

# WestCoastNewsline

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## Long fight for Little India leaves Indians divided

After 15 yrs of struggle for the signboard, the community is now in two minds over its name

KALYANI VASAN  
Artesia, Calif.

THE City of Artesia, 30 minutes from downtown Los Angeles, is a small city with a population of 16,000. Yet, this is a city divided.

On the one hand are the prosperous Indian merchants who account for close to 35 percent of the city's revenues but only form five percent of the town's population, while on the other are the Portuguese who claim that they started the city in the 1920s.

The Indian merchants have transformed Pioneer Boulevard in Artesia into a shopper's paradise for all things Indian—food, clothing, jewelry, furnishings, grocery and more. The Portuguese have a community center—the DES Hall—that has been the center of Portuguese life in Artesia since 1927. But, even the Portuguese who stake a claim on the city agree that the Indians have jumpstarted a dull town bringing in tourist traffic, shopping dollars, parking fees, business license fees and higher tax payments to the city's coffers.

So what is wrong with this Utopian picture of a new community waking up a sleepy town? The Indian merchants wanted a sign on the 91 freeway pointing to "Little India". A formal request for the sign was made to the City of Artesia

by the Little India Chamber of Commerce in 1991. The request was rejected. In the meanwhile, though the Little India Chamber crumbled, a few businessmen kept up a valiant fight.

Assembly Member Rudy Bermudez (D-Norwalk-56th Dist.) joined this fight, introducing a bill—ACR 67. In August 2004, the ACR 67 passed with a 67-5 vote in the California Assembly for a sign that read "Little India Next Exit".

Speaking at the formal announcement of the setting up of the sign, Assemblyman Bermudez then said, "Today is a great day for the City of Artesia and the Indo-American community. In answering the question 'Should there be a Little India sign?' the California Legislature has answered with a resounding Yes!"

Yet, more than a year after the announcement where is the sign? Nowhere! Reason? In February 2005, the Artesia City Council rejected the wording of 'Little India' to be placed on the 91 Freeway's Pioneer Blvd. off-ramp in favor of a more generic sign that reads 'Artesia International and Cultural Shopping District.'

While other communities like the Chinese, the Korean and the Filipino have also joined the fight against the sign in the meanwhile, rifts have appeared within the Indian community over the name "Little India".

Says Inder Singh, the founder of the Federation of Indian Americans (FIA): "Once again, lack of unity in our community has helped kill the progress. A silly objection over the verbage has exposed our weakness

and lack of unity."

However, CA Assemblyman Rudy Bermudez is still hopeful. On May 10, he told *The Indian Express*: "We are still working with the government to put up the sign. It is no longer in the hands of the City Council. We are going into the implementation stage soon."

Meanwhile, in an act of assertion, Krishna Koka, owner of the shopping mall Little India Village on Pioneer Blvd., has adopted 4 stretches of freeways that lead to Artesia—the 91 East and West and the 60 North and South—and has put up a sign saying 'Adopt A Highway maintained by Koka's Little India Village.' For the present this seems the closest one can get to the 'Little' sign that is so big on the minds of the Indian community of Los Angeles.

## Drowned Indian physician's family sues city of Alameda

SAM RAO  
Alameda, Calif.

NEARLY six months after she drowned in the Oakland estuary, after driving off a boating ramp which had no warning gate, the family of Dr Zehra Attari has filed a wrongful death claim against the city of Alameda.

The civil law suit claim filed last week seeks compensation for the family's suffering and Dr Attari's burial and the funeral expenses.

On November 7, 2005, Indian-American physician Dr Zehra Attari (55), apparently drove into the Oakland estuary, off a boating ramp which had no warning sign.



Dr Zehra Attari

After a series of searches by the Oakland and Alameda Police departments for over a month, her body was recovered after a woman remembered seeing a "distracted" and "lost" person in the vicinity of the estuary.

San Jose attorney Mohinder Mann, who is representing Dr Attari's husband Tasadduq "Taz" Attari and his two daughters, said that his clients felt that Dr Attari's death

could have been prevented and that several people told the family "one too many accidents" had happened at the boat ramp, which apparently does not have adequate warning signs or a gate.

The downward ramp, was built in 1959 and leads directly into the estuary at the end of a street road called Grant Street in the city of Alameda. Since the latest tragedy, officials have erected a temporary gate at the site of the downward ramp.

Previous victims in a similar fashion were two men who drowned there in November 2002 when they drove off the ramp, and their car was discovered in

the same area almost six weeks after they went missing. Earlier, in 1979, an 80-year-old man drove down the ramp. Mann said her family wants to work with Alameda officials to find a solution "so no one will have to suffer such a horrible and unnecessary death again."

Alameda City Attorney Carol Korade said she received the Attari claim and was reviewing it. Alameda officials have 45 days to accept or deny the claim.

KALYANI VASAN

Espanola (New Mexico)

IN a rare gesture, the New Mexico State Transportation Commission has renamed a state highway—Highway 106—as 'Yogi Bhan Memorial Highway' in memory of the late Harbhajan Singh Khalsa Yogi. An Indian-American, he was known to his followers as Yogi Bhan.

The renaming ceremony on April 28 brought to fruition the efforts of New Mexico Transportation Secretary Rhonda Faught. A resolution in this regard was unanimously passed in a meeting held in Pueblo Laguna, NM, in 2005.

New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson in his remarks on the occasion said: "Yogiji was not only a spiritual leader, but was a business and social leader as well. And he kept a hand in politics too. I know many of the elected officials here today often sought his counsel in professional and personal matters, as I did many times. This highway is travelled by all of you and lies in the heart of your community; it is therefore with great pleasure that I declare New Mexico State Highway 106 as Yogi Bhan Memorial Highway."

## New Mexico renames state highway on Indian-American



Bicky Singh stands under the new sign on Highway 106

Yogiji left behind a legacy of '3HO'—Happy, Holy, Healthy Organisation—a nonprofit educational and scientific association offering guidance on nutrition, health and interpersonal relations. A teacher of Kundalini Yoga, he was also a successful businessman and owned Akal Security, a private security firm. He founded the Sikh Dharma, which propagated vegetarianism, Yoga and a white dress code. His followers are spread over New Mexico, California and Arizona.

Founder of *sikhpoint.com* Bicky Singh, who was invited to attend the function, said, "It was one of the greatest moments for Indians in the US. To have a highway where thousands can see the name of an Indian-American overwhelmed me. Being the only Indian-American present made me feel even more honored."

## Sunnyvale holds prayer meet for J&K victims

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
Sunnyvale, Calif.

THE recent massacre of 36 Hindus in Doda and Udhampur district of Jammu and Kashmir found echo in the Silicon Valley last week. On May 10, the local chapter of the Friends of India Society International (FISI) held a prayer meet for the victims at the Sunnyvale Hindu Temple.

The call for the meet was sent out by Gaurang Desai of FISI, also a member of the HSS Bay Area, along with the Jammu & Kashmir Forum.

A Hindu priest offered special prayers on the occa-



Children return home from school minutes after a grenade exploded at a security camp in Kanyar, a day after the massacre. Express

sion for universal peace and harmony. The gathering also issued a release on the occasion, asking: "It is about time that the governments marshal all the resources at their command to eliminate the unlawful elements that are in the

business of terrorizing innocent civilians and ensure the safety and welfare of the minority populations."

The Hindu Swayamsevaks Sangh, USA, also strongly condemned the incident. In another statement issued on

the occasion, Khanderao Kand, PR coordinator of HSS-USA, said: "The gruesome massacre of 36 Hindus in Doda and Udhampur in Jammu and Kashmir on May 2, was brutal. Innocent minority civilians—Hindus—were lined up and gunned down in cold blood. This was one of the worst terrorist acts of recent times perpetrated by Islamic extremists who victimize peaceful people. Our hearts go out to the families of innocent victims and we appeal to the state and central governments to apprehend the culprits and bring them to justice in a speedy manner."

