

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA,
SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND
AT THE CONVOCATION OF GURU NANAK COLLEGE**

Chennai, May 5, 2018

1. It is a matter of happiness for me to be here for the Graduation Day at Guru Nanak College, as well as for the inauguration of the Guru Amar Das Block and the Shaheed Baba Deep Singh Auditorium. I congratulate the College students, faculty and authorities on these milestones. I especially congratulate approximately 900 students who are graduating today. This is a great achievement for you as well as your families and professors. I wish you all the best as you carry the rich heritage of your College to the world outside.
2. Of the graduating class over one-third is made up of girl students. Twelve students are University rank holders and are being honoured today with medals. And seven of the 12 medal winners are girls. These are impressive statistics. As I have said on earlier occasions, in educating a daughter we educate not one but two families. An educated girl is a positive influence on both her parents' family as well as the family she marries into and builds with her husband. And of course, she contributes enormously at the workplace and in building our economy.
3. Established in 1971, to commemorate the 500th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev, this College has become a landmark institution in Tamil Nadu. I am told that the Guru Nanak Educational Society, the non-profit organisation that runs the College, is supported by 250 Sikh families living in Chennai. Despite the small size of the community, you are contributing to the state and to society, and doing so in the field of education. This is commendable.
4. This College is taking forward a long and rich history of engagement between Punjab and the Sikh community, and Tamil

Nadu. This history goes back to the period when Guru Nanak Dev, who was one of our greatest spiritual leaders and nation builders, visited Tamil Nadu as part of his journey to southern India. It is believed that he spent a few days in the holy town of Rameswaram.

5. Tamil Nadu and Punjab were at the forefront of our freedom struggle. And after Independence, both states and their hardworking people have contributed substantially to India's social and economic development. The Sikh community in Tamil Nadu is involved in a range of professions, from business and industry to agriculture. It is worth remembering that over 100 years ago, the family of the late A.G. Ram Singh migrated from Amritsar to Chennai. Ram Singh became one of the pioneering cricketers of our country and mentored many local players here in this city. Later two of his sons, A.G. Milkha Singh and A.G. Kripal Singh, played for India. At one time it used to be said that the leading cricket family of Tamil Nadu was a Sikh family. That sense of oneness, that unity in diversity, makes our country special.
6. Guru Nanak College represents the same spirit. The objective of the College, and its fraternal philosophy, is apparent from its motto – Pro Bono Publico, which means “For the Benefit of All”. I am told that 57 programmes are offered here, and that the College has an A Grade rating as per the National Assessment and Accreditation Council.
7. What is truly heart-warming is that the gurudwara within the campus has a langar kitchen that provides a free meal to about 700 students daily. Tamil Nadu is the state that gave India the idea of the midday meal programme in schools. But a midday meal at the college level is unique. And here again I congratulate the College authorities.

Ladies and Gentlemen and Dear Students

8. The value of education lies not just in getting a degree or training for a job. The real value is in giving back to society, and in helping those less privileged and less fortunate than us. It is with this

sentiment that Guru Nanak College has extended a special facility in partnership with an NGO that runs a school for special children – that is children with special needs. I am told that certificate courses are offered to such students to help them find employment and to promote mainstreaming. I wish such efforts all success.

9. Your College also strives to inculcate service to society and make students socially responsible. Following the December 2015 floods in Chennai, I have learnt that a team from Guru Nanak College was one of the first to reach people in distress and provide food, water, medicines and other essentials. In the nearby Velachery area, among the worst hit in Chennai, teachers and students from your College evacuated over 250 people.
10. This was a true embodiment of the message of Guru Nanak Dev. May his blessings always be with you!

Thank you
Jai Hind!