Breakfast with Mo Dutta

8.00-10.00am

Mo Dutta presents the latest music and top news stories of the day, and takes a look at the Sunday papers. He catches up with events across the country and brings listeners all the entertainment news.

Take Two With Maz Khan

10.00am-12.00noon



Maz Khan joins the BBC Asian Network from Sky News, to bring listeners music and chat with the stars of Hollywood, Bollywood and Lollywood. Maz presents the inside story on the film world with all the latest gossip, reviews and on-set reports.

The Vibe With Veronica

12.00-2.00pm

Veronica presents two new charts for the Asian Network – a Top 10 pop music chart and a Top 10 of movie music tracks.

The Mix With DJ Ritu

2.00-4.00pm

Internationally acclaimed DJ Ritu presents her look at Bhangra and Re-mix. The latest news, views and sounds make this unmissable listening for all fans of cutting-edge British Asian music.

Sound Selection With Kanwal Qazi

4.00-6.00pm

Kanwal Qazi gives listeners a second chance to e-mail, write or phone in their requests and dedications. The programme is primarily presented in Hindi/Urdu.

Old Gold With Zeb Qureshi And Najma Sayeed

6.00-8.00pm

Zeb Qureshi and Najma Sayeed present the best sounds of the Fifties, Sixties and Seventies.

National programmes with regional languages

8.00pm-12.00midnight

From 8.00-10.00pm, Navid Akhtar presents an entertainment-based programme in Mirpuri.

From 10.00pm-12.00midnight, Anwar ul Haq presents in Bengali.

BBC World Service

12.00midnight-5.00am

The BBC Asian Network broadcasts UK and international news from the World Service, along with half-hours from the Bengali, Hindi, Urdu, Pashto, Persian Swahili and Arabic services, throughout the night.

Sonia Deol

Sonia Deol Weekdays 9.00am-12.00noon

Sonia Deol reckons that listeners won't be able to resist her morning show on the new BBC Asian Network. "Everybody has an opinion," she says, enthusiastically. "Whether it's about what's going on in the news or people's personal lives – we've all got something to say ... " And that's just what this chatty, vivacious young woman will be serving up between the hours of 9am and noon each weekday.

"It's all about the listeners – the programme is going to be highly interactive and, in that sense, quite unpredictable at times. Phone-in shows I've heard on Asian radio until now have been cuddly and sweet; they are afraid to rock the boat – and that's precisely why my show is different. It's the only truly national phone-in for Asians that deals with the real issues in their lives," explains Sonia.

"It's a platform for people to get things off their chests and to talk openly and frankly about the stuff that is happening to them. It is a very personal phone-in – listeners get the chance to say on radio what they may never be able to say to their parents, for example."

According to Sonia, now is an interesting time for Asians living in Britain. "It's a community that's established itself well over the years and has a lot to be proud of, but is very definitely not without its problems. Living between two cultures has thrown up all sorts of serious dilemmas for children born here, and tackling those areas on live radio should result in extremely passionate debate," she says.

The show will also keep listeners up to date with the big news stories of the day. "We've got some great reporters dotted around the country, and there will also be a chance to hear from those who hit the headlines," says Sonia.

"Whether it's something outrageous that David Blunkett has just done or an Asian woman talking about why she has a secret relationship, one factor remains the same: the interactivity. Listeners will be able to call in, e-mail, text and anything else we can think of!"

The presenter continues: "But it's not the sort of programme that is going to be preaching to you. I have listened to a lot of Asian radio in the past and it really makes

me cringe when I hear presenters give out moral messages during their shows. What I'll be doing is not telling people how they should be thinking but questioning where their thoughts and opinions come from and how they sit with today's lifestyles – though perhaps that will make people think from a perspective that they may not have considered before."

For Sonia, presenting is a job that comes with real responsibility.

"It's about more than just presenting a programme. You get letters from people saying that they've managed to turn a personal dilemma around because they don't feel they are on their own anymore," she explains. "It's not always easy hearing from



Sonia Deol launches the BBC Asian Network's new digital service with her live morning show

“There should be nothing stopping anyone, regardless of race, from picking up the phone and being a part of it.”

the woman who is beaten by her husband but too afraid to leave, or the man who was sexually abused as a child and has only now been able to talk about it, because you can't help but get involved. But I really do enjoy this kind of radio – there's more to it than playing a few tunes, this is about real lives. I'm not the sort of presenter that likes going in and clocking off, I don't get a great buzz out of that. This is real in every sense of the word and that's what has pulled me back really.”

Back, because Sonia presented a similar show on the Asian Network a few years ago, before moving into mainstream radio, most recently on BBC London's *Drivetime* show. She loved the unpredictability of the programme and its listeners then and she's hoping that her show will have the same feel this time around.

“It can take you through a lot of different moods – it can go from being relaxed and funny to very serious – and I do enjoy that. Our lives are like that and this show is a reflection of that.

“We'll have great music, too, and big-name interviews. One morning, you might hear a top politician; on another, you'll hear me talking to a Bollywood star or musician. And, for the first time, you'll hear them talk frankly – not just about themselves but about topical issues too. I've got a fantastic team working on the show – vibrant and full of energy. They all have great experiences to talk about and a real understanding of British Asian life, so they'll be pulled up to sit behind the microphone as well. I haven't told them that yet, so mum's the word!”

And this time there'll be one big difference for Sonia and her listeners – nation-wide DAB coverage.

“It's such a diverse audience, made up of different backgrounds and faiths, who hold different values, and I think having a network station is really going to pull these people together,” Sonia enthuses. “There's an

impression that's created by mainstream media sometimes of ‘Asians think this about x' or ‘Asians feel that about y; and that kind of uniform thinking is so inaccurate. You'll be able to hear just how diverse opinions can be on this station, so sweeping statements about the ‘Asian community' will hopefully become a thing of the past.

“I'd like to think that people who are not Asian will also find it interesting and will join the debate. There should be nothing stopping anyone, regardless of race, from picking up the phone and being a part of it. I talk to my mates about stuff that's going on in my life and they're not all Asian, so I don't see why this radio show should be any different.”

Sonia herself was born in Britain and, like much of the audience she'll be speaking to every day, experienced her fair share of embarrassing moments growing up between two cultures. There was, for example, the time she got Madonna's *Like A Virgin* album for Christmas ...

“I so wanted that album,” recalls Sonia. “I was about 13, I guess, and the whole extended family had finished Christmas dinner. It was time to open the presents and my dad was there, dressed as Santa. I opened mine and the cover was Madonna in a really suggestive basque – you know the one, black and white, cleavage hanging out ... I felt so embarrassed. But obviously not enough, because I ran up to my dad and said ‘Thanks!’ and, bless him, he gave me a hug. But I knew he was uncomfortable – he couldn't look me in the eye. The next day I still felt so guilty that I offered to have the CD exchanged for something else and they were ecstatic! So I went into a record store with my mum and swapped it for Five Star – a nice fun-loving family pop group with quite a respectable cover. And now my dad loves Kylie – how times have changed!”

Pop fan Sonia was glued to the radio from a very early age. “I was a real radio junkie,”

she admits. “I listened to everything: BRMB, Radio WM, Beacon Radio, Buzz FM, Radio Luxemburg, the list is endless. I was constantly moving the dial up and down to find different stuff. And Radio 1 was a huge part of my life – I grew up with people like Bruno Brooks, Mike Read, Steve Wright and I had a massive crush on Gary Davies, though he still doesn't know!” she laughs. “Err ... have you got any recent pictures?”

And she wasn't content to stop at just listening. “I don't know how it happened or when but at some point very early on, I wanted to be a presenter,” she smiles. She was so determined that she hatched a cunning plan to get herself on the radio ...

“When I was about 14, Comic Relief started. I thought, this is my way of getting on the radio – I can ring them and say I've been sponsored by everybody at school on how many words I say on air. What is now the Asian Network was then a couple of hours in the evening on BBC Radio in Birmingham, so I rang the producer and explained I already had the sponsors because I thought they'd agree. She didn't have much of a choice after that did she?”

“So the next day, of course, I had to draw up a sponsor form and break people's arms to sponsor me. But it raised good money for charity! That was the first time I'd been on air – I've lost the tapes, quite conveniently – but I do remember walking through the corridors of Pebble Mill thinking, ‘Ooh ... wouldn't it be fantastic to work here one day?’ It seemed like a goal that was so far away and so out of reach that sometimes even now it seems very strange to be working for the BBC.”

Though it shouldn't because Sonia's a natural, as proved by her rise from small local stations such as Sunrise and XL to appearing not just on radio but on television for the BBC. She gained popularity as the face of BBC Two's *Network East* for four years and, more recently, has been a newsreader in London.

“The day I'm no longer excited and passionate about what I do, is the day I'll hang up my headphones. There's too much to do yet ... and so little time!”

Adil Ray

Adil Ray Weekdays 10.00pm-12.30am

Adil Ray readily admits that he can talk for England – but then, as a radio presenter, that's probably just as well! He's now chatting away animatedly about his new show on the BBC Asian Network, which goes out every weeknight between 10pm and 12.30am.

"The show's all about music," stresses Adil, a passionate music fan, whose career to date has been mainly on music radio stations, including Birmingham's Choice FM and Galaxy 105 in West Yorkshire.

"It's going to be the first truly national radio show for young Asians that will be playing a lot of UK Asian-produced music," he continues. "I think we've got a responsibility to encourage a lot of the home-grown talent, especially the Punjabi Bhangra stuff, which I think is quite unique. A lot of young Asian people are really getting into that and I think that's a really positive thing; it gives them something to identify with – the language, the culture, the heritage. It just amazes me that UK radio has done nothing about it until now. Well, now it's time to wake up and face the music!"

He continues: "But more and more, a lot of Bhangra now is heavily influenced by Western music and there are a lot of Asian producers who are producing hip hop-oriented stuff. There's a guy called Rishi Rich, for example, who's been working with Mis-teeq and is the first Asian producer in a long time to get into the Top 10. So we'll be keeping our eye on Asian artists who might not necessarily be doing something which is very Asian, in the sense that it's not Bhangra



Adil Ray – breaking new talent ... and all the rules

or it's not Bollywood, but are still doing something very positive on the music scene as a whole.

"Of course, for some time, many talented Asian musicians have been fusing East and West and we will be getting fully behind the likes of Nitin Sawhney, Talvin Singh, Shri and Trickbaby, a band that has continually tried to break new barriers and will be joining us for a live session on the first show.

"So it's going to be a lot about the music and a lot about me – whether or not that's a good thing, we'll have to wait and see! We are determined to break the norm, not to mention the rules ..."

Clearly, Adil has plenty of personality to spare and this sparky 28-year-old already has big plans for his show.

"We're going to have live sessions for well-established artists and, importantly, new talent as well. Up until now, there hasn't been much of a platform for new Asian talent, so we'll invite them to come in and do what they normally do but acoustically, live in the studio.

"On top of that, obviously, the big thing at the moment is club and DJ culture, and that's no different for Asian youth – there are a hell of a lot of young Asian DJs, female and male, and promoters who are putting

nights on, so we're jumping onto the club thing as well. We'll get established and up-and-coming DJs in for a chat and to do live mixes in the studio on a Friday night. We're going to take the show on the road to these clubs and venues too."

Adil's first experience as a DJ was as a student at Huddersfield University, where he took a Marketing degree. Unable to get into the indie music that was popular at the time, he lobbied the Student Union to put on an R&B and soul night. Eventually they agreed – so long as Adil ran it!

"My housemates were all up for it, so we trotted down there on the first Friday night, and it went down an absolute storm," he laughs. "We didn't know what we were doing with the equipment – we had to get the guy to show us how to use it – but it went down really well. We got a really mixed crowd, and then some of the local black communities who ran a pirate radio station asked me if I wanted to come and do a show on there. I was sweating and really nervous before my first show but I loved it

and I thought, 'Right, if I can find a way of making this into a full-time job, then I will.'"

And he did, starting humbly as a general dogsbody on a small Asian radio station in Birmingham. There, he gained invaluable experience in voicing and scripting commercials and presenting – as well as making the tea and cleaning the loos. "It was fantastic experience," he recalls with a grin.

It also gave him the confidence to approach Choice FM, at the time Birmingham's dance and soul station. "They said come in for a chat, but we get a lot of people applying to us so don't expect anything. I spent the rest of the day in town, because I thought I wouldn't hear from them again, but by the time I got home that evening there was a message on the answerphone offering me a job."

He had a similar experience with Galaxy FM in Leeds, whom he called after finishing his degree. "It was the fourth phone call I'd made to them in about 12 months and they finally listened to me and said, 'Okay, we'll

have a listen to your demo, call back in an hour.' I remember pacing up and down for that hour! But I ended up being with Galaxy for two years, presenting their drivetime show. But at the end of 2000, the call came from the BBC Asian Network. I knew that big plans were ahead and decided to nestle in with them."

Of his new weekly show, Adil says: "The beauty of it is that it's something Asian and I feel very close to it all. I think most radio presenters would admit that what they really want to do is something that comes naturally to them. I'm so lucky that I've managed to find something where I can go on air and really be myself,"

"And I'm looking forward to people from all walks of life flicking down their digital dial and suddenly hearing this great music coming out at 10 o'clock at night and wondering what it is – and then spending time with us to find out a little bit more."

DJ Ritu

The Mix With DJ Ritu Sundays 2.00-4.00pm



Catching DJ Ritu in between recording sessions and her Bollywood-based night club Kuch Kuch is an exhilarating experience. From her pioneering role as the first female Asian DJ in Eighties London, to forming internationally renowned acts such as Sister India and Asian Equation in the Nineties, her passion for exploring new types of Western and Asian music has always been strong. DJ Ritu's energy and imagination have

won her loyal fans the world over – and now she is bringing Asian Network listeners all the latest sounds on Sunday afternoons.

Whether performing in front of 65,000 people or connecting with audiences on the radio, DJ Ritu is simply hooked on what can sometimes be a terrifying experience: "The adrenalin is pumping, you're live on air, not wanting to make mistakes, and it's great to be able to talk to the public who ring in," she says. "The key thing with radio and gigs and anything else I do is that I like sharing

music with people. It's the reason I got into this; I've been the person who says, 'Listen to this! Listen to this!' ever since I was a kid and that hasn't changed."

Although she started her DJ career playing Western pop before moving into Bhangra and Asian sounds, it was becoming a resident at the first Asian night club in the UK – Bombay Jungle at the Wag Club – that changed her life.

"Before that, I was playing Asian music to predominantly white people, then I started to play it to Asian people and that was a whole other thing, a whole other learning curve," she explains. "Basically, I was playing Asian music to people who knew what it was and knew their stuff. With non-Asian people, I'd be looking for a beat or a certain melody or something that would entice them to dance. When you're playing Bhangra to Punjabis, you have to play stuff that lyrically suits them or has some kind of meaning to them."

DJ Ritu clearly loves a challenge. She admits that being the first to do something can be

difficult but has relished the opportunity to develop her skills in a demanding environment.

"I have always been a pioneer," she says. "At first, it was very uncomfortable and I was an oddity. One of the great things about being at Bombay Jungle was that the standard of technical skills was very high. The Asian sound systems model themselves on black sound systems, where MCing, mixing and scratching skills are all-important – and there I was, barely able to mix. But because the pressure was on, by the time I left, I could hold my own with the boys in a technical way. It was a very good position to be in."

She is excited about her new show on the BBC Asian Network because, she says, it is "uplifting" to be working with a group of people on something they all believe in. "With some radio work, it's a case of turning up and going to the studio, doing your programme and going home. But when I went in to do one of the late shows at the Asian Network, it was very uplifting because you walk in and there's a real team there – that's really fabulous."

DJ Ritu first began working in Asian music after completing a Fine Arts degree at Chelsea Art College. "There wasn't anything deliberate about it – there wasn't a conscious decision that I must be able to please an Asian public," she says. "But I was DJing at the Victoria and Albert Museum a few weeks ago and was asked whether my mix of Asian and Western appeals to Asian audiences as well as white ones – and it does. For me, that's important. It's like if I've been on holiday and not around any Indian music, I go to a club like this and some of the tunes make me want to cry. There is something quite deep and heart-warming about it."

She has come a long way since she sent off her first demo tape to BBC Three Counties Radio but her enjoyment in performing is unabated: "It's the thing that I get the most pleasure from and is the most nerve-wracking. When you're on stage in front of thousands of people, it's a daunting prospect. But the love you get is wonderful. The interaction I have with my dancers and musicians is thrilling."

Gagan Grewal

Breakfast With Gagan Grewal Weekdays 6.00am-9.00pm

Though still only 24, Gagan Grewal is something of a veteran of breakfast radio. While the rest of us hit the snooze button, he's been dragging himself out of bed for the BBC Asian Network for the past two years and, before that, would often find himself late for morning lectures as he juggled his media degree with fronting the early show for his local station. Little wonder he cites his favourite pastime as sleeping ...

Fortunately, he says, the adrenaline rush that accompanies his BBC Asian Network breakfast show keeps him on his toes, as he brings listeners breaking stories and sets the agenda for popular British Asian news.

"The best thing about the breakfast show is being on air when a story's breaking," he says. "It's fantastic getting all the details in and knowing that you're the first person to be giving out the information. Very often you may not be really clued-up yourself on what's going on, so it's really exciting – you're running on adrenaline."



Gagan is clearly passionate about current affairs. "I'm really into my news and I do treat this job as a big responsibility because the BBC Asian Network is the only place where you can get all the news from an Asian perspective. Very often there'll be a story that everyone has taken a certain line on, and we'll approach it in a completely different way.

"I need to know my news inside out and keeping up to date with South Asian politics can be really difficult. Even if you just talk specifically about India, you're talking about a whole continent, comparable to Europe, because each state has its own language and very often the religion's completely different."

He continues: "You need to be across all the different religious and cultural angles and be really sensitive. The biggest thing is to be impartial and that's really important because you do get judged a lot, especially on an Asian station, just by your name – after all,

you can often tell where someone comes from and what their religion is just by their name. So you've got to be really careful."

Gagan, who was born in London and grew up near Brighton in Sussex, had his first brush with the airwaves at the tender age of 14. He showed an early flair for presenting when he fronted a show on his school radio station and, a couple of years later, found himself at West London's commercial Asian radio station, Sunrise, on work experience.

"I kind of fell into radio," he says. "It was actually completely accidental because when I was 15 and doing my GCSEs, I had no idea what I wanted to do or where I wanted to go. I just thought that radio might be quite interesting but I had no real idea of what it was about before I went on the placement. It lasted two weeks and, when it finished, I asked them if I could keep coming in."

Gagan jokes that for the next three years he was the station's tea boy. "Looking back, I can't believe I stuck with it. I was typing

other people's reports and doing 15-hour night shifts. But Sonia Deol had just started working there as a presenter and she kind of took me under her wing. After a couple of years, they gave me a weekend show, then I got a weekday slot and, from there, the breakfast show, which was mostly music and a few links."

Gagan's show for the BBC Asian Network also gives listeners the opportunity to wake up to the freshest Asian tunes. "We want to get as much new music on as possible but quite a broad range," he says. "I really like Asian music and I'm really into the music I play. There will be lots of South Asian UK-based artists, Bhangra stuff and new Bollywood, although there will be oldies as well."

When Gagan's not working or catching up on his sleep, he spends his time playing badminton and travelling. "And I have to admit that, very often, Playstation II is my life!" he smiles.

Sameena Ali-Khan

Drive With Sameena Ali Khan Weekdays 4.00-7.30pm



You could argue that Sameena Ali-Khan had the perfect upbringing for a news journalist – certainly one that's given her an impressive global perspective.

"I've lived in a few different places in the world because my dad was a professor and he used to travel around the world and work two years here and four years there," she explains. "We were really privileged when we were growing up, we had a great lifestyle."

Her favourite places were Africa and Hong Kong – though she was rather disappointed at the time at having to come back for a

British education! "Living abroad was an education in itself; it made you realise there's a big world out there," says Sameena. "We lost the island mentality that people tend to have here."

It seems almost natural that this engaging Mancunian should end up on a news programme like the Asian Network's *Drive* – but Sameena confesses that it was more by default than design.

"I'm a failed medic!" she laughs. "I did a science degree, didn't really like it – didn't get a kick out of mixing chemicals in the lab, because I was doing pure science – and I ended up going to a radio station on

Wednesdays, which was my half-day off. I just got a feel for it then. I was answering phones and within about six months they allowed me to go on air and it all started from there."

It was while she was working on both Asian and mainstream programmes at BBC Radio Lancashire that she heard that the Asian Network would be taking over the Asian programming there.

"On a personal front, I was going through a separation and I had to get a job and support myself, so I ended up applying for the job here at the Asian Network in Birmingham as a Senior Broadcast Journalist. I didn't have any experience at all but I got the job. I think it was meant to be – it was a turning-point in my life.

"For the first few months I was just in a management role, then I job-shared that as well as doing *Drive* and then, this March, I was allowed to go back to presentation full-time, which has always been my first love."

And especially when it's presenting the news. "For me that's the most enjoyable part of the programme," she says. "The news side is the challenging part, that's what gives you the buzz."

Sameena certainly finds plenty to keep her buzzing on the *Drive* show and is looking forward to the new extended version on the relaunched Asian Network.

"It's been extended by half an hour," she says of the speech and music mix, "though it won't change radically in other respects. At the moment, there are three or four stories every hour and one of those stories will be an entertainment programme, so it's not top-heavy news and there's almost like an 'and finally' at the end of every hour.

"In the last half-hour we'll do a round-up of all the news that we've covered in the programme, and we'll probably also have a look at what the headlines are likely to be in various areas of the papers the next morning."

There has certainly been a lot to keep Sameena busy in the last year.

"When we've got rolling news, like when September 11 happened and you really

didn't know what was happening and everyone was just waiting for information, that was when the Asian Network was just like any other station. It became an all-speech programme and it was really just taking on board what was going on as it happened. Without a doubt, that's the biggest story we've ever covered."

And, interestingly, the station's coverage has won it fans thousands of miles away in the States, where the Asian Network has a growing audience via satellite and the internet.

"I think they're light years behind in terms of Asian programming," says Sameena, and we do find on *Drive* in particular – probably because of the time difference – that we have lots of listeners in America. And because America has dominated the news so much over the past year, certainly since September 11, there's a real interest in the way we're covering news which affects them, so that's worked out quite well."

She's also noticed an upsurge of interest in all things Asian over in Britain too.

"I think it's been hip to be Asian for about a year now and it's really come into its own this year. It's influencing fashion and music and it's almost like it's trendy. And everyone seems to have watched a Bollywood film now – which previously you wouldn't admit to even if you were Asian! And because Bollywood films made it into the Top 10 of the most-watched films in the UK this year, the media attention was inevitable.

"The interest in the Asian Network has increased as well and there's been a lot more cross-contacting between people like *Midlands Today* for instance, because they want the contacts."

Sameena herself is part of the *Midlands Today* weekend presenting team, which provides her with more of the challenges she loves.

"I like to be continually challenged," she says – and, as the mother of a four-year-old boy, she's certainly kept on her toes at home too. "When you lose the adrenaline buzz, that's when you know you've got to move on."

Sanjeet Saund

Asian Sport
Saturdays 2.00-6.00pm

Cricket-mad Sanjeet Saund was bowled over when she landed her dream job as presenter of the BBC Asian Network's new dedicated sports show, *Asian Sport*.

"It's the first time we've had a sports programme, though in my *Drivetime* show I always sneakily introduced an element of sport!" laughs Sanjeet, who has worked both as a presenter and behind the scenes at the network since graduating from Birmingham University four years ago.

"*Asian Sport* is a mix of music and sport, with lots of guests, lots of chat, in-depth interviews and constant updates. I'll be



keeping listeners up to date with everything that's going on in the world of sport, with the goals as they happen and news from cricket matches around the world. I'm also very keen on phone-ins. There really is nothing like sport to get people talking – there's always an issue that people want to have their say about."

Supported by the vast resources of BBC Sport, the show covers sport and sporting issues across the board. "But what makes us different to other sports outlets is that we will focus on Asian personalities," explains Sanjeet. "I want to get them on board and give them some limelight ... we've got four hours on a Saturday to get them into the studio or link them up live and to give listeners the chance to talk to them – and that's something we've never had the opportunity to do before."

One man for whom Sanjeet will always make space in her studio is Indian cricket star Sachin Tendulkar. "He's such a legend – if we could ever get him live in the studio ... well, let's just say that would be something I'd work towards!" she laughs.

Birmingham-born Sanjeet grew up in the shadow of Edgbaston, so it should come as little surprise that her greatest passion is cricket.

"It will always be my thing and I blame my dad and my uncles for that. It was one of those things: you can't beat them, so you join them. From the age of four, I was taken to cricket matches because they always played for local clubs. To my family, cricket's one of those things you have to be passionate about or there's something wrong with you," she smiles.

Football is also high on Sanjeet's agenda and she says that she can't wait for the first Asian player to hit the Premiership.

"When it happens, we'll be there right away. We want to be the first to report the news and, though the clubs are very secretive, there are a few who may soon break through and we've got our eyes on them.

"We've seen the breakthrough in cricket, with the captain of the England team and all the rest of it, and I can't wait for it to

happen in football. There are so many Asian kids who are into football and they just don't have their own Beckham or their own Owen, which is so important."

Despite being the only woman in the Asian Network's sports team, Sanjeet believes that sports presenting is no longer a male-dominated profession – though she does admit that there are few other Asian women in her field.

"I think I do still surprise people," she says. "For example, I recently did the commentary for a veterans v celebrities cricket match at Edgbaston for Sport Relief alongside [former Indian Test wicket-keeper] Farokh Engineer. And every time I mentioned something even slightly technical, he would say: 'My, you know your cricket!' Now, there is a reason why I work here and breaking that barrier has been quite difficult. I spent all day saying, 'Don't say it! That's why I work here!' and, you know, I think it got through in the end!"

Maz Khan

Take Two Sundays 12.00-2.00pm

He's been thrown off James Ivory's estate, struck a saucy deal with Halle Berry and been thoroughly intimidated by Madonna – now Maz Khan brings his irreverent style and debonair charm to the BBC Asian Network as presenter of the new weekly film show, *Take Two*.

A diverse mix of music and chat with the stars of Hollywood and Bollywood, the show is packed with on-set reports and the latest gossip, reviews and news from the world of film. For Maz, whose CV features stints as a presenter on BBC One's *City Hospital* and as entertainment correspondent for Sky News, it will be a whole new challenge.

"I've never done radio before and to break into a new medium is very exciting," he says. "I love chatting to people and meeting people – big names, small names, it really doesn't matter – and radio's a fantastic medium for doing that."

Though quite at home on the Oscars' red carpet and carousing with Hollywood's A-list in Beverly Hills, Maz is delighted that he now has the chance to learn more about Tinsel Town's Indian counterparts and can't wait to immerse himself in a whole new movie culture.

"I've done several features in Bombay, so I do know a certain amount about Bollywood but I'm looking forward to learning much more. It's an interesting industry because it's still expanding, and it's nice to be there when it's growing because you feel as if you've had a part to play in it," he says.

"Obviously, it's very different to Hollywood. It's not as business-orientated but then Hollywood's had a 40-year head start in terms of commercialisation. Hollywood's always focused on that aspect, whereas Bollywood's only been about creating really good film. The commercial side of things is taking off now, though. There are something like two million Asians in Britain alone and, along with audiences in America, the international market is a big cash cow."

London-born Maz started his career in banking but soon found that his job as a fund manager simply did not inspire him.

"I was so bored!" he recalls. "Most of the time I was sat around, twiddling my thumbs, thinking, 'Deep down inside I'm a really creative person'. Coincidentally, a new TV station, European Business News, had just opened in the City and so I just knocked on the door with my CV. A two-day trial turned into three weeks and three weeks turned into six months ... "

... and six months turned into three years. After a stint as a business reporter, Maz persuaded the station that what they really needed was an entertainment correspondent. "I had family in New York and Los Angeles, so I said to them, 'Let me get out there and do a half-hour special and see what you think' – fortunately, they were impressed."

When he later moved to Sky, Maz found himself getting up close and personal with the cream of the entertainment world. It's something he hopes to do again for *Take Two*, for which his dream guest line-up would be Tom Cruise, Madonna, Charlton Heston and Halle Berry.

"I've interviewed Tom Cruise before and he's great – so unassuming, very down to earth and not the kind of megastar deal that you'd expect," he explains. "Madonna is probably the most frightening person I've ever interviewed because she likes to be in control – and she tells you she's in control – but she's such a star. And Charlton Heston would be great because, as a kid, I watched him in *The Ten Commandments* and my favourite film is *Ben-Hur*. I love all those big



Take Two presenter Maz Khan

Hollywood films, they bring back so many childhood memories."

And what of Ms Berry? "Well ... I met her at the junket for *Swordfish* and it was great – she's very flirtatious and so am I!" Maz laughs, coyly. You don't have to be an entertainment correspondent to detect that there's more to this story than Maz is letting on. After a little encouragement, he finally reveals that he and Berry struck a rather unusual bargain: he agreed not to

mention her most striking physical assets (which, rumours abound, she was paid £250,000 to bare on celluloid) on condition that she stopped fawning over *his* (his eyes, that is).

One senses that there's likely never to be a dull moment when Maz is around – even if he does finally confess that being ejected from James Ivory's estate was just a case of mistaken identity ...

Vijay Sharma

Head of the BBC Asian Network

BBC Asian Network head Vijay Sharma jokes that she started out as the tea girl and is now running the station. And, although Vijay's beginnings weren't really quite that humble, her success has made her a role model for women everywhere – and not just Asian women.

Although she still regularly receives mail addressed to Mr Vijay Sharma (her name is used by men and women), she feels that people are now becoming used to the idea of an Asian woman in a position of power and are even inspired by it.

"People out there, particularly young women, think, 'Well, there is a chance, if an Asian woman has actually made it and is running the station,'" she says. "We get more enquiries from young girls than we do from blokes and we're actually quite a female-dominated station."

It was rather different back in the late Seventies, when Vijay first began freelancing for BBC Radio Leicester's Asian programmes (after telling the producer that his programmes were actually not very good, and being invited to do better). Though she had no practical broadcasting experience, having forged a successful career in social work after gaining an HND in Business Studies, an Advanced Marketing Diploma and a Masters degree, her natural flair soon earned her a job as a full-time Education Producer, then Senior Broadcast Journalist and, eventually, Managing Editor of the Asian Network when it was launched in 1996. And when the network was looking for someone to prepare it for its launch as



BBC Asian Network head Vijay Sharma

a national DAB channel on 28 October 2002, Vijay's accumulated knowledge and talents made her the ideal person.

"It is a big job but I'm absolutely loving it," she smiles. "I really feel I'm privileged to have the opportunity of doing something like this and I'm quietly confident that it will be fine."

"And it's exciting on a number of fronts. In our recruitment effort, we've almost doubled our staffing in the last four months and it's been a huge thing. Managing expansion and development is challenging

but what it brings home to us time and time again is just how many talented people are out there, and that's the fun of it.

"And there is so much happening in the Asian community, there are so many stories going on."

Which, says Vijay, is just what the Asian Network is there to reflect.

"As a broadcaster, our role is to hold a mirror up to the community and in that mirror people will see things which are truly

there to celebrate, and there are also things there that people have to come to terms with. Our role is not to promote one or the other but to show it as it is and promote discussion about it. If there is a hot issue to be talked about, we certainly won't shy away from it. In the process, we may annoy a few people, but that's what debate is all about.

"The idea is to make the Asian Network an outward-looking station. It's a station which we want to be a one-stop shop, so you'll get your daily national news, top international news and news about the Asian community. And we also recognise that the Asian community is a big consumer – of theatre, restaurants, Hollywood films ... So if *Spiderman* is showing, of course we'll talk about it because other people are talking about it.

"We should be breaking stories, picking up things that we wouldn't otherwise have heard about. We want to make it an appointment to listen; if there's a story which affects the Asian community, then we'll be covering it and people will know that we will be talking about it."

And Vijay is excited that, with the station going national via DAB, it will be able to receive comment and feedback from around the whole country.

"We will really be looking to drive up the take-up of DAB because it is near CD-quality sound and people who are connoisseurs of music would like to listen to their music in quality sound. For years, people have put up with crackly medium-wave signals and it's got to be better than that."

And as a large proportion of the Asian community is already listening digitally through their television, thanks to digital satellite, it's clear that they're at the forefront of the new technological revolution.

"That did astound me," confesses Vijay. "I really honestly didn't think anybody would actually listen to the radio on telly but it transpires that 22 per cent of our listeners receive us on D-Sat. That tells us something about the appetite for Asian programming out there."

It's an appetite which Vijay is determined to satisfy.

Where can I tune in?

As a digital station the BBC Asian Network can be accessed via DAB digital radio, digital satellite/(some) cable/terrestrial television and the internet.

DAB digital radio

As analogue radio is not able to decode digital signals, you will need to have a DAB digital radio. Unless your radio carries the DAB logo, it will not receive DAB digital radio.

DAB digital radios are available from specialist hi-fi and car audio dealers, as well as in leading high street and department stores.

Digital terrestrial television

The Freeview platform is launching on Wednesday 30 October and will carry the BBC Asian Network, along with other digital radio channels. To access DTT you need a set top box available from leading high street stores.

Digital satellite television

The BBC Asian Network is available on digital satellite television. Using your electronic programme guide, you should be able to find us in the radio section.

Digital cable television

You can get the BBC Asian Network on your digital cable TV in some areas. You will need to contact your local provider for more information.

The internet

You can listen to the BBC Asian Network on a website which relaunches on Monday 28 October at

www.bbc.co.uk/asiannetwork

The website works with the programmes, encouraging listeners to interact directly with presenters and issues aired on the station.

For more information on how to get digital radio or television, visit

www.bbc.co.uk/digital