In its one-and-a-half decade long history, Star has tried to contribute to the reconstruction of the country by concentrating on the Afghan social capital. By helping its students to reach their full potential and become responsible citizens, Star contributes to the development of a better tomorrow for Afghan people.

Star has the pride to be one of the finest English educational centers in the country with services in English language training, computer science and K-12 education. Star’s competitive programs have benefited school-age youth, university students, teachers, businessmen, entrepreneurs, and government officials. Through our programs, Star has touched the lives of men and women, young and old, people from all walks of life and from nearly every corner of Afghanistan.

In addition to connecting our students with the world through English language and computer education, Star has also been a leading institution in providing civic education, and encouraging civic engagement. Unfortunately, the legacy of war in Afghanistan still lingers and while our curriculum prepares students for job markets and overseas higher education programs, it also prepares students for embracing modern values and becoming responsible citizens through facilitating dialogue forums, encouraging community service and promoting volunteerism.

As a co-founder and a senior executive of the institution, I welcome you to join us in making a difference in your life and in the life of the people around you.
English and competed to join Star because I used to hear Star Educational Society (SES) “C” branch. I was so interested in learning English that my parents allowed me to attend classes. In addition to attending public school, I had the opportunity to attend an accelerated school program to catch up with boys my age. In my case, attending public school was not enough to support me and my siblings to study English in a better place. There is no better center than SES. After two years of hardships studying and tolerating many difficulties, I earned my English diploma. Subsequently, after several unsuccessful and relentless attempts, I finally succeeded to obtain a position as an English teacher at Star Educational Academy on September 10, 2012. This gave me the great opportunity to know and teach many people in the society, and utilize their experience and understandings in my everyday life. I think everyone should be proud of being at Star, it is the only place where we can achieve things we want in our life.

The People and Events that Shaped My Life

By: Jomakhan Hamdard

I was born and brought up in a large family in Daikundi province. We are a family of thirteen: my parents, my two sisters, my eight brothers and me. My father and my mother are both illiterate and are only able to read the Quran. From the day I could walk, I’ve been working in different fields: farming, ranching, collecting firewood; feeding and watering the animals; shopping; and other chores. When I was four or five, I began Islamic studies with all the other children my age. At age six, the government forced me to start formal school and I had to walk a distance of about four hours to school every day.

After collapse of Taliban regime, one of my brothers, Alidost, came to Kabul and after his graduation, invited the rest of my family to come to Kabul. Coming to Kabul was a turning point in our whole family’s lives. Despite facing terrible challenges, especially financial, there were many advantages over the life we had in Daikundi. I continued my school in Kabul from seventh grade in auditor Rehman Shahid and finally graduated from Habibia High School with an excellent record. Entering Kabul University’s Law and Political Science faculty was a big achievement and changed the whole destiny of my life. In the University, it was the first time I became acquainted with many authors and books. I studied French language and came the best French speaker in the class. University was an opportunity to get involved in civic activities. I was introduced to many civil society organizations and networks; I wrote many project proposals in different areas, some of which were approved and were awarded grants. I worked as program manager, project coordinator and am currently working as a research assistant. I volunteered with many reputable organizations and programs in civic and social activities. I participated, coordinated, facilitated and led many workshops, seminars, conferences and short duration courses.

Throughout my life, I have had the opportunity to meet many people who helped shape me into the person I am today. But two people are the most important people in my life and I know I could not have lived and studied without their sacrifices – Jahantab, my brother; Bismellah, a student of Marezif and my university class fellow, Esmaulah Sahibdil, who first taught me proposal writing; and Hassan Yousofi, who encouraged me to read and be hopeful for the future. In addition to all them, Star Educational Society was the most important academic experience and all my successes and achievements are somehow connected to Star where I learned English language.

My life has been a constant journey of facing challenges and overcoming them which makes me optimistic about the future. I am approaching my future with determination and great visions. I am confident that I will improve my capacity to help my country out of poverty, ensure greater stability and promote a healthier society for the people of Afghanistan.

Unforgettable moments of my life

By: Mohammad Reza Sharifi

It was spring 2009, when my father returned back home. My father had been in Iran for more than 30 years to work for his family and decided to take the family to Kabul, where he had opened a small grocery shop. The income would be enough to sustain the family and allow me and my younger siblings to attend public schools. It was a welcome opportunity that my family will never regret. I was so interested in learning English that my parents allowed me to attend classes. In addition to attending public school, I had the opportunity to attend an accelerated school program to catch up with boys my age. In my case, attending public school was not enough to support me and my siblings to study English in a better place. There is no better center than SES. After two years of hardships studying and tolerating many difficulties, I earned my English diploma. Subsequently, after several unsuccessful and relentless attempts, I finally succeeded to obtain a position as an English teacher at Star Educational Academy on September 10, 2012. This gave me the great opportunity to know and teach many people in the society, and utilize their experience and understandings in my everyday life. I think everyone should be proud of being at Star, it is the only place where we can achieve things we want in our life.

Star is not only about teaching a language but also training our minds to think. At Star, we create dreams, build confidence and help to develop motivated students with big aspirations and ideas. We tell the students what opportunities they can pursue once they are fluent in English. Learning English language is exciting and offers many ambitious and practical benefits. It’s a skill that gives students a greater understanding of the world we live in. Star broadens the students’ horizons, interests and views and opens a whole new world to them when they learn English. – Jomakhan Hamdard
And the award goes to...

A former student at Star Educational Society, Bahara Mohammadi is currently teaching in B Branch during her summer break from Wyoming Seminary College Preparatory School in the U.S. She was also a participant in the Pioneer Academics Research Program that is geared to provide outstanding high school students around the world with challenging and creative research opportunities across a wide range of disciplines. In the essay below she shares some of her experiences about returning to Kabul after studying in the U.S.

Mohammadi said, “This is my second short documentary movie. There are no internet cafés for women in Afghanistan and that is why a lot of women do not know what the internet is and how to use it. The Sahar God internet café is the first internet café just for women and it is a great way to educate women.”

You can watch the short documentary film here: http://www.bitlanders.com/movie/the-first-women-internet-club/41390

“In Her Own Words”

What I Learned Going Home

Over the past two years spent in the United States, I have realized media has a huge influence on how people view Afghanistan. Although some media channels cover the positive side of Afghanistan, most of the news highlights the explosions, deaths, and poverty in my country. I am fortunate to know that there is so much more to Afghan life than blood and horror.

Recently, I was making my way back home from Washington DC to Kabul and I had a stop in Dubai’s international airport. I had dressed comfortably and forgot I would be going to Kabul where I need to respect the way of dressing, which means I had to cover my head and hair and wear a long piece of cloth. But I was just being me and ignored being an obedient young Afghan girl. I was late and there was a long line of people waiting to board. In the line, I saw many Afghan men with long beards and long white traditional Afghan clothes. To be honest, I was a little bit scared. I felt like they were giving me looks. I mean what kind of Afghan man would like to see men with long beards and long white traditional Afghan clothes. To be honest, I was a little bit scared. I felt like they were giving me looks. I mean what kind of Afghan man would like to see

security. Suddenly, one of the men turned to me. I was so ready to make a scene. And he said: “It is a very long line, but you can go on front of the line.”

Suddenly all my aggressive feelings were replaced with simple shame and regret. What do I think of myself? A girl who goes to the United States for education and now judges my own people by the common prejudices of the news or held by foreigners. That day Afghan men taught me something that I never learned in a classroom. They taught me not to judge a book by its cover. It can be easy to judge people of a country by their corrupt government and poverty, and ignore what they have gone through and what their real values are. It is very important for our generation around the world to understand these prejudices and be critical about them. Many of our judgments are based in haste on common stereotypes and labels put on a race or nationality. Raising awareness is the key to using our good judgment.

Last month, with the help of one of our school officials, Ms. Harrison, I created a blog called “High Schoolers’ Cultural Exchange.” This blog tries to raise awareness among teenagers about different cultures. It only covers teenagers in Afghanistan and United States, but we hope to expand it to more countries. These past few weeks, fourteen girls in Afghanistan and the United States talked over Skype about cultural differences. Now fourteen girls have altered the way they look at the other country and expanded their vision beyond common stereotypes. There are so many other things besides bombs explosions, poverty, and corruption in Afghanistan. People learn to love, respect, and smile and live happily with what they have. Afghans are strong believers, because otherwise it would have been just very hard to live in a country that everybody else thinks is only a birthplace for terrorism.
Abdullah: Activation of Band-e-Salma will have a significant effect on people’s life

The Daily Guardian quoted a western diplomat who said that Hamid Karzai is determined to break down the national unity government ruled by Ashraf Ghani and has been working on it for several months. “All his (Karzai) meetings with tribal leaders and politicians take place in anti-governmental task direction,” the diplomat said.

The article confirms the strained relations between Karzai and Ghani as well as political mismanagement of the national unity government inducing failures. On the other hand, both sides have ceased their dialogues since signing the Afghan-Pakistan treaty of intelligence coordination.

And now, is Karzai really determined to cause the collapse of the government? Is the government collapsible?

The Daily Guardian does not dramatize how Karzai would attempt to dethrone Ghani. The entire article invokes a western diplomat who talks about Karzai’s desire to collapse the government. Such an assertion is an extremely ambiguous claim.

Even if Karzai really wishes to break the government down and replace it with his own temporary administration, he will not succeed. Karzai realizes very well the financial expenses of government that are beyond the realm of his resources. His foreign policy background and the international relationships he created during his administration do not provide him enough support from the international community to replace the current government. Therefore, it is unlikely that Karzai is determined to dethrone Ghani. Karzai is cleverer and will not get to pay for such propaganda brought by collapsing the ruling power.

But Karzai’s silence does not mean that the national unity government maintains strong rule. If the government collapses, the leaders’ serious errors (especially of Ghani) would be the reason for any probable power breakdown. Since 2001, there has never been such extensive insecurity, poverty and such a high unemployment rate. Considering the public satisfaction as the product of political handlings, we have reached a seriously anxious stage. Since 2001, the public satisfaction has never decreased as low as now. Such dissatisfaction may bring a hard time to Afghans and escalate to more harsh adversity. Then again, authorities are responsible for the potential power breakdown.

Is the National Unity Government Collapsible?

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Resistance to be broken. Where is the country heading with the current situation?

On one hand, the peace negotiations are getting more highlights. On the other hand, the security is more fragile than ever. The whole country is worried about it, and the war is out of control now. Strategy of war changes every day. Beside the civilians, the number of Afghan militants’ casualties is increasing as well. What makes us more concerned is that Taliban have recently had their maximum attacks on local police stations in cooperation with the local residents while the authorities in charge have remained totally indifferent.

The soldiers were slaughtered by Taliban in Jalrez and Dai-Choopan as the result of government’s ignorance. These two incidents seem very questionable and, even worse, some close to the President are trying to legitimize them. In Badakhshan, a similar case, the government’s failure also resulted in the massacre of many soldiers!

The attacks on security forces as well as the government’s ignorance cause an uncertain future for Afghan soldiers. In such circumstances, the security authorities’ actions will have a significant negative impact on the morale of soldiers facing the war and no one knows how long they will tolerate this situation. The soldiers’ desertion is not a new phenomenon; it has been witnessed in more favorable conditions. Now that the insecurity is more threatening, it is not unexpected. In addition, the ambiguous policy of the government has made the situation more critical than ever for the security forces.

The current war forms a triangle of Taliban, security troops and the government. The security troops that are impacted by government and the insurgents play the principal roles here. If this situation continues, the soldiers are likely to stop resisting. The game of ‘peace and war’ is an unending drama whose directors still have more and more bloody scenes to show.

Barack Obama, President of the United States, on Monday during the first visit of a U.S. President to Ethiopia, the second most populous country in Africa and the headquarters of the African Union, began his meet and greet. According to Agence France-Presse – AFP, Mr. Obama went to Addis Ababa for bilateral talks with Hailemariam Desalegn, Prime Minister, and Mulate Teshmy the President of Ethiopia. Ethiopia is a strategic ally of the United States, but because of its record on democracy and human rights the country has always been criticized. It is expected that Mr. Obama will address regional leaders on South Sudan civil war to have their resolve support if the leaders of this war-torn country don’t stop the bloodshed. Obama would be America’s first president to address the African Union.

Dostom: Opportunity to launch military offensive against insurgents is ready

With the beginning of the new year when weather gets warmer many Northern provinces, especially Faribay, have been made insecure by insurgents and national security forces and Taliban are busy fighting in several fronts. Officials in this province say the plan for liberation and removing the Taliban insurgent has been finalized.

Meanwhile General Dostom has said that forces under the command of Commander in Chief of Ministry of Defense have conducted multiple operations against Taliban in the area. The first vice president further said, “War in Faribay is not solely war of one province. This war threatens all the Northern provinces, until we the Taliban is removed from every home and every town we will not sit in peace.”

It is expected that Saturday or Monday evening, General Dostom will be arriving in Faribay. Launching military operations and helping the displaced families will be the main purpose of his visit in this province. He also stressed that he will get the attention of International aid agencies to aid the displaced people. Whereas it is said that thousands of families in fear of their lives have escaped from warzones and have sought refuge in safe areas.

Earlier, UN Special Secretary General for Afghanistan had also traveled to Faribay. He promised to bring more aid for the displaced families. Officials have reported that most of the displaced people who are living under the tents are in immediate need of first aid, mostly food and water.

FIFA presidential election to be held in late February, 2016

It is expected that International Federation of Association Football (Fédération Internationale de Football Association – FIFA) elections for the new head of this organization will be held on 26 February next year. According to a new decision, Joseph S. Blatter will lead this organization in next 7 months. He was elected as the president of this organization for the fourth consecutive time about two months ago but because of widespread corruption at the International Federation, FIFA, decided to step down from his post before the end of the current period. According to AP, this date was defined by the FIFA Executive Committee on Monday. Joseph S. Blatter, aged 79, joined FIFA about 40 years ago, and has been leading this organization since 1998. Michel François Platini (born 21 June 1955), president of the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA), is one of the key candidates for the FIFA presidency.

Obama arrives in Ethiopia as America’s first president

Translated by: Rasoul Ahmadi
Source: Jaame-Baz Newspaper

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The first vice president, General Abdul Rashid Dostom, announced that preparation for the launching of military operations against insurgents in the north of the country is ready, and he called it a big operation.

As reported by Boghdai news agency, while meeting Friday evening with local commanders and tribal leaders who oppose Taliban in Sheberghan, the first vice president said, “Everything for launching a big operation is ready and the Commander in Chief with his soldiers have arrived in Faribay”

Dostom said that Special Army commandos, special police forces, national security officers and local armed units have arrived in Faribay and are on high alert. He added that few military aircrafts are already settled in Faribay and have targeted several Taliban positions.

With the beginning of the new year when weather gets warmer many Northern provinces, especially Faribay, have been made insecure by insurgents and national security forces and Taliban are busy fighting in several fronts. Officials in this province say the plan for liberation and removing the Taliban insurgent has been finalized.

Meanwhile General Dostom has said that forces under the command of Commander in Chief of Ministry of Defense have conducted multiple operations against Taliban in the area. The first vice president further said, “War in Faribay is not solely war of one province. This war threatens all the Northern provinces, until we the Taliban is removed from every home and every town we will not sit in peace.”

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Nothing challenged my readiness to live in the US more than a chicken sandwich

I never imagined that ordering lunch in the U.S. would be an ordeal for me. Back in Afghanistan, I taught English for several years. I watched countless Hollywood movies, and worked with foreigners for almost four years. I performed well on standardized tests of English, or at least the SATs. So I never expected that bread, cheese is cheese. And if we’re lucky enough to have any choices, it’s usually the choice between yes or no.

I didn’t know what to say. I couldn’t understand her. Then I thought maybe she was asking about the sauce. “Hmmm, it doesn’t matter,” I responded. She seemed irritated, and then asked rapidly, “Cheddar, pepper jack, Swiss, provolone, or American?” This is what I heard: “Cheddar, paper jack, Swiss (the country), or American?” This is what I heard: “Cheddar, pepper jack, Swiss (the country), or American?” This is what I heard: “Cheddar, pepper jack, Swiss, provolone, or American?”

I pondered over the fact that I knew the difference. I had just arrived from a country where bottled or fountain? That was more pressure than the TOEFL exam. I never imagined that buying a sandwich in the US would be this challenging and cause me so much embarrassment. The $100 bill in my hand was damp with my sweat, squeezed and crumpled. “Bottled please,” I said, although I had no idea what the difference was.

When I paid for my food, I stood in my place expecting my food to be delivered to the counter instantly. The lady said, “Sir, this is your slip. Please take a seat and we will call you when your food is ready.” I nodded like a parrot who understands everything people tell him and walked away. But now I wondered how she would call me. While sitting at my table, I watched and listened vigilantly. I realized she was calling customers by number. I stared at the number on my slip and listened intently. When I heard my number, I took my food and found a seat far away from the cafeteria.

As I ate my first meal in the U.S., I pondered over the fact that I knew words like abrogate, conflagration and inexorable, but not the words “bun” or “fountain drink.” I could comfortably write professional technical proposals and review solicitations in English, but I broke into a sweat ordering a chicken sandwich. And then I realized my lunch ordeal wasn’t an English deficiency, but a cultural difference. I had just arrived from a country with very few options: bread is bread and cheese is cheese. And if we’re lucky enough to have any choices, it’s usually the choice between yes or no.
1. A musical string instrument that is featured in many folk songs
2. A quintessential dish that includes browned rice with sautéed carrots and raisins, served with lamb
3. Thank you in Dari
4. A region of Afghanistan known for its scenery
5. A deep Blue gem that is native to Afghanistan
6. The first religion of Afghanistan prior to Islam
7. A religious month of fasting
8. A conqueror that invaded Afghanistan in 1220
9. A national sport
10. Please in Dari
11. A national dance
12. A veil or scarf used by some Muslim women to cover their heads or faces as a sign of modesty
13. A favorite past-time of Afghan children
14. A percussive instrument highly common in Afghan music
15. The festivities following the month of fasting
16. The unit of currency

Down
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Our Rising Starian: From Watchman to Teacher to Executive Director

An Interview with Mustafa Hussaini

About the interviewer:

Qamar Nisa is a Star alumna who is currently a junior at St. Margaret's School, a private high school in Virginia, U.S. She is supported by the Afghan Girls Financial Assistance Fund. Qamar will be conducting several interviews for the Interstellar Bulletin while in Kabul for her summer break.

In this issue of the Interstellar Bulletin, she interviews Mustafa Hussaini, who has worked at Star Educational Society since 2005 and has been the Executive Director since 2012. He is currently in his second year at the American University of Afghanistan where he is working on his Bachelor of Business Administration.

Tell me about your career at Star. I applied for a job at Star in 2005 and Mr. Yasa kindly offered it as he thought I had the potential. After couple months of training, I took over my duty. I began working at Star as a watchman. Six months later I started studying elementary English classes at Star. My rapid improvement in English made me qualified for teaching. Then, two years later, I became administrative office assistant. It didn't take long that I was given the position of Discipline Director. Seven years later, I became the Assistant of Director General, Mr. Hussain Yousofi, due to my working potential. Then successfully, in 2012, Mr. Yasa promoted me to Executive Director of Star.

What do you enjoy the most about managing at Star? I enjoy working with Starians to educate young generation of Afghanistan to build a bright future. I love implementing rules and regulations at Star and encouraging my students to be organized by following discipline.

What are your favorite hobbies? Actually, there aren't many fun things to do in Afghanistan, but I enjoy playing chess.

Is there any dream that you are still longing for? Yes, I have loved books in the future and publish them so that others can benefit from them.

What are you most proud of in your life? I am very proud that I am supporting my daughters to get education and follow their dreams and goals. Unfortunately, many Afghan females are victims of negative traditions and perspectives, and they don't get the privilege to going to schools and universities.

What is one thing you value the most? There are two things that I value most highly in my life; one is education and the other is discipline.

What is the most essential lesson you have learned in your life and want to share with others? One of the most essential lessons I have learned from my experiences is striving for greatness and fighting with hardships. The first time I joined Star, I was an ordinary worker, but it didn't take long for me to become one of the senior staff at Star.

When did a big change occur in your life? How did it influence you? My life changed when I understood the value of education. Although I studied before, I didn't take it seriously. The day I joined Star, I realized that I am among a different community where everyone is motivated to create a bright future for themselves and their people. They gave me inspiration to look toward life differently. I developed a strong desire to get further education and convey it to others.

What is the secret of your management? The secrets of my management are seriousness and honesty. I am very open and honest with my colleagues here. Also, I am very serious regarding rules and discipline while maintaining friendly relationships with my colleagues and students.

Who do you owe your improvement to? I am very grateful that I got to know Mr. Yasa. His support and encouragement helped me to reach my goals. I totally owe him for my improvement and achievements. I love him so much. He is the one who told me, "You can do it".

Why is discipline so important to you? I believe there is a system that keeps this universe going. It wouldn't stand without discipline. Therefore, discipline is very important to me. Time management, planning ahead and following rules are crucial to one's life.

How important is Star for you? Basically, Star is part of my life. It is like the blood running through my veins. I am thinking of it day and night. It gives me so much joy and pleasure to see our students changing their lives as they join Star.

What are some of your future perspectives for Star? It is difficult to predict future, but I am dreaming to see Star University in the near future. I think if Star keeps progressing as it is now, we can establish Star University soon.

What are some new changes that you see at Star in near future? We have recently opened Russian department at Star, and we are planning to offer more Languages courses. In addition, our newly opened Computer Lab is making wonderful progress.

What is your message for students of Star? Don't look at Star only as an English Center, but a life changing community. Star offers social mobility, and students should use it as a source of motivation toward a better future for their society.