

# WestCoastNewsline

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## Fiji Indian father-son accuse UA, SkyWest of racial bias

Taken off their flight on an attendant's complaint, they now seek damages and better civil rights training for airline staff

**SAM RAO**  
Oakland, Calif

A Fijian-Indian and his son who were taken off their flight after a flight attendant reported feeling uncomfortable with their presence, have lodged a complaint of discrimination with the US Department of Transportation (DoT) against the United Airlines and SkyWest Airlines.

According to the complaint by Fazal Khan (59) and son Mohammed Khan (28), almost an hour after they boarded a United Airlines/SkyWest flight from Los Angeles to Oakland, California on January 31, a UA customer service

representative asked them to leave the plane claiming that the flight attendant was "uncomfortable with their presence there". And while they were booked on a separate flight going to San Francisco International Airport a few hours later, their check-in luggage was left in the aircraft's cargo hold.

"We were humiliated in front of people for no reason at all," said Mohammed Khan.

Hayward resident Mohammed Khan, who moved to the East Bay in 1998, added, "The humiliation we felt will remain with us for a very long time."

"Everyone who saw us taken off the flight will now think it's ok to

look down on anyone who looks like us. Since this incident, whenever we leave the house to go shopping or to the hospital or even when we are driving, we worry about how people will treat us because of how we look."

The duo has now sought for a thorough investigation into the incident and compensation for the trauma they went through at the hands of UA officials.

They are also asking for better civil rights training for the airline employees, according to their attorney Shirin Sinnar, of the San Francisco based Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights.

The Khans, who are ethnic Indi-

ans from Fiji Islands, were traveling attired in ethnic Indian dress of kurta and pajama and were also wearing Islamic skull caps. Both are devout Muslims—have full beards and read the Koran regularly, which they were apparently doing while waiting for their flight to take off.

Sinnar said the Khans do not know of anything, other than their attire or features that could have upset the female flight attendant, who apparently expressed concern to the terminal crew about their presence.

"Imagine even after 5 years, post 9/11, in spite of mandated civil rights training for United Airlines staff, flight attendants are still deciding whether a passenger can fly or not

depending on their skin tone or clothes they wear," said Sinnar.

Since 2003, following several complaints from Arab, Middle Eastern, Muslim and South Asian airline passengers, DoT has ordered several airlines especially United Airlines and American Airlines to provide annual civil rights training to their employees.

Both UA and SkyWest are now reportedly looking into all aspects of the incident and the DoT director of Aviation (Consumer Protection Division) Norman Strickland has promised a full investigation into the incident. Utah-based SkyWest Airlines operates some legs of flights booked with United Airlines.



**Filmmaker Manoj Night Shyamalan poses for a photo as he arrives for the ShoWest's closing night ceremony at Paris hotel-casino in Las Vegas on March 16. ShoWest has named Shyamalan Director of the Year. AP/PTI photo**

## Celebrate Fremont Committee honored at IACF Unity gathering

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE**  
Fremont, Calif

UNITY Dinner 2006 of the Indo-American Community Federation (IACF) was held at the Newark-Fremont Hilton on March 24. The event brings together the various communities of California.

IACF chose the occasion to honor Congressman Mike Honda. Also honored were Celebrate Fremont Committee for successfully organizing the 50th anniversary of Fremont and Fremont Chamber of Commerce for their efforts in promoting harmony and cultural awareness.

Members of the Indian, Chinese, Filipino, Vietnamese and Caucasian communities exchanged their views and ideas with about 80 public officials. Prominent among them included California's insurance commissioner John Garamendi, State Assembly Member Alberto Torrico, Assembly member Johan Klehs, Alameda County Supervisors, the Mayors, council members, City Managers of

Fremont, Newark, Union City and Hayward.

Members of the city's chamber of commerce, Fremont Unified School District, Ohlone college, Hospital board, school board, sanitary board, water board, rapid transit board also attended the event.

"After 9/11, I saw a need for an event like this which can bring public officials together with diverse community leaders. It gives the community an opportunity to understand different cultures, come closer and also meet their elected representatives in a social setting," said Jeevan Zutshi, founder of IACF. "Holding Unity dinners is a way to remind us that we need to be involved in this community which needs to further understand and accept our traditions and way of life," he added.

Insurance Commissioner Garamendi said the unity dinner was a demonstration of unity of the human spirit in coming together and sharing histories and experiences. A cultural program was also held on the occasion with Chinese songs, Japanese dances, a Hispanic folktale and a bhanga performance.

## Indian run over by speeding train, community shocked

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE**  
Sunnyvale, Calif

AN accident, which would otherwise have been a mere news item in the morning papers, sent a shockwaves through the Indian-American community last fortnight.

An Indian American engineer was killed recently after being hit by a speeding train in Sunnyvale. Investigating officials are terming the incident a 'possible suicide'.

According to CALTRAN spokesman Jonah Weinberg, Raghavendra Anantha Reddy (24) died on the spot after being hit by a train between the Fair Oaks and Lawrence Expressway on March 7.

According to Weinberg, the driver of the northbound train No. 193, reportedly saw the man "deliberately lying down" on the track at around 9.20 p.m. and tried to stop the train but could not do so in time.

The collision occurred in an area of the train tracks where there are no streets or crossings. The incident is under investigation by the San Mateo County Sheriff's Office, which provides policing services to CALTRAN.

The local Bay Area Telugu Association (BATA), which was contacted in the days following the death, arranged for Reddy's with the help of its volunteers, community members and the victim's friends.

Several of Reddy's friends from across the US were on hand for the funeral services conducted on March 17 at the Chapel of the Oaks, Oak Hill Funeral Home and Memorial Park, San Jose. Local priests conducted Hindu funeral rites, which was attended by about 70 people.

**Friends attend the funeral service for Raghavendra Anantha Reddy**



When contacted, several of Reddy's batchmates from Louisiana State University—where he had completed his M.S. (Elec. Engg)—revealed that of late he appeared depressed and had decided to live by himself, so as not to be "disturbed".

Earlier he was known to be a good student and a sociable person involved in community activities.

Shocked at the incident, the BATA officials are now looking at ways to set up forums for identification depression patients in the community and to provide them with psychological counselling.

"Our community is small and we are miles away from motherland. Our association is family-oriented and we welcome everyone with open heart. There are plenty of opportunities for anyone to participate, so that no one feels isolated and lonely," urged BATA president Yugadhar Reddy.