

Indo-American group marks 25 years at Unity Dinner

News, Culture, STATE OF THE ART | April 18, 2026 | indica



Share the news



By Ritu Jha-

The Indo-American Community Federation (IACF) marked the 25th anniversary of its signature Unity Dinner, drawing nearly 400 community leaders, elected officials and residents to the India Community Center to celebrate a legacy rooted in cross-cultural engagement.

[H-1B Visa Consulting](#)

The milestone event highlighted both the progress and ongoing challenges facing diverse communities in the United States, according to organizers and participants.

At the center of the organization's mission is founder Jeevan Zutshi, whose journey from Kashmir to California helped shape the federation's focus on civic dialogue and inclusion. In an interview, Zutshi said the group's mission remains as relevant today as it was in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, when the Unity Dinner was established.

"I don't really see that things have changed much except for the technology. The whole world has definitely changed because of that," Zutshi said. "But the basic human beings, the way we were thinking, the way our governments are thinking, have not changed. It has been very rough in the past couple of years."

He pointed to persistent issues of discrimination and division.

"There always have been those differences where people don't seem to really recognize that we're all human beings," Zutshi said. "Let's respect people and let's try to understand where they are coming from."

Zutshi, who has lived in the United States for more than five decades, contrasted today's climate with his early experiences.

"I came to this country 53 years ago, and it was very beautiful," he said. "I always used to feel that I'm so fortunate that I'm in a country where nobody ever cares to ask me what my religion is."

He added that while the country still offers freedom of expression, he is concerned about rising divisions.

"The 9/11 attack shocked me. And then we started the Unity Dinner. But now things are shaping up in a very shocking manner," Zutshi said. "I am disappointed that we haven't been really able to do much in that respect."

Despite those concerns, Zutshi praised leaders who emphasize a shared national identity, including U.S. Rep. Ro Khanna. [California News Coverage](#)

"We still see some people coming together, believing in unity," he said. "We are all Americans."

A hallmark of the Unity Dinner is its inclusion of people from across South Asia, including India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan, with organizers emphasizing that geopolitical tensions abroad should not define relationships within the diaspora.

Zutshi also noted what he described as a shift among more recent immigrants, particularly those arriving on work or student visas.

"The new immigrants are on H-1B and student visas," he said. "They are a little different, and if something happens, they get very upset. They are not inclusive. A lot has changed in the past five years." [H-1B Visa Consulting](#)

On the issue of rising hate crimes, Zutshi suggested the growing [economic](#) success of Indian Americans may contribute to resentment.

"I hear and read in these various reports, such as Pew Research, that hate crimes have increased," he said. "Maybe slowly the resentment built up, and they thought that the immigrants had taken their jobs."

Still, Zutshi emphasized persistence and dialogue as the path forward. "I overcame those challenges with persistence," he said. "You have to continue to prove that you really believe in something."

The Unity Dinner gala also honored people with the Public Sector Leadership Awards, recognizing six leaders for impact across transformation, innovation, service delivery, operations, cybersecurity, equity, and public service.

Vice Mayor Chantel Walker presented the Transformational Leader of the Year award to Khaled Tawfik, CIO of the City of San Jose, and the Equity, Accessibility & Community Impact award to Beverly Greene, Chief Government Affairs Officer at VTA. Sunnyvale Mayor Larry Klein presented the Innovation & Service Delivery Excellence award to Ahsan Baig, CIO of AC Transit, and the Operational Excellence & Reliability award to Derek Calhoun, COO of BART. Former Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa presented the Cybersecurity, Risk & Resilience Leadership award to [Tas Jalali](#), CISO of AC Transit, and the Rising Leader in Public Service award to Nicole Guttridge, CIO of the City of Elk Grove and MISAC President.

indica talked to a few about being honored and their thoughts about the Unity Dinner.

"Public transit really is part of the main fabric and the underpinning of any community; we connect people to people," Greene said. "Unity is our strength. It has been the strength of the United States for centuries."

Another award recipient, Baig, highlighted the role of technology in advancing inclusivity.

"AI is at the core of everything we do in service delivery," Baig said. "One of the greatest advantages of AI is its ability to provide multilingual and accessible technologies, which is a huge step forward in serving a diverse community." [Machine Learning & Artificial Intelligence](#)

Attendees also included Mehul Kumar, chief information and technology officer for the San Mateo County Transit District, who described the event as a valuable platform for public engagement.

"The whole purpose of what we do is about the people, how we make things better and more efficient for our community," Kumar said. "It is fantastic to see such a big, diverse group coming together."

As the federation looks ahead, Zutshi said its message remains simple.

"Continue building bridges and don't hate people because they are different," he said. "Continue to uplift communities."