

Let me start by congratulating all of us with the 197th anniversary of the establishment of the Armenian College and Philanthropic Academy, to my knowledge, an oldest seat of learning in the entire Armenian Diaspora across the globe.

On this occasion I want to recall and commend the wisdom and virtue of Astvatsator Muradghanyan, Mnatsakan Vardanyan, David Davidyan and other founding fathers of this collegewhose foresight and dedication haveenabled several generations of Armenians from the different corners of the world to get a highly qualified multilingual education, including in our mother tongue. I call you on to pay also tribute to memory of Arutoon Kalust, who 220 years ago, 23 years prior to the establishment of ACPA founded his school, which in 1821 amalgamated with the college.

These visionaries from New Jugha survived the ordeals and burdens of foreign lands, went through various hardships, and established the school to create an environment in which Armenian identity was nourished and preserved.Meantime, they became exemplary citizens of this country that so kindly embraced and gave them haven.

In 1821, when the college was established, most intrepid visionaries would dream only about an independent Armenia. Today it is a reality. Their dreams have come true. Our homeland is an equal and respected member of the world community of states. And many graduates of this college will be taking part in the strenghtening of Armenian state and building the dreamland of Shahamir Shahamiryan from Madras, who in 1772 promoted his vision of a Republic by drafting a constitutionof Armenia.

This cohort of visionaries made commitment not only to survive but also to prosper and make possible for many generations of the young Armenians to study here. Today Armenian College and Philanthropic Academy stands out as a living proof of prominent Armenian presence for almost two hundredyears in Kolkata, the cultural citadel of India. The Academy serves its noble purpose by educating the young Armenian boys and girls and instilling into them knowledge and virtue. This educational institution has kept the beauty of our language, culture and the spirit of Surb Etchmiadzin alive and flourishing in a country so far away from our homeland. Throughout its almost two century old existence, the Armenian College & Philanthropic Academy has provided the finest education to thousands of children from Armenia, Iran, Iraq, India and other parts of the globe. Its graduates have contributed to the spread of culture, skillsand creativity throghout the region and beyond.

Over the past years, the College management and the Church committee, working hand in hand, spared no efforts in their mission to further improve the high academic standards of this educational institution to insure its further growth and development. During the last two years they have done a notable work in improving the conditions in the college both for education and leisure of the students.

The Armenian Church Committee carries out various projects aimed at raising high image of Armenian Community in India and preserving many Armenian historic

monuments and churches over here. The college continues to remain an embodiment of the friendship between our nations.

But today it is much more than that.

As you all know, during the course of the past two years, the college has opened its doors to the servicemen who have arrived in Inida for a medical treatment after being wounded in the combat, protecting our motherland. With generous support of the Armenian Church Committee, our nation's true heroes have been given an opportunity for a better future, a better life. But above all, it has given an opportunity to the young students of the college to learn the true meaning of courage, manhood, will power, and perseverance. That is something that is hard to learn in the confinements of the regular classrooms. This noble undertaking of the Armenian Community has enabled this generation of the students of ACPA to witness the genuine manifestations of patriotism and citizenship, which hopefully will guide them in the course of their life. This benevolent mission of the college, I believe, will stay in the history of this educational institution as one of the most outstanding accomplishments.

This invaluable contribution of the Armenian community is highly appreciated and acknowledged by the government of Armenia. On March 27, by the Decree No 279 of the Minister of Defence of the Republic of Armenia, in recognition of personal contribution for organization of medical treatment of the military men wounded during the combat operations and support of their families, the wardens of the Church Committee of the Armenian Holy Church of Nazareth Mr Sunil Sobti and Mrs Suzan Rouben were awarded with the medal of Vazgen Sargsyan.

For some of you this is the age when probably for the first time you are going to make your commitments, the undertakings that would shape your future. Few things influence our life more than commitments we choose to make and adhere to. They can develop you or they can devastate you, but either way, they will define you. We become whatever we are committed to. Many are afraid to commit to anything and just drift through life. Others make half-hearted commitments to competing values that actually lead to frustration and mediocrity. Some choices may have long lasting consequences, so you would better choose wisely. And once you have done it, you must not be afraid of committing to them.

Without any hesitation I would call you today to commit yourself to knowledge. There is no doubt that knowledge has become one of the persistent needs of the modern society while the lack of education becomes a life-long concomitant of second-quality citizens. I'm hopeful that the solid educational foundations acquired within the walls of ACPA would open you the avenues to pursue the higher education in the best universities in India, Armenia and worldwide.

Using this opportunity, let me thank the Armenian Church Committee in the persons of the wardens Mr Sunil Sobti and Mrs Suzan Rouben for their continued generous support to the school, and the teachers and the staff of the college under the inspiring leadership of the Very Reverend Father Movses Sargsyan and Mr. Malik for their commitment to the pupils upbringing and education.

In conclusion, on behalf of the Embassy of Armenia and myself, I express my gratitude for invitation and reiterate our commitment to support the Armenian Church Committee and the Armenian College and Philanthropic Academy in the realization of various ventures and initiatives.