

# WestCoastNewsline

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## Sikh cab driver shot dead on Christmas day

SAM RAO

Berkeley, Calif.

GURUPRATAP Singh was a devout Sikh whose philosophy to ensure safety on his job was "Give them anything they demand. Don't argue." On December 25, this wasn't enough to save the taxi driver for El Cerrito's Sherry Company. Singh was found shot dead in Richmond, 10 miles north of Berkeley, when his car crashed at Sanford Avenue and York Street near the Richmond Parkway, according

to the Richmond Police Department. Gurupratap was an Indian immigrant, who plied his taxi from the El Cerrito BART station.

Devinder Grewal spoke for the Singh family to media, expressing hope that those responsible would get caught for the future safety of other cab drivers of the area. Police did not have any suspects and appealed to the public to contact the department at 510-620-6643 with information.

Unusually, the crime took place around 11 a.m. Robberies and killings in Richmond typi-

cally occur after dark. Police believe Gurupratap was killed during a robbery or attempted robbery. While family members have ruled out race or hate crime as a motive for the robbery, many of Singh's colleagues face such threats routinely in Richmond which has one of the highest crime rates in Northern California.

Shamsher Singh, another driver at the El Cerrito station said, "People are depressed and want to stop working." Many are refusing to accept calls and fares to certain parts of crime-ridden Richmond. There are renewed

demands from drivers and the Indian American community for better policing and safety measures. Plans are underway to take a deputation to the city council highlighting the danger to hard working cab drivers.

According to Grewal, "Singh never cared about race and creed. He was nice to everybody and never argued about fares. When people couldn't pay he would give them a ride free of cost." Singh arrived in the US in 1997 and acquired citizenship in 2003. His family still lives in India.

## Natarajan all set for Fremont development

SAM RAO

Fremont, Calif.

ANU Natarajan stands out as a pioneer in the Indian American community. In a short duration, she has established herself as a local community leader. Currently, she is a City Council member of Fremont, California, an area having one of the largest Indian American populations across the US. According to the Census 2000 figures, the number is around 21,000—about 10 percent of the total population of the city of Fremont (200,000). Independent observers and politicians maintain that the actual figure is much larger, almost 15 percent.

Natarajan has a great responsibility representing the city of Fremont and is also carrying on her shoulders the aspirations of nearly 150,000 Indian Americans of the SF Bay Area. Her election bid comes up in November 2006 as she was appointed to a special vacancy created by Councilman Bob Wasserman, who became the Mayor of City of Fremont in 2004.

"The need for Fremont is sensible growth. I believe in a community-based planning process, and creating well-designed, sustainable and livable communities, which is essential to fostering economic growth," says Natarajan.

This is a welcome news to many business and community leaders as Fremont has been known as "a bedroom community"—a place for rest after commuting to work in Silicon Valley. However, since the population explosion of Silicon Valley in the past few years, Fre-



Natarajan with Rennu Dhillon, prominent community member in Fremont

mont is no longer a sleepy suburb anymore and the community wants its share of downtown and all amenities of a big city. It is possibly the only city with a population of 200,000 which does not have a symphony or a defined central downtown area of its own. Plans are afoot to change that, and Natarajan's presence is seen as the right step to achieve the plans.

Though endorsed by a diverse group of people, including all local media, Natarajan did have her share of opposition. For many in the Fremont area, Natarajan belongs to the pan-Asian American community, which constitutes about 40 percent of the total population of Fremont. Vice Mayor Steve Cho is already on the City Council. So Natarajan and Cho make up a

neat 40 percent of the seven member council. Interestingly, Chinese-American Steve Cho was initially opposed to her appointment as Council Member in 2004 on the grounds that the next best performing candidate should be inducted into the Council. In this case it was Republican Dirk Lorenzo, who finished fourth in the elections. Also, in the largely Democratic con-

stituency, the ruling City Councils in Fremont and neighboring cities area have always been predominantly Caucasian White.

Ashok Bhatt, a recent appointee on the Fremont Human Relations Commission, said, "She has all the support of the Indian American community, and also many of the Democrats."

"I'm keeping all my options open. I'm not saying I won't run. Certainly my options are open," Natarajan said.

Natarajan is also the Event Chair of the Fremont 50 Celebration, which celebrates the formal incorporation of the city on January 23, 1956. With an upcoming launch gala for the 50 years of celebration in January, she is spearheading a community-based mega event in September—which will culminate the year long festivities to celebrate the silver anniversary of Fremont in the city's Central Park Area. "This is a good opportunity to showcase her skills," Bhatt said.

Natarajan, an architect by profession, has lived in Fremont for nine years. While in US in 1987 on a Rotary Scholarship, she briefly went back to India in 1992 and returned to the Bay Area after her marriage to Sunderam Natarajan, an IT professional. She has a BA degree in Architecture (Bangalore University) and a MS degree in Urban Design and Planning (University of Washington).

She has also worked as an urban planner and a public agency planner and has served in the Planning Commission of the city of Fremont before her appointment to the City Council.