

Wildfires in Nagorno-Karabakh Threaten Ancient Armenian Monastery and Other Historical Sites

By Arshaluys Barseghyan

Former Nagorno-Karabakh officials have warned that Amaras Monastery, home to the oldest Armenian school in Nagorno-Karabakh, as well as nearly 100 other historical and cultural monuments, are in danger because of wildfires that have been raging in the region.

“The Tigranakert Historical and Cultural Reserve, the Amaras Monastery Complex, as well as significant monuments located in the vicinity of the Talish community and a number of other settlements, have been caught in the fire’s spread zone,” the statement of the former Culture Ministry read.

Amaras, a medieval Armenian monastery and important religious and cultural site, was where the first Armenian school in the region was established by Mesrop Mashtots in the fifth century.

The former Cultural Ministry additionally published a map showing the



Amaras Monastery,



Firefighters battling a blaze in Artsakh (Karabakh) (APA photo)

spread of fires, crediting the NASA LANCE/FIRMS system.

Citing information circulating on social media, they recorded that “the historic mulberry orchards of the Nor Shen [Yenikand] community have already been damaged by fire.”

They noted that Azerbaijan “is obliged, in accordance with international law and conventions on the protection of cultural heritage to ensure the preservation of cultural and natural heritage in the territories under its control, to take urgent measures to extinguish fires and restore the damage caused.”

The statement also said the responsibility of international organizations and specialized institutions, “within the scope of their mandate, should provide an appropriate assessment of the current situation and take practical actions to preserve the cultural heritage of Artsakh [Nagorno-Karabakh].”

The fire broke out on July 23, with the Azerbaijani pro-government outlet APA citing the Azerbaijani Ministry of Emergency Situations saying that they received information about a fire “in an open area in a mountainous area” in the Fuzuli district.

Following which they “immediately” deployed a helicopter and “forces of the State Fire Protection Service.”

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Jailed Tycoon to Lead New Armenian Opposition Group

By Shoghik Galstian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Samvel Karapetyan will be the top leader of a new opposition group which he is creating in a bid to unseat Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, a representative of the jailed Russian-Armenian billionaire said over the weekend.

Karapetyan announced the start of “the formation of our political team” on July 14, almost one month after being arrested following his condemnation of Pashinyan’s campaign against the Armenian Apostolic Church. It remains unclear which prominent individuals will join the group that could become a major player in the Armenian political arena ahead of parliamentary elections expected in June 2026.

Karapetyan’s nephew and chief spokesman Narek made it clear on Sunday, July 27, that the tycoon will officially lead the party despite not being eligible to become prime minister because of his dual Russian citizenship.

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Lawyer: Vardanyan Blamed For Alleged Crimes that Occurred When He Wasn’t In Nagorno-Karabakh

By Arshaluys Barseghyan

Following the latest court session of Russian-Armenian businessperson and billionaire Ruben Vardanyan in Azerbaijani military court, lawyer Siranush Sahakyan claimed that Vardanyan was being blamed for actions that occurred when he was not in Nagorno-Karabakh or held any state position.

The court session took place on Tuesday, July 22, during which a series of Azerbaijani citizens testified against Vardanyan.

According to coverage by Azerbaijani state media outlet Azertac, it was unclear when the events in question actually occurred. Azertac only noted that “victims and their legal heirs then testified about crimes committed during Armenia’s aggressive war and occupation.”

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Ruben Vardanyan during the trial in Azerbaijan (photo Azertac)

US Lease of Corridor for Azerbaijan ‘Unacceptable to Armenia’

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — The Armenian government has turned down a US proposal to lease a land corridor that would connect Azerbaijan to its Nakhichevan exclave through Armenia, according to a senior lawmaker allied to Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, on July 24.

The US ambassador to Turkey, Thomas Barrack, revealed on July 11 that Washington offered a 100-year lease on the would-be transport link in a bid to facilitate a peace deal between the two South Caucasus nations. Pashinyan’s press secretary, Nazeli Baghdasarian, ruled out such a possibility on July 14, arguing that Armenian law allows only the lease of agricultural land for farming or grazing purposes.

However, Pashinyan seemed open to the idea when he commented on it during a news conference held two days later.

“Under our legislation... this is called a construction permit,” he said. “And under certain conditions, investments granted under this right to build remain or become the property of the Republic of Armenia after the expiration of a contract.”

Arman Yeghoyan, the pro-government chairman of the Armenian parliamentary committee on European integration, raised more questions about Yerevan’s stance in an interview with Factor.am late on July 24.

“The Americans had such an idea but it was not acceptable to us ... because we



Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmail Baghaei at a news briefing in Tehran.

saw a danger of ceding our sovereignty there,” Yeghoyan said, adding that it is therefore not on the agenda of Armenian-Azerbaijani negotiations.

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ARMENIA

Why Does Armenian Produce Taste So Good?



NASHVILLE

Ararat Hockey Club



WORCESTER

Jango Janigian ‘25 Wants to Take You On an Adventure





ARMENIA

NEWS from ARMENIA

German Ambassador Visits Shirak Province

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — German Ambassador Claudia Buche visited Shirak Province on July 29, where she was welcomed in Gyumri by Archbishop Georges Noradounguian. During their meeting, the archbishop presented the mission and role of the Armenian Catholic Church and discussed the local community’s life in Armenia.

The organization Armenian Caritas briefed the ambassador on its current programs, which provide support for single mothers, refugees, and residents of border communities.

Levon Barseghyan, head of the Asparez Journalists’ Club, also shared the latest concerns facing Gyumri’s civil society.

Akopian Finishes Second at US Senior Chess Championship

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — Armenian GM Vladimir Akopian finished as the runner-up at the 2025 US Senior Chess Championship on Sunday, July 27, in St. Louis.

He was the only player to remain undefeated throughout the tournament, scoring 5.5 points out of 9, the Armenian Chess Federation reported.

GM Alexander Fishbein, who also scored 5.5 points, won the title after a playoff.

“We congratulate Vladimir Akopian and wish him new achievements,” the federation said.

Company to Appeal Land Seizure Ruling

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Soglasie Armenia, owned by president of the Union of Armenians of Russia and businessman Ara Abrahamyan, on July 29 announced plans to appeal a court decision ordering the return of a 2,859.4 square meter plot on Yerevan’s North Avenue to the city.

According to the company, the Anti-Corruption Court disregarded objective facts and “favored arbitrary dispossession without proper legal grounds,” Panorama.am wrote.

The company emphasized that the verdict is not yet final. The case involves a civil suit filed by Armenia’s Prosecutor General’s Office to revoke the company’s ownership rights and registration over the land, formerly the site of the Children’s World department store.

Soglasie Armenia claims the judgment is linked to Abrahamyan’s public profile as a businessman, UNESCO goodwill ambassador, and head of the Russian-Armenian Union. The firm adds that all construction works are ongoing and challenges stem from delays and obstacles posed by government bodies. It also highlights its role as a foreign investor.

Concerns Mount over the Planned Dismantling of WWII Memorial

ARTIK, Armenia (Panorama.am) — Artists, local residents and public figures have voiced concern over plans to dismantle a World War II memorial in the town of Artik, fearing the move could set a troubling precedent for other historical monuments across Armenia.

The monument, erected in 1965 in Artik’s central Liberty Square, commemorates the victims of the Great Patriotic War (World War II) and is designated as a nationally significant monument. Despite its protected status, the local authorities, backed by the Armenian government, have approved its dismantling and relocation.

Historian and political analyst Derenik Malkhasyan suggested the decision could signal a shift towards policies echoing those of Eastern European and Baltic countries, where Soviet-era WWII monuments have been removed amid growing anti-Russian sentiment.

“If dismantling is successful in Artik, this may become a model other communities will follow,” Malkhasyan warned in a social media post on July 26.

In an interview with Panorama.am on Tuesday, Artur Gevorgyan , a sculptor and head of the Gyumri National Park-Museum of Sculpture, stated that dismantling such a monument is unprecedented in Armenia.

“No monument recognized as cultural heritage and registered with a passport has ever been dismantled in Armenia. When necessary, they’ve always been restored on-site,” Gevorgyan said,

“They claim it will be reassembled later, but such promises are rarely fulfilled. This may very well become a lingering issue for the community.”

Gevorgyan also criticized the official reasoning behind the dismantling. He said that during discussions with local officials, some claimed that the monument obstructs the view of the Artik Municipality building.

“This is absurd,” Gevorgyan said. “The monument and the surrounding buildings, including the Municipality, were built according to a unified urban design plan.

They do not interfere with one another.”

Officials have also cited plans to develop a recreational zone in the area. However, Gevorgyan argued that the existing space, with its benches, fountain and open layout, already serves that function and could be revitalized without removing the monument.

He further questioned the financial feasibility of the project. Documents released by the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports mention an allocation of 5 million drams (approx. \$12,500) for the project, a sum Gevorgyan says is insufficient for properly dismantling and restoring a monument of this scale.

“You can’t dismantle and restore such a

cultural heritage status requires a detailed, well-justified government resolution,” he argued.

The sculptor warned that dismantling the dismantling of a World War II memorial in Armenia would trigger a profound moral and ideological crisis.

“This isn’t just about a monument, it’s about our values. Are we denying our grandfathers’ victory? What message are we sending to future generations?” he asked.

“If a WWII monument is dismantled today, who’s to say they won’t do the same to memorials honoring Artsakh war heroes under the same pretext of urban development tomorrow?”



World War II monument in Artik, Armenia

massive structure with so little funding,” he stated.

Gevorgyan also condemned the lack of public consultation. Descendants of WWII veterans, local cultural experts, and other stakeholders were not involved in the decision-making process.

“Any relocation of a monument with

When contacted by Panorama.am, Sevak Petoyan , an assistant to Artik’s mayor, confirmed that the issue remains under discussion.

“The Artik Municipality will soon release an official statement and may hold a press conference to address all questions,” Petoyan said.





ARMENIA

Armenia: Public Opinion Survey Contains Lots of Warning Signs for Pashinyan

Survey results covering social, political and economic developments in Armenia indicate that Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's program to retool society is facing severe headwinds.

The polling data, published July 21 by the International Republican Institute, shows 49 percent of respondents feel the country is headed in the 'wrong direction,' representing a sharp spike in negative sentiment: in IRI's 2024 survey, the "wrong direction" percentage stood at 40 percent. Meanwhile, 36 percent of respondents said the country is headed in the right direction. Just two years ago, the percentages were largely reversed, with 50 percent voicing a "right direction" response against 39 percent saying "wrong direction."

A major driver of the trend appears to be widespread public suspicion over Pashinyan's 'Real Armenia' project, which he unveiled in February. The program promotes a new understanding of patriotism, striving to fix Armenians' attention on the future, while fostering a stronger sense of individual initiative to drive economic growth.

The survey also indicated that almost three-quarters of the population is grappling with poverty. Six percent of respondents said they lack money to afford essential food items; 16 percent said they can afford food, but not clothes; and 52 percent can buy food and clothes, but not much else.



Pashinyan appears to have hurt his public standing by initiating a public feud with the Armenian Apostolic Church, which he has identified as an impediment to Real Armenia implementation. The prime minister opened his attack in early June by accusing the church's prelate, Karekin II, of fathering a child in violation of his vow of celibacy. Since then, Pashinyan has maintained a steady drumbeat of anti-Church rhetoric.

IRI survey results show the church has enjoyed a big bump in approval, with 58 percent this year saying they were "very" or "somewhat satisfied" with the institution, a full 10 percent rise over the responses given in 2024.

At the same time, only 38 percent approved of the prime minister's perfor-

mance, according to the 2025 survey results, down from 46 percent the previous year. Meanwhile, 59 percent said they were dissatisfied with the prime minister's work in 2025, a 9 percent increase over the year-earlier level.

When queried about what they saw as the government's most significant accomplishment over the past six months, 42 percent of respondents answered "none." Another 22 percent said they "didn't know" or declined to answer. Of the one-third of participants who cited an accomplishment, road repair garnered the largest share with 11 percent.

Despite the signs of rising dissatisfaction with his leadership, Pashinyan's Civil Contract Party remains the most popular political force in the country. Even so, there are still plenty of warning signs for the incumbent. When asked who they would vote for if parliamentary elections "were held next Sunday?" just 17 percent voiced support for Pashinyan/Civil Contract. The Armenia Alliance had the next highest level of support at 4 percent, and former president Robert Kocharyan was third with 2 percent. Overall, just over 36 percent of respondents expressed a preference for a specific political party or politician.

In a sign of disillusionment with the political process, 12 percent said they would intentionally "spoil" their ballot, while 28 percent stated they would not vote. Another

23 percent either refused to answer or said they didn't know who they would vote for.

IRI conducted its survey in late June, with results based on responses by 1,500 individuals. The margin of error was reported at 2.5 percent. But only one-quarter of those originally contacted agreed to take the survey, raising the strong possibility that many Armenians are keeping their opinions to themselves, thus creating space for surprising results in an actual election. Armenia's next parliamentary vote is scheduled for the fall of 2026.

(This article originally appeared on the website www.eurasianet.org on July 24.)

Jailed Tycoon to Lead New Armenian Opposition Group

KARAPETYAN, from page 1

"The leader of our team will be Samvel Karapetyan and we will move forward under his working auspices, meaning that on all economic, social, and foreign policy issues we will follow the path outlined by him," he told reporters.

He did not deny or confirm rumors that Karen Karapetyan (no relation), who served as Armenia's prime minister from 2016-2018, will top the new party's list of election candidates. The ex-premier, who has deplored the tycoon's prosecution, has not commented on the speculation yet.

Some analysts expect Samvel Karapetyan to redraw the country's political landscape. They say he can win over many voters who trust neither the government nor the mainstream opposition. According to some opinion polls, such disillusioned people make up the largest percentage of the electorate.

The 59-year-old billionaire, who has mainly lived in Russia since the 1990s, was initially prosecuted for allegedly calling for a violent overthrow of Pashinyan's government. After announcing his political ambitions, he was also charged with tax evasion, fraud and money laundering. He rejects the accusations as politically motivated.

Speaking at a July 16 news conference, Pashinyan effectively admitted the connection between the crackdown and Samvel Karapetyan's rhetoric. He said the tycoon must give up his Russian citizenship before engaging in political activities in Armenia.

Armenian Universities Launch Online Admissions for Foreign Students

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Starting from the 2025–2026 academic year, admission of international and diaspora applicants to higher and postgraduate education programs in Armenia will be conducted online through the platform fs.emis.am.

According to the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports, the platform

includes a step-by-step user guide tailored for applicants. To apply, users must first register and activate their account, then proceed with the application steps.

Once registration is complete, users can log in using their credentials. Within the platform, they can apply to universities, track application status, change institutions or programs, and update their pass-

word.

Saved applications will be stored in the "Applications" section of the user's personal page, where they can be edited or withdrawn.

The platform offers a list of Armenian universities, academic programs, and degree levels. The user guide explains the registration process in detail.

Wildfires in Karabakh Threaten Ancient Armenian Historical Sites

WILDFIRES, from page 1

The next day they reported that fires continued "in the territories of the Aghdam and Aghdara [Martakert] districts." According to them, the fire was "fully brought under control" the day before, but as a result of 'strong winds during the night' the flames intensified.

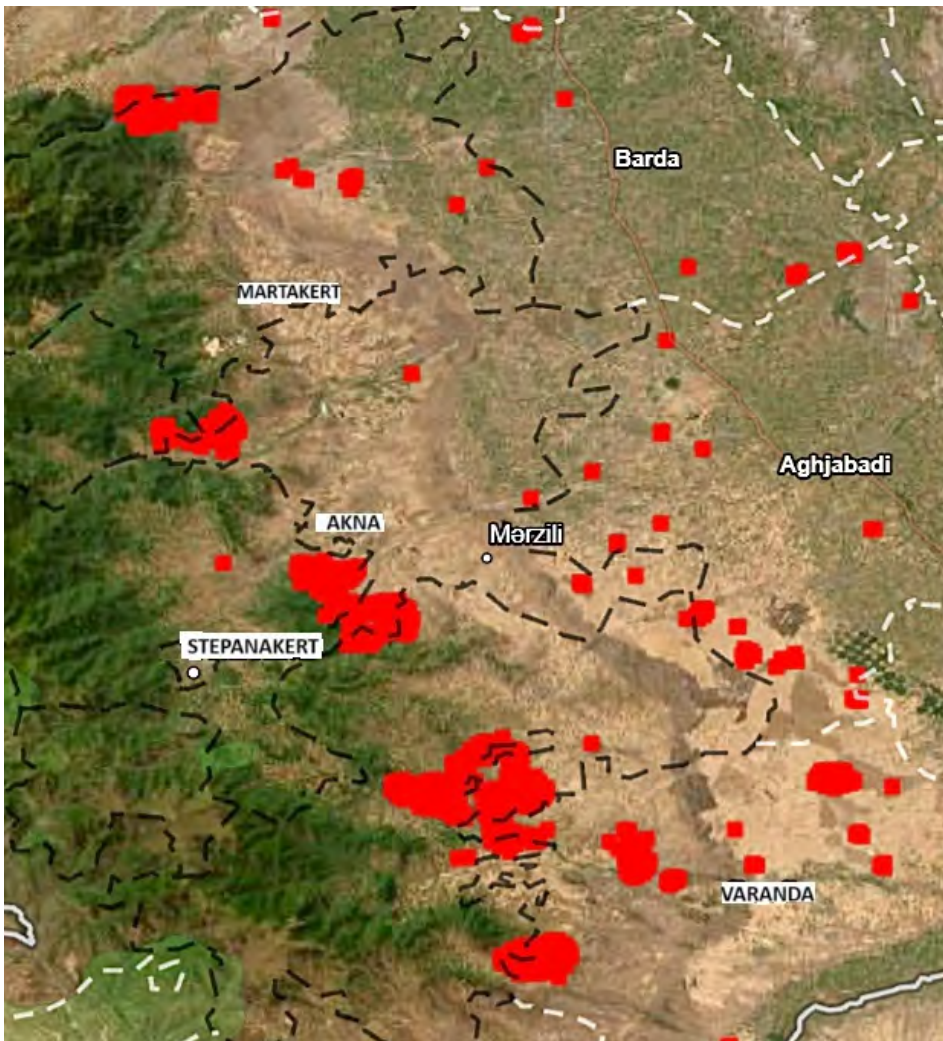
On July 26, APA reported that "new fires have started in an open field near the village of Talish in the Aghdara District"

On the same day, APA reported that the authorities determined the cause of the fire in the area of Boyuk Galadara [Mets Shen] village of Shusha [Shushi] District to be "a short circuit in a power pole in the area."

The latest news on the fire was shared on July 27, with APA citing the Emergency Situations Ministry as saying that fires were "completely extinguished" in Yenikand, Kojavand (Martuni), Boyuk Galadara in Shusha, and Ashaghi Yemishjan (Nerkin Sznek) in Khojali.

The ministry said it was "intensively" fighting fires in the villages of Talish in Aghdara and Gargoyunlu in Goranboy.

(This article originally appeared on the website www.oc-media.org on July 28.)



Note to Our Readers

The *Armenian Mirror-Spectator* has been forced to increase its rates for US, Canada and overseas subscribers.

The rate increase is a result of many factors, including the higher cost for everything from printing, materials and postage. The newspaper has not implemented a rate increase in a decade.

The new rates will go into effect on September 1.

The US second class rates will increase to \$100, first class mailing will increase to \$160, while mailing to Canada will increase to \$150 and overseas will go to \$230.

As always, we thank you for your continued support and understanding.



ARMENIA

Why Does Armenian Produce Taste So Good?

By Christina Markarian

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

In the U.S., I was intrigued to discover a new fruit item on the grocery shelves. An American grower fused a nectarine with an apricot and created an “Angelcot.” My diasporan friend insisted it was the closest thing in America to an Armenian apricot. Apricots in Armenia are a truly transcendent taste experience, practically a food of the gods. Is it possible anything could ever really be as good?

Overflowing summertime bins dedicated to sun ripened, sugary apricots are reason enough to live in Armenia. This is to say nothing of figs, melons, berries, cherries, vegetables and herbs available in an Armenian produce market. So, it begs the question, if America is the land of abundance, what does Armenia have which sets it apart?

To begin, the land itself is unique. The trifecta of sun, altitude and mineral-rich soil produce maximum flavor. Anyone who has spent a summer in Armenia can attest to the abundant sunshine. The country not only has 2,700 sun hours of light per year, the Ararat Valley which is known for its agricultural land, is perpendicular to the sun. Therefore, the angle with which the sun’s rays hit farms in this valley is particularly intense. This results in strong plant sugars and exceptional sweetness.

Armenia is also more than a mile above sea level. At this altitude, there is a strong diurnal temperature variation —the difference between daytime and nighttime temperatures. In some areas, the difference may be up to 35 degrees Fahrenheit. These cool nights result in slower plant growth. Slower growth allows for a more concentrated development of flavor compounds. In a 2025 plant science study, it was found that “particularly significant diurnal temperature variations and high light intensity” enhanced flavonoids and nutritional value.

Finally, the extinct volcanos Mount Ararat and Mount Aragats are the source of rich volcanic soils in Armenia. Volcanic ash has essential nutrients such as potassium, phosphorus, magnesium, which improve soil fertility. A Cairo University study even tried importing volcanic ash to test the effects on soil properties and found that it improved soil moisture retention and was “a source of elements for plant nutrition.” Armenia naturally has an abundance of this exceptional soil. Volcanic soil has a strong mineral composition, which imparts a distinct flavor to crops. It is also nutrient dense, reducing the need for chemical fertilizers, plus it acts as a “soil conditioner,” maintaining moisture.

These are a few of the reasons Armenian produce is renowned and is one of the country’s top exports. According to a 2020 report from Armenia’s Statistical Committee, fruits and vegetables were the fifth largest export group. But, there is more to the equation. Not only does Armenia happen to have favorable growing conditions, but traditional farming methods also factor into the results. Armenian farms are small, family owned, and focused on “low input subsistence agriculture,” as stated by agricultural researcher Richard Wilson.

Historically, Armenia was an agricultural society supported by small, family owned farms. The Soviet Union expropriated those small farms and consolidated them to hundreds of mega farms focused on export. After independence there was a return to the small, traditional, family operations and today there are roughly 350,000 farms, each 4 acres on average, as shown in a 2019 UN report. The families that own these small plots often prioritize meeting their own food needs, with the surplus going to trade. This is called subsistence or semi-subsistence agriculture.

In the U.S., farms are mostly “high input” and “export oriented cash crop,” meaning there is a heavy reliance on cheap labor, GMOs, agrochemicals, monocrops, and expensive machinery to create the highest possible output for the smallest possible area of land. Also, crops are largely grown for sale internationally. Conversely, in

Armenia, commercial production is not the main goal. Armenian farmers emphasize taste, quality, and sustainability.

Furthermore, Armenia is not yet dominated by supermarkets. Other than the rare farmer’s market, supermarkets in America are the only way to buy produce. These supermarkets work with massive distribution companies that ship items from extreme distances. It is common to see Midwest shelves stocked with December blueberries shipped from Chile. In Armenia, the freshest items are still found at the open market stands or the individual produce shops.

While Armenia does import some items, like citrus and tropical fruit from Iran, local markets largely sell locally grown, in-season produce. Locally grown items can luxuriate on the vine or tree, for maximum ripeness. Armenian fruit, at the absolute peak of flavor, is fully ripe, bursting in the skin, and utterly divine.

While summer fruit may get most of the attention, there is a staggering variety of year-round locally grown items, such as jujube, hawthorn berries, dandelion greens, sunchokes, watermelon and Spanish radishes, sorrel, ramps, beet greens, Goris heirloom beans, pig’s ear mushrooms, the list goes on.... This delicious assortment has the added benefit of contributing to soil health and crop health. Strong crop diversity blocks pests and pathogens from moving easily from plant to plant to decimate fields. This

rope and Asia. As a result, it has great variation in altitudes and a wide range of climatic zones. As described in an AUA study, this has resulted in a tremendous variety of landscapes and “ecological communities with distinct flora and fauna, including many regionally endemic, relict, and rare species.”

The positive relationship between plant biodiversity and ecosystem functioning is explained in this 2025 WHO report, “Biodiversity supports key ecosystem services like soil fertility, natural pest control, pollination and water regulation.” From the earliest days of independence, Armenia has recognized the importance of its biodiversity and sought to implement legislative and institutional reforms.

This March, Armenia launched BIOFIN, to “develop a comprehensive national biodiversity plan” which will help Armenia produce nutritious food with minimal environmental impact. Healthy soil results in the most flavorful, nutritious crops. The health of the soil directly impacts quality and taste, creating one more reason that Armenian produce tastes so good.

Every July, it’s common to see Armenians struggle home from the produce market, arms laden with kilos of apricots. Most likely, they’ll stop to sample a few handfuls, juices dripping down their forearms, savoring the uniquely sweet taste. Simply put, nothing else comes close. And, it’s no wonder, considering all that goes into



Some of the luscious produce in Armenia

reduces the need for synthetic pesticides.

In addition to “on-crop diversity,” Armenia is considered a “significant center of agrobiodiversity,” as written in an ISHS report. Biodiversity is the variety of animals, plants and microorganisms. Agrobiodiversity (or agricultural biodiversity) is how biodiversity underpins agricultural systems. It is “all the (supporting) forms of life that make agriculture possible,” such as “soil microbes, pollinating insects, and wild relatives of crops,” as stated by CGIAR.

Armenia’s strong agrobiodiversity is due to its location. It is at the junction of geographic crossroads, between Eu-

the creation of the simply perfect Armenian apricot, or anything else that Armenians are privileged to enjoy from the bounty of their land.

Armenia has the good fortune of great land, strong biodiversity, and Armenian farmers have not abandoned their traditional methods of growing the best food products. And, this is why Armenians can boast of having produce that is par excellence. The creation of great produce is a significant part of our culture and cuisine.

(Christina Markarian is a journalist, blogger, and copywriter, living in Gyumri. She repatriated in 2024.)



INTERNATIONAL

US Lease of Corridor for Azerbaijan ‘Unacceptable to Armenia’

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The proposed lease is understood to be part of a US proposal to have an American company run the transport corridor to Nakhichevan passing through Armenia’s strategic Syunik region. Pashinyan, who met with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev on July 10, indicated on July 16 that he is ready to agree to such an arrangement.

Armenian opposition groups have expressed serious concern over the US proposal. They say it would undermine Armenian sovereignty over Syunik, the only Armenian province bordering Iran.

Aliyev again demanded late last week that the transit of people and cargo through Syunik be exempted from Armenian border controls. Pashinyan’s spokeswoman rejected the demand on Monday, calling it a “hidden territorial claim against Armenia.”

Opposition leaders downplayed her reaction. They stood by their claims that Pashinyan has agreed to open an extraterritorial land corridor for Azerbaijan.

Iran Also Signals Opposition To US Offer On Corridor Through Armenia

Iran has indicated its strong opposition to the US proposal to have an American company run a transport corridor to Azerbaijan’s Nakhichevan exclave that would pass through Armenia’s Syunik region bordering the Islamic Republic.

Commenting on possible Armenian-Azerbaijani transport links, the Iranian Foreign Ministry repeated on Monday, July 28, Tehran’s warnings against the presence of “extra-regional” powers in the South Caucasus.

“Rumors about the participation of extra-regional countries were rejected by regional actors,” the ministry spokesman, Esmaeil Baghaei, was quoted by the ISNA news agency as saying. “However, Iran is

closely monitoring this issue and is in close contact with both countries.”

Echoing regular statements by Iranian leaders, Baghaei rejected any arrangement

tion, rather than passive reaction.”

Speaking at a July 16 news conference, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan confirmed that the US has suggested that



M9 highway in green hills in Syunik province.

that would change Armenia’s borders or regional “geopolitics.” He thus reaffirmed Iran’s strong opposition to an extraterritorial land corridor to Nakhichevan sought by Azerbaijan as well as Turkey.

A top adviser to Iran’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei claimed over the weekend that the United States is behind the Azerbaijani demands for the so-called “Zangezur corridor.”

“The main goal is to weaken the Resistance Axis, sever Iran’s link with the Caucasus, and impose a land blockade on Iran and Russia in the region’s south,” Ali Akbar Velayati said in a speech quoted by another Iranian news agency, Tasnim.

“This project is not only part of America’s strategy to shift pressure from Ukraine to the Caucasus but is also supported by NATO and certain pan-Turkist movements,” Velayati said, adding that Iran will thwart it with its “policy of active preven-

the transit of people and cargo through Syunik be administered by a US company. He signaled readiness to accept such an arrangement which is understood to involve a 100-year US lease on the Syunik corridor. Pashinyan and Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian as well as senior Armenian and Iranian security officials spoke by phone in the following days.

The Russian Foreign Ministry criticized the US proposal on July 24, saying that it is part of the West’s continuing efforts to sideline Russia and Iran. The criticism came as Pashinyan met with Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin on the sidelines of a conference held in Siberia.

Just hours after those talks, a senior lawmaker from Armenia’s ruling party said that Yerevan has rejected the US offer to lease the Armenian transit routes for Nakhichevan “because we saw a danger of ceding our sovereignty there.”

Vardanyan Blamed for Alleged Crimes that Occurred Before He Moved to Artsakh

TRIAL, from page 1

Moreover, the coverage only cited testimony, and did not show any people actually making the statements.

Azertac quoted several people, including Eynur Kazimov, legal heir of victim Anar Kazimov, who stated that “his brother was killed in the Lachin district by gunfire from remnants of Armenian armed forces and illegal Armenian armed groups.”

Zamir Sadigov and Zulfugar Muradov also testified, saying that they reportedly sustained injuries “due to enemy provocations.”

Another, Kenan Gadirli, was reportedly injured “in Aghdara while evacuating wounded individuals.” Others were reportedly injured in Kalbajar or Khojaly, either by Armenian fire or planted mines.

According to Siranush Sahakyan, representing the interests of Armenian prisoners in international instances, the witnesses were “involved by Azerbaijani special ser-

vices and are assuming a certain role in these staged trials.”

“Ruben Vardanyan is being attributed with actions during a period when he was not physically present in the given region [Nagorno-Karabakh], did not hold any position by virtue of which he could have participated in the crimes attributed to him,” Sahakyan told RFE/RL.

Vardanyan was appointed as a state minister in November 2022 and served for less than four months. Prior to his appointment, Vardanyan renounced his Russian citizenship and moved to Nagorno-Karabakh in September.

Sahakyan stated that during Vardanyan’s tenure, there was no war, while during the final attack on Nagorno-Karabakh in September 2023 and the consequent exodus, Vardanyan did not hold any state position.

Vardanyan was detained by Azerbaijani authorities in September 2023 when he attempted to leave Nagorno-Karabakh, along

with the region’s Armenian population.

Azerbaijan has accused him of “illegally cross[ing]” its territory in September 2022 and financially supporting and providing “illegally acquire[d] and import[ed]” military equipment to “armed formations and groups” in Nagorno-Karabakh, as well as plotting an action plan for a “terrorist” operation against Azerbaijani diplomats abroad, amongst other charges.

Previously, his lawyers have said Vardanyan could face life imprisonment.

No independent or international media is allowed to cover the ongoing trials against Armenians held in Azerbaijan, among whom are the region’s former officials.

They are represented by public defenders appointed by Azerbaijan; only Vardanyan has an international lawyer, Jared Genser, who, according to RFE/RL, has not been allowed to enter Baku.

(This article originally appeared on www.oc-media.org on July 24.)

INTERNATIONAL

Azerbaijan-Armenia Confrontation No Longer Relevant, Aliyev Asst. Says

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev’s assistant, Hikmet Hajiyev, stated that a military clash between Yerevan and Baku is not on the agenda, as both sides are working toward signing a peace agreement.

According to Azerbaijani media reports, Hajiyev made the remarks in an interview with the German newspaper Berliner Zeitung on July 26.

He noted that a military confrontation or escalation between the two countries is no longer relevant. According to him, “real peace” exists in the region, although some disputed issues between Baku and Yerevan remain, something he described as a normal aspect of the post-war process.

Louvre Masterpieces to Be Exhibited in Armenia

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — Armenia’s Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sports Zhanina Andreasyan on Monday, July 28, met with French Ambassador Olivier Decottignies to discuss deepening cultural and educational ties.

A key highlight was the announcement of an upcoming exhibition at the History Museum of Armenia in September this year, organized in collaboration with the Louvre. Over a dozen significant artifacts from the Louvre’s collection will be showcased in Armenia with full adherence to international security standards.

The minister emphasized the importance of the exhibition not only as a cultural milestone but also as an opportunity to strengthen Armenian museums’ professional capacities. Other topics included French language teacher training programs and joint cultural initiatives, including the Armenian Impressionism exhibition in Barbizon, France.

Baykar Tests Drone Flights near Armenia Border

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Turkish defense company Baykar carried out simulated drone flights last week along Armenia’s border, according to Sputnik Armenia citing the After War Telegram channel. The simulations included trajectories from near Izmir to Nakhichevan, and later along the Armenia-Tavush frontier.

Screenshots from the Flightradar service show the drone first appearing near Izmir in Turkey, then across Nakhichevan, later in the Yevlakh region. A second screenshot shows the UAV flying along the Armenian border in Tavush.

Baykar’s website states that these simulations allow drone operators to perform tests without security risks. The company notes the ability to run “dangerous scenarios” that need validation during flight operations.



INTERNATIONAL

Azerbaijani-Russian Relations at a New Stage: Causes of Tension and Future Prospects

By Elmaddin Shamilzade

BAKU (JAM News) — In recent months, relations between Azerbaijan and Russia have grown increasingly tense. Key events that have contributed to the escalation include the downing of an Azerbaijani passenger plane, police raids targeting Azerbaijanis living in Russia, and mutual accusations in the media and at the diplomatic level.

While official Baku claims it is trying to resolve the situation within the framework of international law, experts believe Russia’s response – passive in some cases and openly aggressive in others – is pushing the relationship into a new phase of crisis.

The Plane Incident

The incident involving the AZAL passenger plane shot down in December 2024 near the city of Aktau in Kazakhstan marked a turning point in Azerbaijan-Russian relations.

The Azerbaijani side claims the aircraft was downed by Russian air defense systems. President Ilham Aliyev, drawing international attention to the case, stated that the incident represented a grave violation of international law.

According to available information, the order to fire was given directly by Major General Aleksandr Tolopilo, commander of the 51st Air Defense Division of Russia’s 4th Guards Army. The missile system involved was a Pantsir-S, under the command of Captain Paladychuk. Russia’s internal investigation downplayed the incident, and Tolopilo was later promoted and reassigned.

Azerbaijan’s Prosecutor General’s Office and other state institutions have announced plans to launch international legal proceedings over the case. According to President Aliyev, the matter may be brought before the International Court of Justice or other international tribunals.

President Aliyev raised the issue publicly for the first time on July 19, 2025, at the Global Media Forum in Shusha: “Our AZAL aircraft was shot down near the Kazakh city of Aktau. To this day, no one has taken responsibility for it. This is a blatant violation of international law.”

Although he did not name Russia directly, Aliyev’s message was clear: “Seven months have passed, yet there has been no explanation or acceptance of responsibility. This kind of behavior does not match the spirit of strategic partnership.”

The Russian side maintains that the investigation is ongoing and no official conclusions have been reached. On July 21, Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov commented: “Sometimes there are difficult periods in relations between two countries. This is one of them. But we hope it will pass.”

He also stressed that “bilateral cooperation is mutually beneficial and rests on a solid foundation.”

Responding to a question about the AZAL plane, Peskov said the investigation is being handled by Russian authorities, but Azerbaijan has the right to go to court:

“If Baku chooses to bring the matter to an international court, that is their right. We will await official decisions.”

He added that Moscow considers respect for the rights of Russians in Azerbaijan important — just as Azerbaijanis in Russia are seen as “a law-abiding and respected community.”

Pressure on the Diaspora in Russia

In June 2025, Russian police in an operation in Yekaterinburg shot and killed two Azerbaijani nationals. Azerbaijan labeled the incident a “demonstrative killing,” launched an investigation through the Prosecutor General’s Office, and demanded compensation.

In response, Azerbaijani authorities detained several Russian citizens in Baku, including employees of Sputnik Azerbaijan. Russia viewed the arrests as a “hostile step,” summoning the Azerbaijani ambassador to the Foreign Ministry. Baku, in turn, summoned the Russian ambassador and demanded clarification over the Yekaterinburg incident.

According to Nikolay Mitrokhin, a researcher at the University of Bremen (Germany), the operations appear to be politically motivated:

“Putin is displeased with Aliyev and decided to use the Azerbaijani diaspora in Russia as a tool of pressure. In this context, the head of Russia’s Investigative Committee, Aleksandr Bastrykin — backed by security agencies — has taken center stage.”

‘Z-Bloggers’ and Media Pressure

On his Facebook page, he writes that a group of “Z-bloggers,” created within the Kremlin, has spun out of control and — through its chauvinistic rhetoric — now overshadows even the official state line.

He emphasizes that figures like Vladimir Solovyov and Igor Strelkov (Girkin) are portraying Azerbaijan as a military target and openly threatening President Ilham Aliyev: “Z-bloggers write about bombing Azerbaijan, deporting Azerbaijanis from Russia, and demand immediate action from the Kremlin. These people could be dismissed as marginal, but their statements resonate with parts of Russian society and reflect rising chauvinist sentiments.”

Shahinoglu also warns that Russia may begin imposing economic and administrative pressure on Azerbaijanis, including rejecting agricultural imports and targeting businessmen’s assets through tax inspections.

He notes that this rhetoric is not only shaping public opinion but is also being used as a tool of pressure against the Azerbaijani government. According to him, some segments broadcast on Russian state TV have directly questioned Azerbaijan’s territorial integrity and sovereignty — prompting strong reactions from official Baku.

A Shift in Diplomatic Language: ‘We Are Neutral, but not Indifferent’

A particularly significant moment in the context of Azerbaijan–Russia relations was President Ilham Aliyev’s remarks on Ukraine during his speech at the Global Media Forum in Shusha. Referring to the principles of international law, Aliyev expressed support for Ukraine’s territorial integrity:

“We recognize the territorial integrity of Ukraine, and this stems from Azerbaijan’s respect for international law.”

Aliyev also emphasized that Azerbaijan continues to provide humanitarian aid to Ukraine: “We are neutral, but not indifferent.”

This wording reflects Azerbaijan’s attempt to pursue a balanced foreign policy — maintaining neutrality while signaling solidarity. Analysts interpret the speech as

Baku’s effort to send a political message to the West and regional partners without entering into direct confrontation with Russia.

Military exercises and energy negotiations

Amid growing tensions, Azerbaijan has conducted — and plans to conduct — several joint military exercises with Turkey and Central Asian states, which has drawn criticism from Moscow:

•“Eternal Brotherhood – 2025”

Date: June 12–19, 2025

Location: Nakhchivan, Azerbaijan

Participants: Armed forces of Azerbaijan and Turkey

Purpose: Coordinated military operations and joint training in mountainous terrain

•“Mustafa Kemal Atatürk – 2025”

Date: June 20–30, 2025

Location: Nakhchivan, Azerbaijan

Participants: Military units from Azerbaijan, Turkey, and Pakistan

Purpose: Coordination of multinational forces, offensive and defensive maneuvers

•“Eternal Brotherhood – IV” (scheduled)

Date: September 2–8, 2025

Location: Training grounds in Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan

Participants: Azerbaijan, Turkey, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Pakistan

Purpose: Regional military cooperation within the framework of the Organization of Turkic States

These exercises are intended to strengthen regional security cooperation — a development that has caused unease in the Kremlin.

At the same time, Azerbaijan is holding negotiations with the European Union to expand energy cooperation. Talks held in April and June focused on gas supply and the development of green energy initiatives.

Parallel Diplomacy with Iran

In July, advisors to Iran’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei — Ali Larijani and Ali Akbar Velayati — held high-level meetings in Moscow and Islamabad, during which Azerbaijan faced open criti-

cism. Velayati called Azerbaijan’s cooperation with Israel and its activity in the region “a betrayal of the Islamic world.”

Against this backdrop, the visit of President Pezeshkian to Khakendi (the Azerbaijani name of Stepanakert) and his warm relations with Baku caused dissatisfaction among Iranian conservative circles. Azerbaijan seeks to distinguish between its official relations with Tehran and the influence of parallel structures: “For Baku, the partner is Tehran, not Qom (religious center in Iran).”

Prospects and Possible Scenarios

Amid current tensions, Baku is moving away from the pragmatic cooperation model established after 2020. The initiation of legal procedures regarding the plane incident, voiced concerns about the diaspora’s situation in Russia, and changes in diplomatic rhetoric all confirm this.

Nevertheless, a significant economic interdependence between Russia and Azerbaijan remains. According to 2025 statistics, remittances from over 300,000 Azerbaijanis living in Russia account for 46% of all monetary inflows into the country. Moreover, Russia remains one of the main markets for Azerbaijani agricultural products.

These factors indicate both sides’ desire to avoid a full-scale conflict. However, rhetoric in the information space, actions by intelligence agencies, and diplomatic moves suggest that tensions will persist for some time.

All these developments show that relations between Azerbaijan and Russia have gone beyond strategic partnership and entered a phase of serious trust crisis.

The downing of the AZAL plane, pressure on the diaspora, propaganda by Z-bloggers, and increased regional diplomacy further complicate these relations. Alongside reliance on international law and diplomatic mechanisms, the Azerbaijani government seeks to strengthen its position in military-political and informational spheres as well.

This points to the formation of more complex and multidirectional relations between Baku and Moscow in the near future.



Aliyev Family Buys Luxury Hotel Shares in Turkey for \$500 M

YEREVAN (News.am) — The Aliyev family has acquired a 50-percent stake in the five-star Mandarin Oriental Bodrum hotel in Mugla (Turkey) through an investment of 500 million euros, Türkiye Today reported on July 29.

The deal, done in partnership with Turkish development company Astas Holding, was realized through Pasha Holding, whose largest shareholders are reportedly Leyla and Arzu Aliyev, daughters of Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, which directly links the investment to the country’s ruling family.



INTERNATIONAL

Europe Accused of Going Soft on Azerbaijan to Avoid Buying Russian Gas

By Magerram Zeynalov & Grigor Atanesian

BAKU (BBC News) — When a young peace activist was jailed for 15 years for high treason in Azerbaijan last month, his friends' anger was directed primarily at the European Union, ahead of the government that put him

Trump Shares Video of Aliyev Complimenting Him

By Xandie (Alexandra) Kuenning

US President Donald Trump has shared a short video clip of Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev complimenting him, a move widely publicized by Azerbaijani pro-government media.

Trump shared the video on the social media platform Truth Social on Monday, July 21, though Aliyev's statements were originally made on July 19 during his opening speech at a media forum in Shusha (Shushi).

In his speech, Aliyev clarified that he never predicted Trump's victory, but had made it clear Azerbaijan would prefer a Trump presidency because "Mr Trump, just like the people of Azerbaijan, share fundamental values, including family values."

Aliyev went on to claim that Trump was the only US president not to start a war, emphasizing that instead Trump aimed to end wars.

"We are grateful to him personally for his personal aspiration to help Armenia and Azerbaijan to finally come to an agreement despite the fact he is busier with other global security affairs," Aliyev said.

The video clip ended with Aliyev wishing Trump "every success" in accomplishing his agenda, "especially when draining the swamp."

On Tuesday, Aliyev thanked Trump for sharing the video, while again underscoring Azerbaijan's support for Trump's "vision and efforts to promote peace and stability around the world, including in our region."

Previously, on 19 July, Trump told Republican senators that the US "worked magic" in the peace talks between Armenia and Azerbaijan, saying "it's pretty close if it's not already done." The statement came as Azerbaijani and Armenian officials continued to publicly disagree over how the unblocking of regional transport links could look.

Trump did not offer any additional details as to what he was referring to, and neither Armenia nor Azerbaijan commented on the brief remark.

Earlier this year, top officials from Trump's administration made a series of diplomatic overtures to Azerbaijan, including a visit in March from special envoy Steve Witkoff to Baku and a phone call between then-US National Security Advisor Mike Waltz and his Azerbaijani counterpart Hikmat Hajiyev.

The discussions appeared to focus on the then-recent announcement that Armenia and Azerbaijan had agreed to sign a historic peace treaty, with Waltz highlighting that the US was pleased the two countries had "taken a big step forward and agreed to a peace treaty."

(This article originally appeared on the website www.oc-media.org on July 22.)

behind bars.

Bahruz Samadov, a 30-year-old PhD student, is facing one of the harshest sentences ever given to a critic of President Ilham Aliyev's 21-year rule. He rejects the charge as fabricated.

The EU "may keep flirting with Baku, but silence has its cost," one critic complained.

Shortly after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen declared Azerbaijan a "key partner" in EU efforts to move away from Russian natural gas.

In that time, Aliyev has re-established control of the breakaway Karabakh region, causing an exodus of its entire Armenian population; he has also secured a fifth consecutive term in an election widely criticised by monitors, and cracked down on opposition and press freedom.

The European Parliament called on the EU last year to impose sanctions on Baku and end reliance on Azerbaijan's gas exports. However, top foreign policy officials avoid publicly criticizing Aliyev.

When Kaja Kallas, the EU's top diplomat, visited Baku in April, she was heavily criticized by Aliyev's opponents for emphasizing "great potential" for EU-Azerbaijan ties while at least 21 leading journalists were detained in Baku.

Aliyev has justified arresting journalists by the need to "protect the media landscape from external negative influences," accusing reporters of "illegally receiving funding from abroad."

He has also long accused international organizations of bias and meddling in domestic politics, and the Baku offices of the UN, the International Red Cross Committee and the BBC have all been ordered to shut down.

EU policy has in effect given Aliyev "a free hand," says Eldar Mamedov, a former Latvian diplomat who served as foreign policy adviser to the European Parliament's Social Democrat group.

"The repression, arrests of dissidents, bloggers, and opposition voices have long strained Baku-Brussels relations," he told the BBC. "Since Russia's aggression in Ukraine, this issue virtually disappeared from the agenda."

The European Union rejects the allegation. "[The EU] is concerned by the shrinking civic space in [Azerbaijan]," a spokesman told the BBC, and has called on Baku "to release all those arbitrarily detained for exercising their fundamental rights."

"The EU has consistently raised its concerns at all levels, both in public and in private," including during Kaja Kallas's visit to Baku, he added.

The EU wants to diversify where it gets its gas, to avoid being dependent on a single supplier such as Russia.

Azerbaijan is far from being the biggest player, as its overall share in EU natural gas imports remains a modest 4.3%, despite an uptick in supplies.

But the share is much higher in some member states connected to the Southern Gas Corridor pipeline from Azerbaijan. Up to 40% of Bulgarian natural gas imports come from Azerbaijan, and for Italy and Greece it is 15%.

This makes it difficult for the EU to present a united front, according to a senior European diplomat who spoke on condition of anonymity.

"Europe in this situation does not have a huge amount of credible leverage over Azerbaijan," he said.

The power will not go out in Europe without Azerbaijani gas, but that is not the point, says Benjamin Godwin, a risk analyst specializing in the Caucasus and Central Asia.

"The EU's strategy is to have as much gas from as many different locations as possible," he says. "And while it is not reliant on Azeri gas, it would like to have more gas from Azerbaijan to ultimately reduce its dependence on Russia."

That energy partnership "does not change our stance on the human rights situation in

Azerbaijan," the EU spokesman told the BBC.

President Aliyev has other benefits to Europe besides gas.

He has consistently supported Ukraine's territorial integrity in the face of Russia's invasion - a rare stance among ex-Soviet states seen by the Kremlin as allies.

Although Azerbaijan has not imposed sanctions on Russia, it has supplied Ukraine with humanitarian aid.

Baku's relations with Moscow have taken a dive in recent months.

An Azerbaijani Airlines plane crashed with the loss of 38 lives last December - apparently shot down by mistake by a Russian anti-aircraft missile.

The crisis then deepened following the deaths of two Azerbaijani men in Russian police custody.

By openly challenging Russia, Aliyev has sought to take on a larger role in a region traditionally dominated by Moscow, experts say. But he also presents himself to the West as an opponent of Vladimir Putin.

"Azerbaijan has pocketed the attention and they played it pretty well. They are seeing that all sides want to be friends with them and they are making use of that in all directions," the senior EU diplomat told the BBC.

Another well-placed European diplomat said: "We are absolutely not happy with [Azerbaijan's human rights record], but there is not much we can do."

When seven Azerbaijani investigative journalists were given long jail terms last month, the EU's diplomatic service (EEAS) said it was a "worrying development" and called for "immediate steps to ensure a safe and enabling environment for all journalists."

So far the EU has stayed silent over Bahruz Samadov's jail term for treason. But his friends say he recently tried to take his life and fear for his safety.

Armenian Honorary Consul Fired After Defending Church

By Ruzanna Stepanian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — An Armenian honorary consul in Russia has reportedly been sacked after criticizing Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's ongoing campaign against the Armenian Apostolic Church and the resulting arrest of billionaire Samvel Karapetyan.

The consul, Narek Spartakyan, has held the position in the Russian city of Yekaterinburg since 2018. Armenia's Foreign Ministry on Tuesday, July 29, did not deny his dismissal reported by a Russian news website, Ura.ru.

"I consider any actions against the Armenian Apostolic Church, an important foundation of the spiritual unity of all Armenians, unacceptable," the publication quoted Spartakyan as saying on Monday.

The 35-year-old also heaped praise on Karapetyan, who was arrested on June 18 hours after condemning Pashinyan's efforts to depose the supreme head of the Armenian Church, Catholicos Karekin II, and other senior clerics.

The tycoon, who has mainly lived in Russia since the early 1990s, is facing a string of criminal charges, including a call for a violent overthrow of the government. He rejects the accusations as politically motivated.

Vahagn Aleksanian, a deputy chairman of Pashinyan's Civil Contract party, appeared to confirm the Russian report.

"In my view, an honorary consul has no right to speak out against policies of the elected authorities of Armenia or actions of Armenia's law-enforcement bodies," Aleksanian told RFE/RL's Armenian Service.

Pashinyan has been pressuring Karekin to resign, saying that the latter had fathered a child in breach of his vows of celibacy. His detractors say that he is simply trying to please Azerbaijan and/or neutralize a key source of opposition to his unilateral concessions to Armenia's arch-foe.

In a July 20 appeal to his supporters, Pashinyan pledged to "free" the Echmiadzin seat of the Catholicos, which is part of the town of Vagharshapat, from Karekin. He said they should gear up for a rally in Vagharshapat's central square adjacent to the church's Mother See.

The gathering did not take place last week, contrary to predictions made by some media outlets and opposition figures. Pashinyan has not yet set a date for it.

Karekin's office accused Pashinyan on July 21 of planning a violent attack on the Mother See. Armenian opposition groups condemned Pashinyan's declared plans in even stronger terms. They also urged their

supporters to be ready to rush to Echmiadzin and protect the Catholicos.

Pashinyan has made no further social media posts against the church's top clergy in the last few days. Aleksanian insisted



Narek Spartakyan, Armenia's honorary consul in the Russian city of Yekaterinburg.

that the prime minister has not abandoned his plans to "liberate" the historic church

Community News

Come Move Mountains: AIWA's Fidelity To Its Mission to Connect

By Arpi Sarafian

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

Declaring victory may be premature, yet Come Move Mountains, the June 20, 2025 Zoom webinar hosted by the Armenian International Women's Association (AIWA) with the participation of the Armenian Volunteer Corps (AVC) sent a powerful message that women are no longer relegated to the traditional "Ladies' Auxiliaries" whose very raison d'être was to provide support and resources to the larger organization of which they were extensions and which often excluded them from leadership and decision-making roles. The webinar evidenced that women today are at the forefront ready to challenge all norms with their innovative ideas.

The Armenian Volunteer Corps, headquartered in Yerevan, was founded in 2000 to foster connection between Armenia and the diaspora by inspiring people to volunteer their time and their service to the homeland. While initially centered on initiatives that contributed to Armenia's development in business, education, arts and culture, health and other domains, the recent Artsakh Wars and the forced displacement of large numbers of refugees shifted the focus of their activities to more humanitarian endeavors. The ability to adapt to the critical need at hand evidences a flexibility and a creativity crucial to meeting the evolving and the ever-growing needs of the homeland. Even with the gloom hanging over it today, the members are successful in portraying Armenia as a desirable place to move to.

AVC brings together diasporans of all ages and backgrounds, including non-Armenians, to help Armenia thrive. When in the United States, a notoriously "throw-away society," the elderly are discarded into retirement and convalescent homes, the AVC welcomes them and engages them in useful activities. "I feel I'm contributing to my homeland," cheers an 85-year-old volunteer from Brazil. "There is a lot of work to be done," notes Executive director Arina Zohrabian who moved to Armenia in 2002 as a volunteer with the Corps. "What was meant to be a one year of service evolved into a life-changing experience and Armenia became home. Armenia needed me more than America," avers Arina, who makes it all sound so doable.

The unassuming manner in which the volunteers do the practical work of protecting the needs of children, of pregnant women, of victims of domestic abuse, of violence and of much more, their open-mindedness and their ability to respond to the issues at hand, often with significant impact, is deserving of the highest recognition. Former journalists, artists and other professionals from
see AIWA, page 10



The Ararat Hockey Club team and its coaches in the Nashville hockey arena

Ararat Hockey Club

By Tamar Bederian Dekirmenjian

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — June was coming to an end and the ice rink was being prepared for another tournament game in Nashville. The air was cold, but there was much warmth in the hearts of the Ararat Hockey Club team of 14 players and its supporters.

The weekend of June 27 represented the realization of a dream that had been months in the making (since October of 2024). A Dallas Armenian resident, Greg Dekirmenjian, wanted to put together a team of skilled players between the ages of 11 and 12 that could compete and represent the Armenian nation. It required many phone calls to communities and churches. Furthermore, although this sport is not very prevalent within the Armenian-American community, a head coach was found, Andy Gevorgyan, from Los Angeles. Gevorgyan was also able to help find players, and so the inaugural season soon started for this Armenian youth hockey club.

With the team and tournament location all set – Ararat Hockey Club would compete at the Music City Cup in Nashville – the question remained how these young boys would play together when most were meeting for the first time.

Armenian families from all over North America (Los Angeles, Boston, Dallas, Calgary and Toronto) flew into Nashville, unaware of how the weekend would unfold. But as William Saroyan stated in so many words, "when two or three are gathered, we will create a new Armenia," and that's precisely what happened. The families bonded and formed friendships for a lifetime. Armenian music was played all weekend – by the poolside, in the hockey rinks and inside the hotel.



The Ararat Hockey Club team with parents and supporters in Nashville

The players showed resilience during the competition and were able to play in the championship game. Although they came short of the gold, there was no shortage of talented plays made. The boys took home silver representing not a lost nation, but one where Armenian last names and culture will be remembered within the hockey community. After all who can forget the tricolor flags being waved from the bleachers and Armenian music blaring during warmups and medal presentations in country music town?

As the weekend concluded, it was evident that the goal of bringing together a group interested, not only in hockey, but also proud Armenians, was successfully realized. Parents and players lingered in front of the ice rink, unwilling to part with their new friends.

Ararat Hockey Club is prepared to participate again next summer and bring together players and families to represent the Armenian people in the hockey arena.

87 Members of Congress Sign Assembly Supported Letter To Secretary Rubio

WASHINGTON — Eighty-seven Members of Congress signed an Armenian Assembly supported bipartisan letter to Secretary of State Marco Rubio regarding the fundamental right of return for Artsakh Armenians.

Spearheaded by Armenian Caucus Co-Chair Frank Pallone (D-NJ), the bipartisan letter welcomed Secretary of State Marco Rubio's recent testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, which confirmed "U.S. support for a peace process that averts the risk of escalation by Azerbaijan and ensures the release of all arbitrarily detained Armenian prisoners of war and civilian captives," the letter specifically encouraged the Secretary to "address the issue of a collective and protected return of Armenians to Nagorno Karabakh."

"We commend Congressman Pallone for spearheading this bipartisan initiative, along with Armenian Caucus Leaders Gus Bilirakis, Brad Sherman, and David Valadao," stated Armenian Assembly Congressional Relations Director Mariam Khaloyan. "We also thank the participants of the Knights and Daughters of Vartan who spent a day on the Hill with the Armenian Assembly urging support for this letter. Together, we made an important impact," Khaloyan concluded.

The letter to Secretary of State Rubio encouraged "the Administration to actively engage with international partners and multilateral institutions to facilitate the return of Armenians to Nagorno Karabakh," including "through diplomatic support for a recent measure adopted by the Swiss Parliament ...which would establish an international negotiation platform to mediate a safe, secure and internationally guaranteed return of Armenians to Nagorno-Karabakh."

In addition, the letter highlighted the Final Statement of the International Conference on the Preservation of Armenian Religious, Cultural, and Historical Heritage in Nagorno Karabakh held under the auspices of the World Council of Churches on May 27-28, 2025, in Bern, Switzerland. The Statement urged "governments and international bodies, particularly Switzerland where we are meeting today, to take diplomatic and legal steps based on OSCE and other conventions to prevent further erasure of Armenian cultural heritage, support the return of the people to their land and to work actively towards the liberation of the Armenian hostages in Baku."

The letter concluded by encouraging the Secretary to "engage all parties in this unresolved conflict to ensure the collective, protected, and dignified return of forcibly displaced Armenians to their indigenous homeland of Nagorno Karabakh," and further noted that "taking this action
see RUBIO, page 10



OBITUARY

Robert Kaprielian

Watertown Native, Army Veteran

WATERTOWN — Robert Kaprielian of Watertown, passed away on July 25 with his family at his side. He was 89.

She was the husband of the late Landyce (Torrance) Kaprielian), father of Rachel Kaprielian Feloney and her husband Paul, and Myra Ovoian and her husband Bill, all of Watertown. He was also “Papa” to grandchildren William Robert Gannon and Calvin and Drew Ovoian and the brother-in-law of Ilse Kaprielian of Belmont.

Bob was born and raised in Watertown, a first-generation son of Armenian parents who like many, chose to live and raise their children in Watertown among their extended family and rooted community. As a young boy, he remembered the impact of the second World War and the ways in which it touched everyone in his hometown, including the deployment of his older brother Gil to the South Pacific when he was eight. Together with his many friends — many of whom he held throughout his life — they would play pickup games in the fields of the East End and watch the latest newsreels at the Coolidge Theater.

He played football and basketball at Watertown High School and earned a college scholarship to play football at Northeastern University. He graduated in 1958 and was commissioned as a Lieutenant in the U.S.

Army and attended flight school. He met and married Landyce Torrance and the two of them lived in Ozark, Ala., while he was serving his duty and later moved to Fresno, Calif., where they had the time of their lives seeing and discovering the West Coast. In 1962, they moved to Mount Auburn Street where they raised their family and would live the rest of their lives.

Bob worked in business management at a number of firms, beginning with Honeywell, Inc. where he took the job so that he could see and travel the country. He loved to see and experience places and sites throughout the country and the world, yet his favorite place anywhere was always Watertown. He delighted in starting and stewarding the Watertown High School Athletic Hall of Fame where scores of former WHS athletes would be regaled and celebrated. He hosted the Watertown cable show “A Veterans Story” where he got to interview some of his heroes, local men who served their country with distinction. He also hosted shows where he interviewed local Watertown candidates running for office as well as “It Was a Very Good Year” which told stories of past days in Watertown. As a former athlete, Bob was a fixture at the Mount Auburn Club where made a whole new group of friends



and was considered the club’s “Mayor” and served a number of years as boxing judge with US Boxing. Throughout his whole life, he spent much time with his cadre of friends, many of whom he had grown up with and cherished all his life.

Above all, Bob loved and was devoted to his family. He was so proud of his daughters, Rachel and Myra, and was fully invested in their lives and relationships. He showed up for everything: their dance recitals (which he suffered through); their sports games (they were NOT athletes); town parades; Rachel’s many political events and crossed the country to see Myra in Arizona and California and being her

“Uber” into work every morning.

He and his wife Landyce spent their 52 years of marriage always putting their family first, from caring for his parents in their old age to supporting their daughters at every phase of their lives.

They took interesting trips and spent a lot of time having adventures and connections.

Bob was also a loving grandfather and was delighted to have boys in his life after raising only girls. He was proud of their pursuits and interests and was always imparting something to them about Watertown or in the ordinary like pouring cereal for breakfast each morning to walking the track at Victory Field.

He could often be found at one of his many hangouts like Uncommon Grounds and Town Diner (where he had brought his own bottle of real maple syrup), the St. James Men’s Club, AMVETS, Greg’s or Lanno’s or Union Market Station before that, enjoying company and imparting his own brand of pearls of wisdom. He will be fondly remembered and dearly missed.

Funeral service/reception was held at St. James Armenian Church, 465 Mount Auburn Street, Watertown on Thursday, July 31. Interment will be at Mount Auburn Cemetery, Cambridge.

In lieu of flowers, donations to Watertown Community Foundation, PO Box 334, Watertown MA 02472 or Saint James Armenian Church.

Karolyn Kurkjian-Jones

Style Maven and Bookworm Devoted to Family

WATERTOWN — Karolyn Kurkjian-Jones of Watertown and formerly of Dorchester and the North End, passed away on July 20, 2025 at Lawrence and Memorial Hospital in New London, Ct.

Born in Dorchester, she was the daughter of Rosella and Anooshavan (“Flash”)



Kurkjian, and the beloved mother of Meredith Kurkjian Lobur and her wife, Stephanie Page of Provincetown, and Peter E. A. Lobur and his wife, Janel Lobur, of Frederick, MD. She was the best grandmother (Gammy) to her adored Rhett and Reagan Lobur, and the cherished sister of Stephen Kurkjian of Manomet and Elizabeth (Liz)

Kurkjian-Henry and her husband John W. Henry of Niantic, CT. She was the wife of the late Ralph Jones, a consultant for the US Department of Transportation, whom she met when he moved to Boston in the mid-1980s.

Karolyn was a graduate of Dorchester High School and Boston State Teachers College. She cherished her years at her dream-come-true contemporary condo and deck in the North End. (Mayor Menino awarded her Best of Boston Deck design several years in a row.) When she moved into her parents’ house in Watertown she turned it into another showcase of design and beauty. Dearest to her heart were the Kurkjian family memories that we made at our Manomet cottage, Mer Doon, and “down the beach.”

In the 1960s Karolyn achieved her lifelong dream and became a flight attendant for American Airlines. She had maintained her ties to the airlines decades later and was working as a volunteer at Logan International Airport on the morning of Sept. 11, 2001, assisting early arrivals to their gates. Minutes after the tragedy became known, she was transferred to the Logan Hilton Hotel where she brought consolation and comfort to those family members who may have had loved ones on the American Air-

lines flight that had been hijacked from the airport.

Her other careers included a teacher in the Boston Public Schools and a Boston real estate agent. She loved her most recent job the most, as a concierge at the Boston Park Plaza, as it allowed her to become Boston’s most proud ambassador, directing visitors to the city’s best sights and sites, whether historic and hidden. She was still planning to return to ‘the desk’ after her recuperation.

Her passions in life included figure skating which she perfected at ice rinks wherever she lived whether in Dorchester, Needham, upstate New York, Tampa and the North End, and she maintained her membership in the Skating Club of Boston. Other passions included gardening, keeping her home as if House Beautiful was coming to write a feature article at any moment and rescuing older, often frail dogs and cats. She was Larry David’s biggest fan and a rapt daily listener to Boston Public Radio’s “Jim & Margery” Show.

She was the family’s most avid reader

and political pundit. Her antipathy to the current occupant of the White House was so strong that she sent him a postcard every day — except Sundays — demanding that he release his taxes during his first term in office. Her anger towards his presidency became well-known enough that the New York Times featured her letter-writing campaign in its Page 1 story in 2020 on Americans’ rejoicing over President Biden’s victory. Karolyn was ever elegant, ever informed, ever loving and loved by all who knew her.

A Funeral Service for Karolyn will be held at St. James Armenian Church, 465 Mount Auburn St., Watertown, on August 6 at 11 a.m. There will be a family visitation from 10-11 prior to the service. In lieu of flowers, memorial gifts can be made to St James Armenian Church or to a charity dedicated to the rescue of older dogs, the Danny Boy Adoption Fund, PO Box 4043, Pittsfield, MA 01202. Cemetery Services will be private.

Arrangements by Aram Bedrosian Funeral, Watertown.

James “Jack” Giragosian, CPC

Mark J. Giragosian

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COMMUNITY NEWS

Come Move Mountains: AIWA’s Fidelity to Its Mission to Connect

AIWA from page 8
Switzerland, the United States of America, Australia and many other countries contribute to initiatives that accommodate their various skills, while they immerse in Armenian culture.

The resourcefulness of these women is nothing new. Silence may have been a woman’s lot historically, yet these “marginalized” souls have played a decisive role in rebuilding and in enlightening their communities. The Zabel Yessayans, the Shushanik Kurghinians, the Srpuhi Dussaps, and the scores of other “unsung heroes,” to borrow the participants’ words, have, with their skills and inner strength, inspired generations of women to devote their efforts to the betterment of their societies.

It takes courage to go against the norm. When the world flaunts brutality and glorifies destruction, the AVC volunteers offer succor and support. Their caring for the vulnerable and their compassion evoke for me the great diasporan poet Vahan Tekeyan’s “Prayer on The Threshold of Tomorrow,” where the speaker seeks guidance from the goodness and the wisdom of God to deal with his shaken faith on account of

humanity’s suffering, more specifically, the horrendous loss suffered by his people in the 1915 Genocide. The poet pleads for gentleness and kindness to counter the destruction and the devastation caused by brutality:

Let peace reign.
Tear down all fortresses and impregnable walls. And lance
your wrath against the barricades of armored arrogance.

Divide the world’s wealth evenly. Let crowds through the entrance
to your pastures stampede at the last fall of the last tower -

But, O Lord let them break no tree, nor crush a single flower.

(Gerald Papasian and John Papasian translation)

The disgust with violence also recalls ethnographer folklorist Arousyak Sahakyan from Armenia, a one-of-a-kind embodiment of her culture’s values and aspirations. Sahakyan wishes her people to “keep to the margins of a civilization where the more powerful have always devoured the less powerful.” “Better compete for the inner spiritual wealth, and be perceived as powerless, than compete for the evil and

the corruption of a world reduced to brutality and to greed,” comments Sahakyan in a 2013 interview with Vardan Hovanesian on the TV program “Vardanank.”

The zoom webinar reaffirmed AIWA as an association with goals of its own, developing networks and projects, or supporting existing projects, to serve Armenian women and their communities. Aligning with the Armenian Volunteer Corps spotlighted the Association’s stated mission, “to connect and to elevate Armenian women globally.” The webinar was all about connecting. When disunity plagues our nation and when every other newspaper headline highlights, and deplores, our divisions, the “small but mighty force of AVC volunteers,” to borrow their words once again, work together to help Armenia thrive. These women’s is the courage to live life in its truest sense. Maybe Armenians can, in the luminous Sahakyan’s words, “illuminate the world with our inner light.”

Underlying it all is the need of all human beings to connect with fellow human beings to combat their loneliness. Tsoleen Sarian, AVC Executive Director and former AIWA Board Member, is “grateful for the family network the AVC provides.” Com-

menting on her decision to join the AVC, “I wouldn’t be alone,” confides Sarian. One is indeed richer and safer when connected. Science has shown that living as a community, where the members cooperate and support one another, greatly enhances the chances of a species to survive.

Members of Congress Sign Assembly Supported Letter to Secretary Rubio

RUBIO, from page 8
is in direct accordance with international law and in pursuit of a just and lasting peace in the region.”

The letter was cosigned by Reps. Nannette Barragán (D-CA), Ami Bera (D-CA), Judy Chu (D-CA), Gil Cisneros (D-CA), Jim Costa (D-CA), Vince Fong (R-CA), Laura Friedman (D-CA), Jimmy Gomez (D-CA), Jared Huffman (D-CA), Sydney Kamlager-Dove (D-CA), Ro Khanna (D-CA), Young Kim (R-CA), Doug LaMalfa (R-CA), Mike Levin (D-CA), Ted Lieu (D-CA), Zoe Lofgren (D-CA), Tom McClintock (R-CA), Dave Min (D-CA), Kevin Mullin (D-CA), Jimmy Panetta (D-CA), Nancy Pelosi (D-CA), Scott Peters (D-CA), Luz Rivas (D-CA), Linda Sánchez (D-CA), Brad Sherman (D-CA), Lateefah Simon (D-CA), Eric Swalwell (D-CA), Mike Thompson (D-CA), David Valadao (R-CA), George Whitesides (D-CA), John Larson (D-CT), Del. Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC), Sarah McBride (D-DE), Gus

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2025

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COMMUNITY NEWS

AMAA’s 106th Annual Meeting Banquet to Be Held October 18 in Los Angeles

By Louisa Janbazian

PARAMUS, N.J. — The 106th Annual Meeting Banquet of the Armenian Missionary Association of America (AMAA) will take place on October 18, 2025, at the Jonathan Club in Los Angeles. The event will mark the conclusion of the Association’s 106th Annual Meeting, which will be held earlier in the day at the Armenian Church of the Nazarene in Glendale, CA.

The Banquet Committee has announced the theme of the evening: “Faithful to Our Legacy.” This year’s Banquet will honor Dr. Nazareth E. Darakjian, former President of the Association’s Board of Directors.

LindaKay Abdulian, President/CEO of the National Raisin Company in Fresno, will serve as Master of Ceremonies. She is a current AMAA Board member and has been actively involved with the Association for over 25 years.

“When you give your time and talents to the AMAA, you make a difference in the lives of all those who are helped through this Association,” says Mrs. Abdulian. “The AMAA’s generational reputation among the Armenian and Christian communities is reflected in the devotion, integrity, accountability, and stewardship of its leadership. We have been blessed with many dedicated men and women serving the AMAA in various roles.”

The AMAA was established in 1918 in response to the devastation of the Armenian Genocide, with the mission of supporting survivors by re-establishing Armenian Evangelical communities, churches, and schools in the Near East. For the past 107 years, it has remained Faithful to its Legacy. The AMAA has rebuilt, built, established, and strengthened churches, schools, and communities around the world. The Association stands firmly on three foundational pillars: Evangelism, Education, and Humanitarianism.

Throughout more than a century of service, the AMAA has followed the call to put faith into action by serving both the physical and spiritual needs of people around the world.

For decades, the AMAA has been a cornerstone of Armenian education, supporting 22 educational institutions worldwide. These schools offer a rich educational, spiritual, and cultural environment to more than 3,000 students each year.

The AMAA has founded, co-founded, and supported schools and universities across Armenia, the Middle East, and North America including Haigazian University in Beirut, Lebanon—the only Armenian university in the Diaspora which celebrates its 70th anniversary this year.

From conflicts in the Middle East to current challenges in Armenia, the AMAA has provided consistent humanitarian support. Inspired by Christ’s example, it has raised funds, developed programs, and delivered medical, social, and financial aid to thousands of vulnerable families, individuals, and children in need.

“With God’s grace, we will continue to be Faithful to our Legacy by providing financial aid to Armenian Evangelical schools; investing in youth and health ministries; helping churches proclaim the eternal hope we have in Christ; contributing to the Armenian Children’s Milk Fund and Summer Camps; and supporting displaced Artsakh families as they integrate and thrive in Armenia,” said Serge D. Buchakjian, CEO/Executive Director of the AMAA.

For more information or to make reservations, visit amaa.org/events.

Newlywed’s Party Bus Gets ‘Storrored’ on Way to Wedding Reception

By Erin Logan

BOSTON (NBC Boston) — Steve and Varteni Akian say they are looking at this minor bump in the road as a true sign they are meant to be together.

Storrow Drive is a scenic parkway along the Charles River in Boston, but its low overpasses often get people quite literally stuck. Bostonians know it well, as does one newlywed couple, who got “Storrored” on July 26 on the way to their wedding reception — and it was all caught on camera.

Steve and Varteni Akian say they are looking at this minor bump in the road as a true sign they are meant to be together.

“I just got ‘Storrored’ on my wedding day. Like it was kind of cool, being from Boston” Steve Akian said with a laugh.

“He was like calm, cool, and collected,” Varteni Akian said of her groom. “And I was like OK. I think everything’s gonna be OK. We’re together. Everyone’s safe and we’re just gonna roll with it. This is part of our day.”

The Watertown couple says the “Storrowing” happened when they were on a party bus on the way to their wedding reception at the Venezia Boston from St. James Armenian Church — where the “I Do’s” went off without a hitch — and one of their groomsmen felt it, as the maid of honor happened to be recording a video.

“The party bus driver passed the clearance sign at first with the chains that hang down and then inched closer to the actual bridge on Storrow, where he did scrape the top of the party bus and proceeded to reverse,” Varteni Akian explained.

The bride adds that her maid of honor is from out of state and

doesn’t quite get “Storrowing” like locals do, so she was rather confused when everyone was laughing when they got stuck.

Fortunately, no one was hurt, and the couple was only 10 minutes late to their reception, with quite a story to tell their guests on the dance floor.



Steve and Varteni Akian, and the party bus

The couple says they knew they were meant to make a grand entrance.

“Nothing will stop us, not a bridge, not a wall,” Steve Akian said. “It couldn’t have been more perfect. It added to it. It added to it absolutely.”

Varteni Akian has a few words of advice for Boston-area brides, though...“Make sure your party bus company or driver knows not to go on Storrow Drive.”



Tekeyan Cultural Association, Inc.

Dr. Nubar Berberian 2025 Annual Awards



Dr. Nubar Berberian, intellectual, journalist, activist and editor of many ADL daily newspapers for more than 50 years passed away at the age of 94 in November 23, 2016. In his Will, Dr. Berberian directed his Trust Fund managers to appropriate awards every year to college students of Armenian descent worldwide who major in either **International Law or Political Science**.

ELIGIBILITY AND REQUIREMENTS

- 1) Eligible recipients are college students of Armenian descent who major in either International Law or Political Science.
- 2) Applicant must be enrolled in a full-time graduate program in a fully accredited college or university in the world.
- 3) Applicant must provide all of the information requested on the application form.
- 4) Applicant must submit a copy of his or her most recent college transcript.
- 5) Applicant is to include a small head and shoulders self-portrait.
- 6) Application could be received by requesting from Tcadirector@Aol.com.
- 7) Applicants should submit applications electronically (via email) to: Tcadirector@Aol.com.
- 8) The deadline of receiving the applications is **September 30, 2025**.
- 9) The administrators and managers of the fund will vote the qualified winners in **October, 2025** based on the merits of each applicant.
- 10) The winners will receive their awards in **November, 2025**
- 11) Winning applicants are not eligible to apply again.
- 12) This announcement is published in Armenian, English, French and Spanish.

Watertown, MA, July 14, 2025



Arts & Culture

Jango Janigian ‘25 Wants to Take You On an Adventure

By Meredith Fidrocki

WORCESTER (Holy Cross Magazine) — On a Saturday in February 2025, six professors gathered at Holy Cross and embarked on an epic quest, guided by Jango Janigian ‘25, to recover a lost relic stolen from Mayrenik, a matriarchal nation with a rich, ancient history grappling with recent occupation.

The relic was rescued and the adventure was deemed a great success — as was the event itself, which was a playtest of a new Dungeons & Dragons (D&D) original playable created by Janigian for their English Honors Program thesis. The world of Mayrenik — its people, landscape and lore — were all constructed by Janigian, but inspired by Armenian mythology and history.



Jango Janigian (Holy Cross, ‘25)
Photo by Michael Ivins

Janigian, who is Armenian, hopes the playable short story offers a way to access the richness of Armenia through the immersive nature of D&D, a 50-year-old role-playing game in which players improvise a story guided by a dungeon master, or lead narrator.

“The only time Armenia was talked about in my education was a mention of the genocide in passing,” shared Janigian, a double major in English and classics. “That was devastating, because I knew Armenia as one of the oldest civilizations with a vibrant history. There has always been such a focus on Greco-Roman history that often the rest of antiquity gets completely ignored.”

That is where the idea for the thesis started, Janigian explained: “I wanted to tell that story with a vehicle that I believe deserves more recognition in academia — that’s how I landed on D&D.”

Pioneering D&D in Academia

The role-playing game was a natural fit for Janigian, who has been a pioneer at Holy Cross in promoting D&D’s academic credibility.

In 2023, Janigian completed a Weiss Summer Research project on “Journeys through the Radiant Citadel,” a book of 13 playable D&D adventures that incorporate folklore, mythology and history of different world cultures, written by authors from those cultures. That project was advised by Jorge Santos, associate professor of multi-ethnic literatures of the United States, and inspired Santos to develop his popular

see JANIGIAN, page 13



Nora Armani and Gerald Papasian (born in Cairo)

Nora Armani and Gerald Papasian Honored at Golden Apricot Film Festival

By Marieta Makaryan

YEREVAN— The 22nd edition of The Golden Apricot Film Festival in Yerevan closed last week in the presence of many international guests, including Marco Mueller, festival director and film curator, Jury President and filmmaker Abderrahmane Sissako, Palme d’Or winner Jafar Panahi, Regional Jury President award-winning filmmaker Amir Naderi, and other distinguished guests such as Rachel Tsangari, Tamara Stapanyan, Eric Nazarian and Karren Karagulian to name a few.

Nora Armani and Gerald Papasian were among the festival guests for the closing film “Last Station,” directed by Harutyun Khatchatryan and starring Armani, Papasian and Armen Djigarkhanian. The

film was screened in a restored, digital version in celebration of Festival President Haroutyun Khatchatryan’s 70th birthday.

Filmed during Armenia’s difficult post-independence years, “Last Station” is a docu-drama depicting elements from Armani and Papasian’s international tours with their award-winning production “Sojourn at Ararat.” It is the only fiction film made by documentarist Khatchatryan. The film was completed in 1994 and premiered at the International Film Festival Rotterdam and screened in various film festivals and retrospectives internationally at the time of its release.

During the festival’s closing ceremonies, Armani and Papasian were honored

see AWARD, page 13



Nora Armani and Gerald Papasian in Last Station 2

In the Film ‘The Circus Lion,’ the Dream Becomes A Cage

By Raffi Arkun

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

What do you do when the dream you’ve spent your whole life chasing turns out to be a cage? In an attempt to answer this question, Tigran Tovmasian takes on practically every role — writer, director, producer and actor — in his short film “The Circus Lion.” The somber film presents the story of a young wrestler named Samvel (“Sam”) while questioning ideals and ideas of masculinity, grief and purpose.

The Australian-born Tovmasian took on this cinematic challenge because, he said, “this story was burning inside me, and I needed to express it from every angle I could.” In his film, Tovmasian masterfully portrays the struggles of a young man coming of age.

The physical setting and monochromatic aspect of the film themselves silently convey meaning. The environment depicted reflects Tovmasian’s own journey of growing up in difficult socioeconomic circumstances to a family of Armenian immigrants in Western Sydney, and the music that plays throughout the film connects and immerses the audience in the story. The duduk’s warm, mournful sound and the dhol’s rhythmic feel, add an undeniably Armenian flavor, strengthening the film’s cultural authenticity and emotional depth. Tovmasian said he wanted the audience to feel as if it was “in the town with Sam, living through his daily struggles.”

The greatest of Sam’s struggles seems to be to fit in with his peers. Other youth can be seen enjoying parties, drinking away their sorrows while paradoxically remaining apathetic to those around them, yet Sam visibly responds differently. With discomfort evident on his face, Sam wanders through parties, only opening up when talking to Jasmine, a thoughtful, caring character. Samvel pursues her but she ultimately turns him down, after Samvel misreads a situation and goes in for a kiss.

The burden of his emotional battles is portrayed through the absence of color. In addition, the use of black and white stands as a visual metaphor for the town’s dark, gritty, and colorless reality, starkly contrasting with the bright colors typically associated with Armenia.

A lion and a circus are the two main symbols of Samvel’s struggles in the film. The trapped circus lion represents wrestler Samvel’s current status, fenced in by his environment, trauma and unfulfilled potential. Thus, the lion imagery appears during Samvel’s dream after he is left sitting alone at a party, not even able to fit in with his own friends. Just as the lion can’t escape his isolation, Sam feels trapped and alone, without a tribe of his own. When Sam and a wrestling teammate later actually see a circus,

see LION, page 15



ARTS & CULTURE

Jango Janigian ‘25 Wants to Take You On an Adventure

JANIGIAN, from page 13

2023-2024 Montserrat course Dungeons, Dragons & Diversity, now being adapted into a senior seminar and gaining buzz in Santos’ national academic spheres.

“When you do something pop-y, like Dungeons & Dragons, you’re going to have some people who are concerned that this is light, unserious work,” said Santos, co-advisor on Janigian’s honors thesis. “Jango is the one who revealed to me how profound D&D can be as a learning tool. I never believed that D&D could be this academically rich, and I never would have considered it without them.”

Janigian credits Santos (aka “Dr. J,” as he’s known to his students) with opening their mind to D&D’s academic possibilities in the first place: “It all started in the Montserrat course I took with Dr. J – The Origins of Heroic Ambassadors and 21st Century Mythic Revisions. Our topic was graphic novels and comic books and how what was going on when they were written influenced the way that they were written. That taught me that anything can be academic, it’s just a matter of how you think about it.”

Janigian, who has loved playing D&D since high school, said the course showed them intellectual pursuits and joyful pastimes don’t need to be relegated to separate corners: “I love telling stories and creating characters that have to overcome something, and that opportunity keeps me coming back to D&D. People always say your D&D characters are a part of you in some way, so you’re also getting to work through something you’ve experienced — and doing that with people in a safe, fun environment, as well.”

Adventures in Mayrenik

To kick off their Mayrenik adventure, Dungeon Master Janigian gave each professor at the playtest a gazetteer, the term for a detailed sourcebook of a D&D game’s world. Players chose characters and spent the first hour exploring a marketplace



Janigian was awarded a grant to fund original artwork to accompany the playable, such as this by illustrator McKenna McEachen

known as the Basalt Bazaar. “This lets players understand the cultural aesthetics of the place, warm up and find their character’s voice,” Santos explained.

In the gazetteer, Janigian wrote Armenian history into the world of Mayrenik, putting their own spin along the way.

“The earliest star maps were found in the Armenian highlands, so that field of study is a huge part of my fictional civilization,” Janigian noted. “One of the main changes I’ve made is that the government is a matriarchy instead of a patriarchy. Armenia is known as Hayrenik, which means ‘fatherland,’ but I have named my nation Mayrenik, or ‘motherland.’ There are also Armenian legends that I’m drawing from and adapting into a queer retelling.”

Janigian says their thesis co-advisor, Dominic Machado, associate professor of classics, helped them think through

questions like, “How do I imagine antiquity? How do I approach underrepresented history? How do we understand stories of a classical world?”

Janigian’s gazetteer, in turn, encourages players to reflect on several questions: “What stories were you told growing up? Is there a particular myth that stuck with you? Have you been displaced from your ancestral lands?”

“The great thing about D&D is that you get to experience the research of other people,” Janigian said. “And even if you’re

not an academic, this is totally accessible to you. You still get to walk away with an understanding of what this ancient world was like.”

‘A Destination, but No Set Path’

Janigian was awarded an Ancient Worlds, Modern Communities grant through the Society for Classical Studies to fund three illustrators, two of which are based in Armenia, to draw the scenes, landscapes and characters of Mayrenik. The ultimate dream, Janigian said, would be to publish the playable, making the richness of Armenian culture accessible to a wide audience to explore through D&D.

Janigian’s thesis is one of nine projects undertaken by students in the English Honors Program this year, said Susan Elizabeth Sweeney, Distinguished Professor of Arts and Humanities. The program, which Sweeney coordinates, is celebrating its 25th anniversary at the College. “It takes a particular kind of student to want to write an honors thesis,” Sweeney said. “They have to have this mixture of curiosity and passion to investigate on their own.”

Santos reflected, “We all hope to meet that student who alters the trajectory of your career, and that’s Jango for me. If I did anything for Jango, it was encouraging and unlocking their academic creativity. And in turn, that has happened for me, because now I’m coming up with different kinds of classes and assignments for the College’s new Critical Race and Ethnic Studies department. That’s like D&D ... you have a destination but no set path, so you have to be open to creative ways of fulfilling what may be your destiny.”

Nora Armani and Gerald Papasian Honored At Golden Apricot Film Festival

AWARD, from page 12

with special awards by the Union of Cinematographers of Armenia for their lead roles as actors in the film.

Further screenings of the film are planned in international retrospectives in France and elsewhere as well as in Armenia.

“Last Station” holds a special place in Harutyun Khachatryan’s creative arc. The main characters featured in all of Khatchatryan’s films are wandering artists who have lost their homeland and are looking for a home. They are people whom the director has followed with a camera in his hand during his four-decade creative journey.

The lead characters in “Last Station” are two Diaspora Armenian actors. The film is based on a play they staged, which premiered at the Edinburgh Festival in 1986. Later, the play was performed in many countries. The film tells the story of this itinerant pair who have traveled the world performing a play about their people, as

they strive to find their spiritual roots far from their historical homeland.

“Last Station” tells the fictionalized story of Egyptian-born actors Armani and Papasian, who travel to Los Angeles in search of their American dream. In the film, the pair, having failed to achieve Hollywood fame, stage a small theatrical performance based on Armenian poetry and begin touring the world. In one of the cities, they are joined by another exiled artist, played by Armen Djigarkhanyan. Soon, the trio reaches the last station, Armenia, where their paths diverge.

Using an epistolary style as the film’s main narrative medium, and blurring the boundaries between documentary and fiction. Enriching the story with Armenian poetry, multi-genre music, and equally poetic urban landscapes, the director has created a film about broken dreams, separation, and, continuing the journey; a film full of longing and warmth.



Nora Armani & Gerald Papasian in “Last Station”

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ՄԵԾԱԳՈՅՆ ԼՈՍ ԱՆՃԵԼԵՍԻ ՄԱՍՆԱՃԻՂ

Tekeyan Cultural Association
Metro Los Angeles Chapter

FAMILY FUN DAY

VS

Saturday, September 6, 2025, 6:30 PM

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ARTS & CULTURE

Recipe Corner



by Christine
Vartanian Datian



Barbara Ghazarian's Rice-Stuffed Grape Leaves (Yalanchi Sarma)

"Serious Eats writes, "*Yalanchi sarma*, or just 'yalanchi,' is the Armenian version of vegetarian stuffed grape leaves. 'Sarma' means wrapped in Turkish, while 'yalanchi' means 'liar,' a humorous reference to the fact that this is a meat-free version of the more common sarma, which typically contains beef or lamb. Thanks to the Armenian Christian Church, which historically forbade meat consumption for nearly half the year, Armenians have become pros at meatless cooking, and yalanchi is a prime example of this talent."

"The secret to my yalanchi to use a lot of lemon juice. My Armenian mother-in-law taught me to line the pot with carrot strips. Carrots add a subtle sweetness to the stuffed leaves, and once cooked, make a delicious bonus dish. Serve stuffed grape leaves when entertaining large numbers of family and friends. They're also an important no-meat Lenten dish," says food writer, chef, and author Barbara Ghazarian.



Barbara Ghazarian

Barbara is the author of *Simply Armenian* and *Simply Quince*. At the turn of the 20th century, Ghazarian's Armenian immigrant family settled in the small mill town of Whitinsville, Mass. in the Blackstone Valley. Ghazarian's great-grandfather came to work in the mill with thoughts of returning to his home of Pazmachén, in the Harput region of the Ottoman Empire.

"In *Simply Armenian*, home cooks can now try over 150 fail-proof Armenian favorites without investing lots of time and effort. The secrets of the Armenian table are revealed for North American home cooks. *Simply Armenian* draws on the ancient culinary traditions of the Tigris and Euphrates river basins to explore over 150 classic recipes ranging from inexpensive but tasty peasant fare to special occasion dishes. More than half are meat-free and all are delivered with the cheerful generosity of a neighbor."

With a dash of history, a pinch of nostalgia, and a splash of wit, Ghazarian reveals the secrets of this naturally healthy, olive oil-based cuisine. Delicate line drawings accent clear, easy to follow instructions. Under "Appetizers" you will find recipes for Armenian staples, such as, Rice-Stuffed Grape Leaves (Yalanchi) and Pickle Fresh Vegetables (Tourshi) along with less traditional, but still Middle-Eastern influenced items, such as, Feta Cheese-Topped Eggplant Rounds and Toasted Pumpkin Seed and Pine Nuts. Under "Spreads" there are recipes for Hummus, Zesty White Bean Dip, and Black Olive and Yogurt Cheese Spread. This book captures the soul of this ancient yet astonishingly modern ethnic cuisine.

The quinces used to prepare the 70-recipe collection in *Simply Quince* were donated by the Kaprielian family of Fresno County, says Ghazarian, who planted quince on their family farm in 1919 and faithfully cultivated the ancestral fruit until the Great Recession in 2008. "The cookbook is dedicated to the Armenian people who, like quinces, are rooted in the same soil and have endured through the ages. Quince is one of the oldest cultivars in the world and is grown on five continents," she says.

INGREDIENTS:

100 grape leaves, 4 bundles of small-sized leaves
1 1/2 cups olive oil
8 large onions, chopped
1 1/2 cups long- or short-grain white rice or coarse-grain bulgur
2 bunches fresh flat-leaf parsley, finely chopped
2 teaspoons salt
2 tablespoons tomato paste
1 tablespoon sugar
1 teaspoon ground black pepper
2-3 tablespoons snipped fresh dill
2 tablespoons dried mint, divided
Juice of 4 lemons, divided
2-4 carrots, cut into long strips
2-3 lemons, cut in wedges
Fresh flat-leaf parsley sprigs

PREPARATION:

If using store-bought grape leaves, rinse them several times in water, draining each time. If using fresh or frozen grape leaves, plunge the leaves in boiling water until the color darkens to olive, about 1 minute. Remove immediately, rinse with cold water, and drain.

Heat the olive oil and 1/4 cup water in a large, deep-sided skillet. Add the onions and cook over medium-low heat until tender, about 30 minutes. Add the rice or bulgur, parsley, and salt. Cover and simmer about 5 minutes.

Meanwhile, combine the tomato paste, sugar, black pepper, dill, 1 tablespoon dried mint, and juice from 3 of the lemons in a bowl. Stir into the rice mixture, cover, and simmer another 3 minutes (not necessary when using bulgur). Remove from the heat.

Line the bottom of a large pot with grape leaves. Arrange the carrot strips lengthwise over the grape leaves across the bottom of the pot. Taking one grape leaf at a time, trim the stem to a stub, if necessary. Place the leaf in the center of a small plate or work surface, vein side up, stem end pointing down (toward you). Place a spoonful of rice stuffing into the center of the leaf. Fold the bottom up over the stuffing and the sides in toward the center and roll upward (away from you). Roll snugly. The rolled leaf will resemble a small hot dog.

As each leaf is rolled, arrange the grape leaves in the pot on top of the carrot strips. After all the leaves are rolled, set a dinner plate, bottom side up, on top of the pile of rolled grape leaves. This will secure them in place during cooking. Note: Covering the grape leaves with additional grape leaves while they are baking prevents the grape leaves from oxidizing and turning dark brown.

Bring 3 cups of water, the remaining mint, and the juice from the remaining lemon to a boil in a different pot. When boiling, pour the liquid into the pot holding the stuffed grape leaves. Cover, and bring the liquid quickly back to a boil over high heat. Lower the heat and simmer, covered, until the grape leaves are tender. This may take as little as 30 minutes if you used tender fresh leaves to as long as 1 hour if you used store-bought leaves, which can be thick and tough.

Remove from the heat. Pour off excess water immediately. Let cool in the pot, still covered with the dinner plate, for at least 60 minutes (preferably overnight) before removing the stuffed leaves to a serving platter.

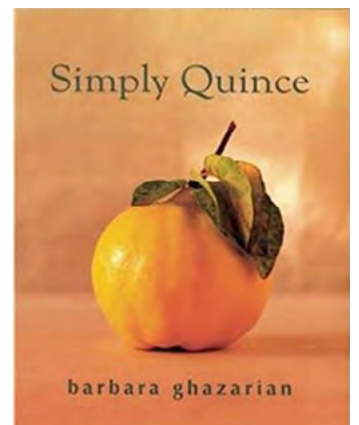
Garnish with cooked carrot strips, lemon wedges, and parsley. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate until serving. Traditionally, stuffed grape leaves are served slightly chilled or at room temperature as an appetizer. You can also serve them hot with a dollop of plain yogurt on top. This party-sized recipe yields enough to experiment.

Makes 100.

Simply Armenian: Naturally Healthy Ethnic Cooking Made Easy in its 6th printing (Mayreni Publishing), with over 16,000 copies sold. Barbara Ghazarian is passionate about sharing her Armenian ancestry with others. She draws on personal history and her ancestors' culinary traditions to present a basic, solid overview of Armenian cuisine. The author, who is half Armenian and is married to an Armenian man, presents a number of recipes that will be familiar to lovers of Greek, Turkish and other Middle Eastern foods, such as Parsley Salad (Tabouli), Rice-Stuffed Grape Leaves, Lamb Shish-Kebab, Rice Pilaf, and Eggplant with Tahini (Baba Ghanoush). Armenian cuisine, she explains, relies heavily on bulgur (cracked wheat) and lentils, as well as vegetables (especially eggplant) and flatbread, and while this is not a vegetarian cookbook, many dishes are meat-free (when Ghazarian does include meat, it's often lamb). Written for the novice and spiked with yarns about Ghazarian's childhood and family traditions, this book should make Armenian cooking accessible to any home cook. Helpful notes and introductions accompany each recipe, explaining foods that may be unfamiliar to American cooks, such as quince, baharat spice and purslane.

In 2009, with the publication of *Simply Quince* (Mayreni Publishing), she became known as the Queen of Quince. The bounty of quince recipes in the collection are widely credited as establishing the base line for cooking with the near-forgotten fruit in the U.S. and around the globe. To order *Simply Armenian*, go to: <https://www.armenianvendorstore.com/category-s/52.htm>

Simply Quince can be purchased on Amazon Marketplace, Armenian Vendor, and Abril Bookstore in Glendale. Go to: <https://www.amazon.com/Simply-Quince-Barbara-Ghazarian/dp/1931834318>





ARTS & CULTURE

In the Film ‘The Circus Lion,’ the Dream Becomes A Cage

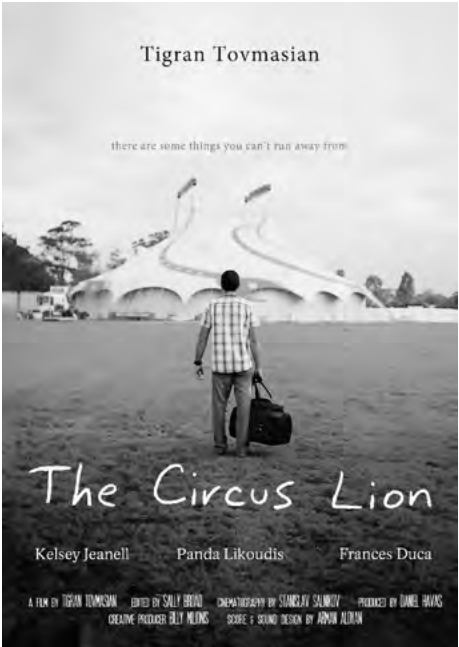
LION, from page 12
the teammate exclaims, “Have you ever seen the difference between the eyes of a caged lion versus a lion in the wild? It’s pretty f****g tragic.”
Samvel is too afraid to break societal expectations around masculinity, perhaps like Tovmasian as a youngster, and so at



Samvel sees the lion in his dream

first walks away from the attraction of the circus. Eventually, though, both he and Tovmasian find life-changing opportunities, with Samvel returning to the circus.
Tovmasian was able from a young age to channel his strength and ambition into acting, unlike Samvel who was held back initially by the shackles of societal expectations. Before Tovmasian left for the US at the age of 14 in 2015, he trained in the Meisner acting technique, which emphasizes natural responses and spontaneity, at the Actors Pulse in Sydney. In the United States, he was able to work with renowned actors such as Debby Ryan from “Jessie,” Paris Berelc from “Lab Rats: Elite Force,” and Josie Totah from “Spider-Man: Homecoming.” Upon returning to Australia, Tovmasian continued training and left high school to pursue acting full time.
After having performed in several stage pieces, commercials, film clips, and the TV mini-series “Greystanes,” he turned to the world of wrestling. Tigran and his older brother had trained and competed in judo tournaments from a young age, and Tigran was an international gold medalist and four-time national medal winner. Tigran switched to this new sport. With one year of training, Tigran rose to the level of state champion, birthing his desire to write “The Circus Lion” with the help of his mentor, Billy Milionis, who became the creative

youth, Tovmasian had certain cultural understandings and morals that did not align with Australian culture. There were many things in school that he found wrong, because he was raised to believe they were wrong. This led him to be isolated from his peers. Armenian was his first language, and the only language spoken at home, making him, he said, a slower learner in an English-language school.
T o v m a s i a n stressed to the Mirror-Spectator that this film is not a cry for help or an exploitation of the difficulties of his life. He remains proud of the people that raised him, including both his family and people in the community. The film is based on true events which left both good and bad memories, but ultimately it is a work of art. Nevertheless, Tovmasian remarked that the desire to grow out of a dead-end town and escape family trauma through any means necessary are true to life. One major departure from real life events in the film is the death of Samvel’s father, as Tovmasian’s father is still alive.
A number of elements in the film besides the music reflect Tovmasian’s Armenian background. For example, Tovmasian said



Samvel and his friends look through a fence onto the circus

producer of the movie.
Tovmasian, like Samvel, didn’t perfectly fit into the social environment in Australia. Both of Tovmasian’s parents were born in Armenia and immigrated to Australia about 30 years ago. Consequently, Tovmasian and his brothers were born in Sydney, but raised with Armenian culture. In his

that family orientation in life is one of the most important things for many Armenians, including himself. This is displayed in the film through the significant mental and emotional impact Samvel’s lack of connection to his family has on him. Wrestling is also very popular in Armenia and Tovmasian said that he always wanted to train as

a wrestler as his father did before him in order to connect to his Armenian roots. The film depicts Samvel’s religious faith, which Armenians are noted for. Samvel prays before he sleeps and he makes the sign of the cross before his wrestling match. Finally, Tovmasian notes that Armenians seem to have grit and tenacity passed down over the generations, and a real toughness that is reflected in Samvel’s restless drive – and this is evidenced also in Tovmasian’s restless drive to make this film.
Although a story set in Western Syd-

ney, “The Circus Lion” has universal significance and should be viewed around the world. It has already been submitted to major international festivals including Sundance, an annual event showcasing independent films, and is currently in consideration for the AACTAs to become an official contender. The AACTAs, short for the Australian Academy of Cinema and Television Arts Awards, are considered the Australian counterparts of the Academy Awards for the US and the BAFTA awards for the UK.

CALENDAR
OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

CONNECTICUT

AUGUST 24 — Armenian Church of the Holy Resurrection annual church festival at 1910 Stanley Street, New Britain. Live Armenian band, authentic Armenian food, Armenian dancing, bake sale, Armenian vendor. Sunday, noon to 5:00 pm. Come experience the legendary New Britain Armenian hospitality.

MASSACHUSETTS

- AUGUST 3 — Under the August Moon. Sunday at 7.30 pm. Armenian Heritage Park on the Greenway, Boston. Meet & greet, old friends & new. Enjoy Dan Teager’s Black Sea Salsa Combo while sipping on refreshing citrus spritzers. RSVP appreciated. hello@armenianheritagepark.org**
- AUGUST 3 — Saints Vartanantz Annual Church Picnic, 12 Noon – 5:00 p.m., Music – Food – Dancing featuring the Jason Naroian Ensemble. 180 Old Westford Rd., Chelmsford, MA.**
- AUGUST 17 — Celebrating What Unites Us! Sunday at 4 pm. Highlights: Italy. Armenian Heritage Park on the Greenway, Boston. RSVP appreciated. hello@armenianheritagepark.org**
- AUGUST 24 — ANNUAL PICNIC 12-5PM Lamb Shish Kebab, Chicken Kebab, Losh Kebab and Kheyma. Pastries-Cuisine Table and Armenian Coffee. Live music by the Jason Naroian Ensemble. Holy Archangels Armenian Church, 1280 Boston Rd., Haverhill MA**
- SEPTEMBER 16 — Holy Archangels 2nd Annual Golf Tournament Hickory Hill Golf Course 200 North Lowell St., Methuen, MA 7:30 AM Registration; 9:00 AM Shotgun Tee off. For Golfer Registration Info and Sponsorship opportunities, contact Mark Kazanjian (508-633-7447) Markkaz55@aol.com**
- SEPTEMBER 20 — Celebrate Armenia! Heritage. Culture. Traditions. Saturday, 1:30-8 pm. On the occasion of Armenian Independence Day on September 21. Armenian Heritage Park on the Greenway, Boston. Rain date: September 27. RSVP appreciated. hello@armenianheritagepark.org**
- SEPTEMBER 27 — Armenian Museum of America Music in Color Concert with Musician-in-Residence, violinist Haig Hovsepian and pianist Joey Vasconi, 7- 9 p.m., 65 Main Street Watertown, MA 02472, (617) 926-2562**
- OCTOBER 4 — National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR) - “Celebrating 70 Years- Building the Future of Armenian Studies” Gala at the Fairmont Copley Plaza in Boston. Honorees, Pamela Avedisian and Yervant Chekijian. For tickets and sponsorship opportunities please go to <http://naasr.org/gala70>**
- NOVEMBER 21 — AMAA’s Boston Child Care Committee presents an evening supporting the Khoren and Shooshanig Avedisian School in Yerevan, Armenia, FEATURING COMEDIAN KEV ORKIAN. COCKTAILS, DINNER & LIVE AUCTION. Wellesley Country Club, Wellesley Hills. SPONSOR BY AUGUST 1, 2025, TO BE LISTED ON THE INVITATION! (Individual Tickets will commence at a later date). For more info visit: <https://amaa.org/hyemindsboston2025/>**

NEW JERSEY

NOVEMBER 22 — 12 VOCATIONS: VARIETY OF GIFTS - ONE SPIRIT. Help us celebrate the vocations of the next 12 alumni, including three bishops, seven priests, a deacon and a lay minister at a gala banquet to be held at Macaluso’s, Hawthorne, NJ. Starts at 6:00pm. Tickets are \$200 per person. Details, invitations, and booklet donations can be found on www.stnerssess.edu.

NEW YORK

SEPTEMBER 14 — St. Paul Armenian Church, Syracuse: Annual Shish Kebab Picnic at Ryder Park under the pavilion. Games, Great Food, and Good Times. All are welcome!

To send Calendar items to the Mirror-Spectator email alin@mirrorspectator.com or alin.gregorian@gmail.com. You can also visit our website, www.mirrorspectator.com, and find the “calendar” section under the heading “More” or mail them to the Armenian Mirror-Spectator, 755 Mount Auburn St., Watertown, MA 02472. All calendar entries must be received by noon on Monday before publication.

COMMENTARY

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SINCE 1932



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Trump's Peace Agenda for the Syunik Corridor

By Suren Sargsyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

The so-called "Zangezur Corridor" remains one of the most contentious regional issues. Azerbaijan's president never misses an opportunity to demand unhindered access to Nakhichevan through Armenian territory. The United States is showing an increasing interest in mediating between Armenia and Azerbaijan regarding this issue and recently there have been a few messages signaling that. The most discussed one became the July 11 proposal of US Ambassador to the Republic of Turkey Thomas J. Barrack suggesting that the United States take control of the 32-kilometer road on a 100-year lease, with all parties able to benefit from it.

Prior to the ambassador's proposal, Secretary of State Marco Rubio had expressed hope during a Cabinet meeting with President Trump to see "a peace agreement between Azerbaijan and Armenia." The announcement came on the same day that Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev met in Abu Dhabi.

In fact, such interest by the Trump administration is interesting, as there have been no serious statements or steps, at least publicly, towards normalizing Armenian-Azerbaijani relations since Trump took office, with the exception of Rubio's statement welcoming the conclusion of the negotiations. This was quite a different approach from the policy of the Biden administration, which had assumed the role of an active mediator and actively urged the parties to finalize and sign a peace treaty especially during his final months in office. In comparison to Biden, Trump is a businessman, who gets involved in processes only when they can yield concrete results for US interests. South Caucasus is not within the immediate zone of interest for Trump and hence, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and Armenian-Azerbaijani relations were not interesting for the president. However, Trump wants to assert himself as a peacemaker and the prospect of a peace treaty between Armenian and Azerbaijani offers that opportunity.

That is why, not long after the above-mentioned statements, President Trump himself commented on the process. On July 14 during his meeting with NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte, Trump said the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan seems to come to a "successful resolution." Just a few days later as Trump welcomed to GOP senators at White House dinner, president said "we worked magic there" and "it is pretty close if not it's already done"

Azerbaijani President Aliyev's response did not take long to address the proposal to involve a private US company as an inde-

pendent foreign operator for the Syunik corridor. During a July 19 media forum in Shushi, he stated that there can be "no operator, no trader, no lessee on our territory" adding that during personal negotiations with Pashinyan in Abu Dhabi on July 10, he told the latter that Azerbaijan "must have unhindered and safe passage from Azerbaijan to Azerbaijan...Our cargo and citizens should not see the face of an Armenian border guard there every time. This is our demand. This is a legitimate demand, a fair demand. Otherwise, our citizens will be in danger."

Pashinyan's spokesperson Nazeli Baghdasaryan responded to this statement, calling it "a concealed territorial claim against the Republic of Armenia." However, according to Pashinyan's statement of July 16, "these contacts [with the RA Border Guard Services] in Armenia's border and customs points can take place with the use of modern technologies, sometimes without any contact, with biometric passports and online goods declaration and scanning." Therefore, with the introduction of these technologies, Azerbaijanis will not have to deal with the Armenian border guards, and Azerbaijani cargo can be transported through the country without direct checks by the Armenian border guards.

From the statements of the leaders of Azerbaijan and Armenia, it becomes clear that the Armenian authorities are more willing to involve an American private company as an independent foreign operator than the Azerbaijani side for the sake of opening the Syunik corridor. A similar proposal had previously been made by the EU, resembling the one made during the Russia-Georgia negotiations, which involved introducing an independent foreign operator,

through which the logistics of routes passing through the disputed territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia were to be controlled and data to be exchanged with all parties.

Currently, President Trump wants to become a mediator in this issue between Armenia and Azerbaijan, which is not a coincidence. Being a business-minded president, the South Caucasus region is outside the scope of his interests. However, one of his main goals in his current presidential term is to assume the role of a conflict mediator and position himself as a world peacemaker in order to achieve his long-cherished dream of receiving the Nobel Peace Prize. Therefore, Trump is probably trying to play a major role in the signing of a peace treaty between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

(Suren Sargsyan is an expert on US foreign policy, researcher and author. He is a graduate of Yerevan State University, American University of Armenia and the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University. Suren Sargsyan is a founder of the Armenian Center for American Studies, a research center based in Yerevan.)



The Strategic Imperative of a France–Greece–Armenia–India Quadrilateral Format

By George Meneshian

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

Many argue that the international system is undergoing structural change. The weakening of traditional hegemonies, the rise of regional powers, and the resurgence of geopolitical competitions have all disrupted the strategic status quo from the Indo-Pacific to the Eastern Mediterranean. In this new context, multilateral cooperation formats are no longer optional but essential. As states confront increasingly complex threats, shifting alliances, and overlapping spheres of influence, they are seeking new groupings that combine efficiency with political coherence. One of the most promising emerging alignments is the quadrilateral involving France, Greece, Armenia and India, a format rooted in shared democratic values, security concerns, and political objectives. What has begun as a series of bilateral and trilateral initiatives must now evolve into a strategic synergy.

The growing convergence among these four states is not coincidental. It partially arises from the need to respond to the in-

creasingly assertive Turkey–Azerbaijan–Pakistan axis, which has matured into a strategic bloc with growing military, economic, and diplomatic coordination. This trilateral format has demonstrated its operational capacity and regional ambitions, most clearly in the aftermath of the second Nagorno Karabakh war (2020), and continues to project influence beyond its immediate geography. In this setting, the France–Greece–Armenia–India format provides a natural and necessary counterbalance, one that is already being considered at the policy level.

In March 2024, Greek Defense Minister Nikos Dendias publicly acknowledged the potential of a quadrilateral cooperation format in the defense sector involving Armenia, Greece, France, and India. His remarks are not merely speculative. They reflect a broader consensus forming among policy and scholarly circles that such a grouping is both viable and needed.

Armenia, at the heart of this potential format, is repositioning itself. Long reliant on Russian security guarantees, Yerevan has begun to reduce that dependency not only

because of Moscow's declining credibility, but also due to the urgency of modernizing its defense posture amid Azerbaijani pressure. Armenia has rapidly expanded its security cooperation with India, France, and Greece. India has become Armenia's principal arms supplier, providing advanced artillery systems, anti-tank weapons, air defense platforms, and drone countermeasures. France has delivered armored personnel carriers and CAESAR artillery systems, while Greece has revitalized and institutionalized its long-standing bilateral military ties, through joint drills and multiple defense agreements. Plans for Greece to transfer Russian-origin air defense systems to Armenia further underscore this new trajectory. Armenia is also exploring participation in Greece's Hellenic Center for Defense Innovation (ELKAK) and is engaging in industrial defense cooperation that would have been politically unthinkable a decade ago.

Each of the other three participants brings strategic value and mutual reinforcement to the proposed format. France, see IMPERATIVE, page 19



COMMENTARY

When Power Mocks Peace

A Lament for Truth and Justice ...the struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting: Milan Kundera

By Hrayr S. Karagueuzian, PhD

When Alfred Nobel invented dynamite in 1867 he felt so guilty about the devastating military applications that he created the Peace Prize to atone. Ironically, the prize has returned to explosives, this time, however, in rhetorical form. There are moments in history that seem scripted by satire, so bizarre, so deeply ironic, that they defy belief.

We now are facing such a moment. A war criminal, Prime Minister of Israel Benjamin Netanyahu, nominating a convicted felon, the U.S. President Donald J. Trump, for the Nobel Peace Prize is not the plot of a dystopian mockery, it is a grotesque reality unfolding before our eyes. This act is not merely absurd; it is an unambiguous assault on decency orchestrated by individuals wielding immense political power with impunity.

When those who preside over war and corruption begin to redefine peace and justice in their own image, it signals a deeper, more insidious decay: the collapse of truth under the weight of unchecked authority. What is truly shocking however, is not just that such a nomination was made, but that it barely registers as shocking anymore.

Our institutions, once guardians of moral clarity, now stand silently complicit, numbed by the normalization of the grotesque.

This moment lays bare a brutal paradox of our time, where power not only rewrites the narrative but dares to present its distortion as virtue. When lies wear the robes of peace and justice, truth becomes the first casualty. The man signing the letter of confirmation, the architect of military campaigns that have slaughtered entire families, obliterated hospitals, schools, refugee camps turning Gaza into a graveyard of innocence. His government has presided over policies that human rights groups across the globe have condemned as crimes against humanity, with actions so brutal, so indiscriminate, that they bear the stench of genocide. Entire neighborhoods reduced to ash, children pulled lifelessly from the ruins, their only crime being born in a cage of siege and occupation. And who is he nominated for the Pantheon of peace? A man whose record is soaked in division, racism, and authoritarian bravado. This is no simple affront; it is a desecration of humanity's longing for justice and harmony. Yet the silence of global institutions, the indifference of those entrusted with moral clarity, only deepens the horror. What does this absurdity tell us? The boundary between parody and reality has completely vanished amid irony, power struggles, and media spectacle.

The Nobel Peace Prize once represented an aspiration toward virtue, if not perfection. Then came the modern era. Now, in a plot twist so grotesque it would make Orwell wince and Kafka weep. This is not satire. This is news. But let us treat it as satire if only to survive the truth. It is justice in reverse: a spectacle where the perpetrators wear halos and the system applauds politely, if not enthusiastically. We are witnessing a *cirque du déshonneur* — a traveling show where the worst are paraded as the best, and the past is whitewashed by the fog machine of public relations.

When power claims the right to define truth, truth ceases to be truth at all. It becomes a tool, a weapon shaped to serve the interests of those in control. When power dictates what is true and what is not, facts are no longer discovered, they are manufactured. Reality is bent, not by reason or evidence, but by authority and force. In such a world, truth is stripped of its moral weight and reduced to political convenience.

Historical evidence indicates that when the pursuit of power outweighs the importance of truth, justice is not merely postponed but ultimately denied. In such moments, facts are not merely disputed; they are deliberately buried beneath layers of distortion, distraction, and denial. Few examples illustrate this more tragically than the ongoing refusal by some, including the current government of Türkiye, to acknowledge the Armenian Genocide perpetrated by the rulers of Turkish Ottoman Empire more than a century ago. This denial is not a difference of interpretation; it is a calculated erasure of historical truth in the service of political convenience. Like the denial of the Armenian Genocide, a wound silenced by the arrogance of denial and the cowardice of the complicit, is another verse in the

long sorrowful ballad of power corrupting memory.

What remains unacknowledged aggravates the human conscience, deepening the wounds of injustice and rejecting the healing power of truth.

To deny such a profound crime against humanity is to commit a second violence: not just against the victims and their descendants, but against history itself. Instead of reckoning with the truth, denialists construct irrelevant alternative narratives (“the other side of the story,” so to speak), a sort of coercion, shallow diversions that avoid moral responsibility and cloud public understanding. The result is a monumental act of demoralization, a stunning failure of moral courage on the world stage. Justice, in these moments, is not defeated by lack of evidence or productive uncertainty but by the raw force of power unwilling to confront its own evidence. This is the beginning of moral decay: when truth becomes negotiable, justice becomes impossible. The Peace Prize stage no longer becomes the global moral summit; it becomes a glittering carousel of plausible deniability.

What is the message to the world's youth, the disheartened, the hopeful? The youth, observing this theater of the absurd, may ask: “What's the point of integrity if infamy gets the applause?” Let us not pretend this is harmless spectacle. This slow poisoning of merit has real consequences: cynicism becomes contagious; democracies begin to rot from indifference and the people most in need of hope and justice are told, loudly, that both are for sale.

We live in a civilization where virtue is not practiced as a value, rather displayed as a costume. Public statements about war crimes and peace prize nominations, previously seen as prestigious, are now considered parts of broader geopolitical strategies. We lionize peace while subsidizing injustice and violence. We imprison whistleblowers and decorate war architects. Here, symbolism clearly overtakes substance.

The Nobel Peace Prize becomes less a beacon of hope and more a circus trophy handed to whoever best plays the part, regardless of past roguish behaviors. By rewriting the narrative, society forgets who did what, and worse, who suffered. A clear case of historical amnesia. The world begins to laugh not with the West, but at it, and with every nomination like this, we contribute to our own intellectual and moral decay.

Let us not ask what kind of civilization allows this. Let us ask: what kind of civilization celebrates it? Because that is what happening now right before our eyes. The cameras flash. The pundits preach. The institutions nod and sip tea, content that history has become so soft-focus it now looks like a luxury product campaign. In this civilization war is defense, injustice is sovereignty, peace is whatever the powerful say. Perhaps it is time to introduce a new category of an award: The Post-Ironic Peace Prize,

bestowed upon the individual who most masterfully transforms hypocrisy into a diplomatic virtue, who wages war with one hand and waves an olive branch with the other, all while keeping a straight face. But all is not lost. Still, the voices of the principled and the learned refuse to be silenced, standing firm against the erosion of truth and the burial of justice. They are the relentless guardians of conscience, like the scholars who defied Holocaust denial, the human rights lawyers who exposed apartheid's brutalities, or the historians who challenge Türkiye's denial of the Armenian Genocide.

What remains when justice is mocked, and memory erased? We descend into a civilization of sarcasm, where lies wear medals, where the absurd is applauded, and where history becomes a grotesque theater. Justice, though silenced for a time, is never truly defeated. It may be buried under propaganda, mocked by power, and delayed by corruption, but it does not die. It waits, it gathers strength in the hearts of the outraged, the grieving, the courageous. Across history, tyrants have fallen, empires have crumbled, and the lies of the powerful have been laid bare. What endures is the unyielding human spirit, the voices of the oppressed, the resilience of truth, and the quiet courage of those who refuse to look away. For example, in 2021, the United States formally recognized the Armenian Genocide as “genocide,” after more than a century of denial thanks to the advocacy, historical scholarship, and survivor testimony. Although it did not reverse the loss, it however, acknowledged the reality.

Despite the challenging conditions created by those in authority, there is hope that the nomination will not be honored and disgrace will be avoided. However, if the unthinkable happens, we risk turning moral authority into an outsourced, hollowed-out brand traded like offshore manufacturing or waved through by spineless ethics committees. The Nobel Committee may well slide into becoming a global reputation launderette, scrubbing the blood off tyrants and war criminals until they gleam enough for a Netflix redemption arc. We have seen it before: remember Henry Kissinger's award amid the wreckage of Cambodia and Vietnam, and Aung San Suu Kyi's silence in the face of genocide, even the EU lauded, while refugees drowned at its gates. Each time, the prize did not just falter it cracked faith in the very idea that justice, though slow, can outlast the brute force of power. If the committee caves, it will not be awarding peace it will be burying it under an inscription of hypocrisy.

(The author is Professor Emeritus of Medicine, David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA. He is the author of the book with Yair Auron: *Perfect Injustice. Genocide and the Theft of Armenian Wealth*, Transaction Publishers, Rutgers University, NJ 2009.)

LETTERS

What Good Is Praying?

To the Editor:

It was my mother's 95th birthday party last week. A lovely Armenian woman sitting across from me spoke about the ongoing unrest in the Middle East and honed in on her visit to the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem. “All that prayer changes nothing. What about all those Armenian monks who hid up in the mountains praying, did it stop the genocide? What good is praying? We need another plan!”

Quite likely she posed this to me as I had just prayed, asking God's blessings over my mother, our guests and over the dinner. It was, of course, too deep a challenge to address at such a happy celebration but could it even be answered at all?

It can and must. Our heritage and eternal life depend upon an answer.

In 1988, during a time of fasting and praying for God to move mightily against the Turkish/Azeri blockade strangling Armenia, I attended a large vigil at St. Vartan's Cathedral.

As hundreds of Armenians demonstrated support on the Cathedral plaza, rumors of an earthquake circulated. “Impossible,” I inwardly insisted, “they must be exaggerating.”

Hours later the catastrophe unfolded. Our country, gripped in blockade by enemies, now crushed with immeasurable disaster. If this was God's answer to our cries, I had one for Him. With raised fist in the air, I vowed to never speak to Him again.

Turning from my faith opened a dark chapter in my life. I was not neutral about God, I was against Him for several years. It was not me but the Lord who initiated acts of reconciliation that chipped away at my hardened heart. Finally, drawn into a church, a fiery message broke my heart and launched me into repentance. A growing Biblical foundation of faith opened up a spiritual life where the truths of ‘unanswered’ prayer unfolded.

Answered prayer, being heard at all, depends solely upon our relationship with the Lord.

Do we have a true relationship? If I spend all day calling and texting Donald Trump, he will undoubtedly not answer me. Parables and Biblical teachings reveal the fate of those whose faith existed on the periphery of Christ. They practiced religious rites, blended in with godly people and even served in the church. But the chilling words of Christ towards them in Matthew 7:21-23, “Depart from Me, I never knew you...” expose the devastating fate for
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COMMENTARY

Anti-Intellectualism In American Life: What Can Richard Hofstadter Teach Us Now?

By Prof. Peter Balakian

(Note by Peter Balakian: This op-ed focuses on American history and the current political situation, but it would be useful context for Armenian to make comparisons with other authoritarian societies. The MAGA movement would like to coerce Americans into spouting simplistic, inaccurate cliches about American history and its legacies. This hostility to higher education, knowledge production and critical thinking is what gives rise to the kind of state censorship by which authoritarian societies like Turkey are governed. In Turkey the government has succeeded, since its modern inception, in censoring critical thinking about large, essential issues that are crucial for societies to own in order to be realized democracies. In Turkey, as Armenians know well, critical thinking about the Turkish past is taboo; it is outlawed from public institutions, and so the accurate histories of the Armenian Genocide, the genocides of Greeks, Assyrians, and the violent oppression of the Kurds, to name a few, are criminalized. For decades Turkey, vying with China, has had one of the worst histories of jailing journalists and intellectuals than any country in the world. And, Armenians know well that the arrests and subsequent murders of more than two-hundred and fifty cultural leaders on April 24, 1915 is a big part of that history. If you don’t want to see the United States follow Turkey into this undemocratic world, then pay attention, speak out, find concrete ways to work to defend democracy and higher education.)

Some books written decades ago return to us, with a renewed relevance, in critical times. Richard Hofstadter’s Pulitzer Prize winning book of 1964 *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* is one. The eminent American historian, who taught at Columbia University in the 1950s and 60s, analyzed a strain in American culture that can help us understand some of the underpinnings of Donald Trump’s assaults on higher education, intellectuals, culture, and free speech. Anti-intellectualism is more than a descriptive term, it’s a concept that Hofstadter developed having studied the roots of the “national disrespect of the mind.” His study was prompted by the virulent assaults on intellectuals, liberalism and higher education unleashed by Sen. Joseph McCarthy in the 1950s in his tyrannous, anti-communist crusade, in which he claimed “commies” were infiltrating the government (even President Eisenhower was suspect).

Hofstadter traced anti-intellectualism to the following sources: 1) evangelical religion with its disdain for modernity, science and rational thought, 2) pioneer individualism with its libertarian worship of practical skills and anti-institutionalism, and 3) businessman culture grounded in the practical life in pursuit of wealth and materialism. These strains have aligned primarily with the attitudes and political behavior of American conservatism and much of the Republican Party of the past hundred years.

In this world-view academics are seen as “anemic, priggish, effeminate; “Harvard professors” as “twisted-thinking intellectuals.” Elite universities are the breeding grounds for the “enemy from within,” and “rotten to the core.” Similar rhetoric was spewed by conservative legislators at the Congressional anti-Semitism hearings in December 2023 when they accused Harvard, University of Pennsylvania and MIT of being “illiberal sewers of bigotry,” “infected by moral rot,” and devoid of “Bible literacy.” Going after liberals in the ‘50s was the right wing’s response to the New Deal, and McCarthy’s “bullying and conspiracy theories” were welcomed by a segment of America because they satisfied a “craving for revenge against intellectual elites,” especially those new experts of the administrative state. Even though New Deal policies helped poor and rural populations, hostility toward intellectuals and East Coast Ivy Leaguers ran deep.

Trump’s weaponization of anti-Semitism and Diversity, Equality and Inclusion (DEI) panic to justify massive federal budget cuts do not mask his real goal: the destruction of knowledge producing institutions, critical thinking, free intellectual inquiry which are threats to his authoritarian efforts to destroy the rule of law and the Constitution. It is unprecedented. In his first months, President Trump’s assaults on universities, especially Harvard and Columbia, the Smithsonian museums, Library of Congress, National Education Association (NEA) and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), Kennedy Center; the termination of the Department of Education, efforts to censor the press, media, and law firms; censoring facts about American history from slavery to climate science from the web sites of the Environmental Protection Agency, NEA, the National Institutes of Health, Smithsonian and banning books at the US military academy libraries make it clear that what Hofstadter saw as a malignant manifestation of embittered scapegoat hunting populist strains in our culture has now emerged with unprecedented political ferocity. This President’s disdain for critical thinking is tied to an ideological agenda. Anti-intellectualism fuels authoritarianism.

We have descended into a new chapter of anti-intellectualism. McCarthyism was a short-lived phenomenon propelled by an alcoholic Republican Senator who died young during a sordid career. Richard Nixon, who was hostile to liberal culture, would have liked to go after higher education was wise enough to tell his conservative Republican colleagues when they advocated cutting huge amounts of federal funding to universities that “we’d be cutting off our nose to spite our face.”

Hofstadter would have recognized Trump’s brand of businessman anti-intellectualism. From gold toilet seats to gold airplanes, Trump is the monetized man exploiting his power as president to make billions — even issuing meme coins of himself and his wife and promoting monetizing crypto currency programs to enrich himself; he posts on social media “it’s a great time to get rich,” or “it’s a great time to invest.” It has been documented that his private business practices have defrauded banks, contractors, and customers. His claims that elite universities are full of lunatics, radicals and Marxists, anti-Semites and racists are not only ludicrous lies, but propaganda designed to alienate a segment of the nation from higher education and distract Americans from the deep sources of Anti-Semitism and racism ensconced in the MAGA movement.

But some things have changed since Hofstadter wrote his book. If Hofstadter would have recognized Trump’s crass businessman anti-intellectualism type, he would also have to update his assessment of the business community and its relationship to the academy. Long gone are the days of the Robber Barons who saw education as “bunk.” In recent decades, the creative synergy between the business community and higher education has been thunderous. Over the past thirty years, financial giving to universities has increased by 175 percent. In 2022, the private sector gave a record high of \$58 billion to colleges and universities most of which contributed to academic programs and research as well as to the diversity of student bodies. Billion-dollar donation span a landscape from the small liberal arts McPherson College to Stanford and Johns Hopkins. In addition, the independence of private universities and their tax status that encourages donations supports conservative and sectarian schools: Boston College, Notre Dame, Brigham Young, Liberty University, among many others.

Trump’s assaults on higher education are an irrational effort to destroy the segment of America that does enormous work for the national good: life-saving medical research, public health and safety, high tech and engineering from bridges to iPhones — and the essential work of critical thinking in the arts, humanities, social and natural sciences wherein complex problem solving and the cultivation of leadership for all sectors of society is taught. Steven Pinker’s also notes how deeply mutual the federal partnership is: “a federal grant is not alms to the university, nor may the executive branch dangle it to force grantees to do whatever it wants. It is a fee for a service — namely, a research project that the government decides (after fierce competitive review) would benefit the country.” Hofstadter called intellectuals the “moral antennae of society” and noted that of all the privileged classes they have shown the most consistent concern for the well-being for the less fortunate.

The American university system is the envy of the world — drawing students from every continent — for the intense faculty mentoring that fosters young adults into professional and civic life. The twenty-first century American university is one of the great achievements of modern civilization and the destruction of the relationship between higher education, the federal government, and the business community would set America back to a parochial era that we left a long time ago.

A liberal democracy depends on its intellectual and cultural producers to pursue their work with both freedom and support from the wider society and the federal government; if these are destroyed, we will slide into an authoritarianism that will smash 250 years of great building. Reading Hofstadter now will give Americans a long view of how vital intellectuals have been to our nation from the great minds of the Founding Fathers to today’s intellectual work-force from Cambridge to San Diego, from Seattle to Miami. His book reifies what Americans need to know in order to resist this irrational paroxysm of anti-intellectualism so we can emerge — as Hofstadter did from the McCarthyist 1950s — into a new age of moral and cultural growth that followed that period, and I believe will follow this one.

(Peter Balakian is a Pulitzer Prize winning poet (*Ozone Journal*), essayist, and author of many books including *New York Times* best-selling *The Burning Tigris*; his op-eds have appeared in *Washington Post*, *Boston Globe*, *Guardian*, *Slate*, *Salon*, *Daily Beast*, *Chronicle of Higher Education* and others. He is the Rebar Professor of the Humanities at Colgate University and was the first director of the Center for Ethics and World Societies. This commentary originally appeared on Literary Hub on July 9.)

What Good Is Praying?

PRAYING, from page 17

those who fail to enter into a saving, personal relationship with the living God.

Willful sin can also hinder our prayers. Isaiah 59:1-2 proclaims God’s power to save but warns that sin separates us, “...your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear.”

Even as glorious promises of God open up to us, there are hard truths of faith to believe and live out. One passage that first marked my heart was Daniel 3:17-18. The three Hebrew boys, facing the king’s fiery furnace, declared faith in God to save them and added, “But even if He does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods...”

Our faith cannot depend upon a good outcome.

Crowds grew with Christ’s miracles, yet the more He preached hard truths His followers increasingly dispersed. Jesus never broadened the road of salvation. “Count the cost” was Christ’s warning to the half-hearted, “Pick up

your cross and follow Me” is His call to die to self. Martyrdom, deprivation, and rejection in this world marked the lives of believers throughout Christianity. We are part of that legacy. Yes, He is returning as the King but while on earth He declared, “My Kingdom is not of this world.” Can we say that, with anticipation of His coming Kingdom? Studying scripture and Biblical prophecies gauge for us the direction of this dark world. Jesus Christ didn’t come to give us a good life spared of suffering but the assurance of eternal life when this world is judged.

No true Armenian is spared the grief of watching our people suffer. I have been in Armenia during oppressive Communism, after blockades, earthquake and war, and cried a million tears for Artsakh and can still cry. Many of us pleaded and even begged God to rescue and deliver from the hands of enemies. I wanted Old Testament victory for our people and utter defeat to our enemies. But the new covenant of Christ, bought with His blood, is one of humility and perseverance. Our testimony to the world is, suffering notwithstanding, that God is worthy to be trusted and worshipped, knowing that justice is in His hand. If

our view of eternity sharpens, God’s sovereignty opens our faith to believe, “All things to work together for good, for those who love God and called according to His purpose.”

What good is praying? God may not bring the deliverance or healing that we long for but He promises to walk us through every dark hour. While all suffer grief in this world, persevering strength is the testimony of believers who depend upon the Lord to strengthen them onward in faith. Therein is victory as Christ reveals His purpose and calling in our lives, a plan that He will fulfill and accomplish through us. Prayer is not just beseeching but also waiting upon God, listening as He moves in our hearts and speaks through the Bible, His living word. Above all, true prayer engages God. Hearing from Him avails the inspiration and direction needed not just to navigate through our own crisis but to lead us in service, becoming the answer to prayer for those who suffer. When it seems prayers fall to the ground, resist despair, go deeper, and resolve to press on in faith. “He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.”

Lisa Stepanian
New York City, NY



COMMENTARY

MY TURN



by Harut Sassounian

Too Incompetent to Govern The Country, He's Now Trying to Control the Church

With each passing day, while Armenia's political and military situation grows increasingly precarious, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has been busy on Facebook trying to control the Armenian Apostolic Church. He does not seem to realize that his repeated interference in church affairs violates the constitutional principle of separation of church and state.

Moreover, over the past seven years, Pashinyan has violated hundreds of laws. He led Armenia to a disastrous defeat in the 2020 Artsakh War, abandoned Artsakh in 2023, and allowed Azeri troops to occupy parts of the Republic of Armenia in 2021 and 2022, despite his constitutional responsibility to defend the country's borders. To make matters worse, when asked what he plans to do to remove the Azeri troops from Armenian territory, he shamelessly replied, "nothing."

Under the guise of fake democracy, Pashinyan has become a de facto dictator: monopolizing power by controlling all branches of government, retaining the majority in parliament, appointing a compliant president, and ordering judges and security forces to comply with his illegal demands.

To divert public attention away from his political and military failures, Pashinyan decided to attack the Armenian Apostolic Church during a cabinet meeting on May 29. In the following weeks, he posted dozens of defamatory Facebook messages against the Church and clergy, often using vulgar language, without presenting a shred of evidence, which is a violation of Armenia's libel laws. He repeatedly called for the resignation or removal of the Catholicos of All Armenians, Karekin II. Meanwhile, Anna Hakobyan, Pashinyan's partner, followed suit with her own vulgar posts libeling high-ranking clergymen, calling them "the country's chief pedophiles" and "black-vested maniac perverts."

During a recent public gathering, Pashinyan attempted to explain why he and Anna were never married. He claimed that, fearing arrest by former leaders and worried the government would confiscate his home, he registered the house in Anna's name. This was obviously a fabrication to deflect criticism, as he sensed that the public was questioning his claims of religious piety. Having violated the sanctity of marriage, he is the wrong person to preach chastity. The Bible says (Hebrews 13:4): "Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral." Moreover, neither the current nor any previous Armenian government has ever confiscated an arrestee's personal property, including Pashinyan's.

Pashinyan recently announced the formation of a committee to remove His Holiness. He even called on the public to gather in Etchmiadzin to force the Catholicos out. After the anticipated ouster, Pashinyan said he would appoint

a married priest — a direct violation of church canons — as locum tenens (acting head of the Church), to be succeeded by an elected Catholicos under his revised Church Charter. This is not only a blatant breach of separation of church and state, but a complete shredding of the Constitution. A man who has failed miserably as Prime Minister now aims to depose the elected Catholicos, rewrite the Church Charter, appoint a married priest as locum tenens, and install a new Catholicos.

Bizarrely, Pashinyan insists on verifying the moral integrity of future Catholicos candidates, without explaining how he plans to accomplish this impossible task.

Here is a better suggestion for Pashinyan: Why not appoint himself as the new Catholicos so he can control both the state and church? Or appoint his partner, Anna Hakobyan, as Catholicos, to "modernize" the Church. He may even declare her a saint, sparing her from any moral scrutiny. One logistical problem: St. Anna needs to cancel her plan to study Chinese Philosophy in Beijing for the next two years.

With great arrogance, Pashinyan declared that he meets all the qualifications to lead his own committee tasked with removing the Catholicos. Committee members must:

- Be a baptized member of the Armenian Apostolic Church (though it's unclear if Pashinyan himself is baptized);
- Believe in Jesus Christ;
- Have read the entire Bible at least once;
- Have observed Great Lent at least once in the past five years; and
- Pray daily.

He also stipulated that any celibate clergyman in the committee must not have broken his vow of celibacy. However, Pashinyan offers no explanation of how he will verify compliance with these criteria.

Although there were rumors last week that a Pashinyan-instigated crowd would converge on Etchmiadzin "to liberate" the Catholicosate from Karekin, that did not take place. Either the rumors were false or Pashinyan postponed the action after his opponents gathered to protect the Catholicos. Since Church supporters far outnumber Pashinyan's followers, any confrontation between the two groups could lead to a bloodbath on the sacred grounds of Etchmiadzin.

A recent poll by the U.S. International Republican Institute found that 58 percent of the public in Armenia support the Church, up 10 percent from 2024. Meanwhile, 59 percent are dissatisfied with the Prime Minister's performance, a 9-percent increase over the past year.

Pashinyan's illegal and destructive plan has little chance of success. The Catholicos will probably refuse to resign. Pashinyan's only remaining option would be to send his armed security agents to arrest the Catholicos on trumped-up charges. If the Catholicos is arrested, no replacement should be elected, allowing Karekin II to run the Church from his prison cell. What an embarrassment for the first Christian nation in the world!

Hopefully, none of these horrific scenarios come to pass. Pashinyan is the one who must resign. If he refuses, he should be removed immediately. Armenians cannot wait until the next parliamentary elections in June 2026. By then, Armenia may no longer exist, since Pashinyan is dismantling it piece by piece, day after day.

The Strategic Imperative of a Quadrilateral Format

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as a major European military power with a global outlook, is seeking to project its influence across both the Eastern Mediterranean and the Indo-Pacific. Its deepening strategic partnership with India, one of the most robust North-South relationships in the world, includes arms exports, joint production projects of military hardware, and a shared Indo-Pacific strategy. Greece, for its part, has emerged as France's closest partner in the Eastern Mediterranean. Over the past five years, the Greek military has modernized its arsenal by acquiring French-made Rafale fighter jets, Belharra frigates and Exocet MM40 Block 3C anti-ship missiles. At the core of the Greek-French defense partnership lies the mutual defense clause outlined in the 2021 France-Greece Defense and Security Agreement. Greece has also expanded ties with India, including defense cooperation, naval exercises and discussions over potential technology transfer and missile systems. Several of the Rafale fighter jets sold to Greece by France include electronic components manufactured by Indian defense firms, highlighting the already integrated nature of this emerging triangle. Both Armenia and Greece have also expressed strong interest in India's Uttar Pradesh Defense Industrial Corridor (UPDIC), reinforcing the possibility of an extended defense industrial ecosystem.

The strategic benefits of this format are tangible for each participant. For Armenia, it represents the end of regional isolation and the decline of dependency on Russia, enabling its military modernization and strengthening its capacity to deter Azerbaijan. Even if Yerevan signs a peace treaty with Baku, it needs strong partnerships and military capabilities. For Greece, it opens a pathway to project itself as the EU's and NATO's strategic outpost in the Eastern Mediterranean, bolstering its efforts to counterbalance Turkish influence and enhance its role as a transit and defense hub between Europe and Asia. For India, the format supports its ambitions to expand westward, contain Pakistani and Chinese strategic outreach, reduce its reliance on Russian arms imports, and secure access to European markets. For France, the format consolidates its arms export leadership, secures access to India's vast market, and reinforces its Indo-Pacific strategy while projecting influence across the Eastern Mediterranean and South Caucasus, two regions where Paris seeks to claim diplomatic relevance and counter Turkish and Russian presence.

Beyond defense, the rationale for this quadrilateral format is reinforced by its potential value to the European Union and the broader Western bloc.

First, it offers a rare and critical opportunity to anchor Armenia, a fragile democra-

cy in a volatile neighborhood, more firmly within a democratic and pro-Western security architecture. This would mark a strategic setback for Russian, Iranian, and Chinese influence in the South Caucasus, where Western engagement has historically been limited.

Second, the format acts as a buffer against China's strategic penetration into Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, the Middle East, and South Asia. Through infrastructure investments, connectivity projects, and defense diplomacy, Beijing has successfully established a strong presence in regions where Western influence has diminished. A France-Greece-Armenia-India quadrilateral format would not necessarily confront China, but it could offer a viable alternative.

Finally, this format presents substantial opportunities for investment and economic cooperation, particularly in the defense and energy sectors. France and India are already pursuing joint production models that could be expanded to include Greece and Armenia. Greece, with its strategic ports and infrastructure, offers a critical gateway for Indian industries to access European markets. Armenia, in turn, provides a fertile landscape for defense and high-tech investment, especially as it diversifies away from Russian suppliers and seeks technology transfers and localized production.

In conclusion, the proposed France-

Greece-Armenia-India format is not a reactive coalition but a strategic project of long-term significance. It reflects the emergence of a new kind of alignment; one that is not imposed by ideology or historical burdens, but constructed through opportunities, mutual interest, and shared challenges. The vision has been articulated, and the political groundwork has been laid. What is required now is the political will and institutional commitment to give this emerging alignment its formal shape. For the European Union and the democratic West, it is a chance to reinforce values and shape outcomes in some of the most contested and consequential parts of the world. That opportunity must not be missed.

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Dual Exhibit by Robby Antoyan and Joseph Bohigian Celebrates Fresno Armenians

FRESNO — The Armenian Museum of Fresno is hosting a dual exhibition, “Fresno Armenians: 50 Years Ago,” by Robby Antoyan, along with the sound installation, “From the Fields of Fresno” by Joseph Bohigian. The exhibition opened on Wednesday, June 25, and runs through August 27.

The museum is located in the University of California Center at 550 E. Shaw Avenue in Fresno, across from Fashion Fair mall. It is open Monday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. and admission is free. “Fresno Armenians: 50 Years Ago,” features over 300 captivating photographs by Antoyan, taken at Armenian picnics and other community gatherings in Fresno during the 1970s. These rare and intimate images document the vibrant social life, traditions, and enduring spirit of Fresno’s Armenian American community.

“From the Fields of Fresno” is a tribute to those generations who established a new home in Fresno and blends Armenian folk music with an oral history of an Armenian Genocide survivor, Bohigian’s beloved great-grandmother, Seranouch Tavookjian. It takes as its sources the sounds of Armenian Fresno: recordings made as part of the Works Progress Administration’s California Folk Music Project in 1939 by the American ethnomusicologist Sidney Robertson Cowell, and a 1984 recording of the artist’s great-grandmother recounting her journey to America. These recordings illustrate the sounds and stories of the community in its earliest decades; a combination of the music they brought with them from the homeland and the influence of their new American home.

“This pairing of photography and sound, representing the artistry of two generations. The exhibit invites visitors to experience Fresno’s Armenian past in deeply emotional and sensory ways,” said Varoujan Der Simonian, director of the Armenian Museum of Fresno. This exhibition has been made possible, in part, by funding from the City of Fresno Measure P, Expanded Access to Arts and Culture, administered by the Fresno Arts Council.

Antoyan is a licensed architect in California. He is a certified member of the National Council of Architectural Registration Board and the National Council of Interior Designers. Prior to the firm’s establishment, Antoyan worked with prominent architecture firms, gaining the knowledge and expertise necessary to manage his firm efficiently. Antoyan is a Fresno native whose upbringing was deeply influenced by the rich cultural fabric of the local Armenian community. As an amateur photographer, he spent the 1970s capturing hundreds of unforgettable moments at Armenian Church picnics and community events. Like many of his Armenian peers, Antoyan grew up surrounded by those who had relocated to Fresno following the Armenian Genocide of 1915, as well as later waves of immigration from Russia in the 1940s and 1950s, and from the Middle East in the 1970s. These older generations of Armenians carried themselves with a quiet authenticity — never trying to be anything other than who they were — and that left a lasting impression on him. After his first year away at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo where he received his degree in Architecture, Antoyan returned home and began photographing this generation. An amateur with a newly purchased Minolta SRT101 and manual focus lens, he set out to document Armenians aged 60 and up, capturing them at church picnics, family gatherings, and everyday moments. His photos offer a candid, heartfelt portrait of a resilient community and a generation shaped by memory, migration, and cultural pride.

Bohigian is a composer and performer of acoustic and electronic music. His work focuses on issues of memory, cultural reunification, and diaspora. With a strong interest in reestablishing a relationship with lost elements of our past to better envision our future, he makes use of archival materials in his music, such as sound recordings, interviews, and written texts, synthesizing fragments of song lyrics and reviving ancient musical notations. Bohigian’s music has been performed at the International Computer Music Conference (Limerick, Ireland), Walt Disney Concert Hall (Los Angeles), TENOR Conference (Melbourne), Suoni Per Il Popolo (Montreal), New Music Gathering, and Aram Khachaturian Museum Hall (Yerevan) by the Mivos Quartet, Decibel, Great Noise Ensemble, Argus Quartet, and Playground Ensemble. He performs as a founding member of Ensemble Decipher, a group dedicated to working with vintage, contemporary, and emerging technologies, and produces broadcasts of contemporary music for Music from Other Minds on KALW in San Francisco and interviews with composers on the Other Minds Podcast and the music/technology-focused series Decipher This!. Bohigian holds a PhD and MA degrees in composition from Stony Brook University, and a BA degree from California State University, Fresno.

“The museum is committed to practicing equitable, diverse, and inclusive culture. We have experienced social injustices and discrimination; they are rooted in our collective memories. We appreciate the systemic disparities of social equity and justice and encourage diversity and impartiality in our workforce environment and interaction with others. The museum is determined to foster diversity and inclusion within the organization and for individual artists who may represent diverse interests and backgrounds. Their artworks exhibited at the museum create an inclusive cultural ambiance embraced by their multidimensional personalities, genres, and subject matters reflected in their artwork.”

The Armenian Heritage Museum, a California Public Benefit Corporation, (dba, Armenian Museum of Fresno,) was established in 2003 as a 501 (c) 3 non-profit organization by the Armenian Technology Group, Inc. (ATG). Initial funding was received in 2001 from the California Endowment for the Arts. The museum leases its exhibition space from the University of California Center in Fresno. The mission of the museum is to enhance the rich, ethnic, and multicultural makeup of the City of Fresno and the Central California in general. It highlights the contributions of the Armenian Americans to the development of the Central Valley, signifying our collective responsibility to research, preserve and complement the cultural fabric of our communities. It promotes and showcases rotating exhibitions of fine arts and provides a forum for the visual and performing arts — including music and literature —and hold workshops and symposiums.

For more information, please visit www.armof.org.



Tekeyan Cultural Association

Sponsor a Teacher in Armenia

Since its inception in 2001, the TCA Sponsor A Teacher program has raised \$878,700 and reached out to 7,686 teachers and school staff in Armenia and Artsakh.

Yes, I would like to sponsor TCA school teacher(s) in Armenia, as well as teachers who fled Artsakh and continue teaching in Armenia schools, to continue helping them to work, to educate the children, our future leaders!



Yes, I would like to sponsor TCA school teacher(s) in Armenia, as well as teachers who fled Artsakh and continue teaching in Armenia schools, to continue helping them to work, educate the children, our future leaders. I would like to have the teacher(s)'s name(s) and address(es).

☐ \$240 ☐ \$480 ☐ \$700 ☐ other _____

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Email _____

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Memo: Sponsor a Teacher 2025
Mail your check to:
TCA Sponsor a Teacher
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