Celebrating the first birthday of the Interstellar Bulletin

A message from Kara Lozier, Interstellar Bulletin’s first managing editor -

In writing this week’s message, I have had the pleasure to reflect on the last year of my life and the life of the Interstellar Bulletin. In the formative stages of Interstellar, there were sometimes times when Ali Reza Yasa, Star’s chairman and founder, and I – clashes between pragmatism and idealism. But when our two distinctively different styles stopped colliding and finally converged, Interstellar was truly born. We agreed on the name, the size, the format, the sections, the roles, the frequency (well, we didn’t really agree on that one) and we began to work furiously to compile the first issue. Yasa was determined to launch the inaugural issue on August 1st. Power outages, lack of internet and Friday holidays were not going to stop him from sticking to that plan in spite of my appeals to delay it. And here we are… exactly one year and 45 issues later!

Of the many goals we had for Interstellar, cultivating a stronger culture of reading and writing were near the top. Yasa and I both had many different experiences that confirmed the importance of helping Afghans, Starians in particular, to improve these two skills and develop an appreciation for them. I feel assured that these goals were met. Our list of online subscribers has grown steadily. Organizations in other provinces have asked to be included on our distribution list – a list which now numbers 3,000 copies each week. Writers who were submitting essays and articles were eager to see their pieces in print. Some were motivated enough to start their own blogs and to send their writing to other outlets to be published. Receiving praise and recognition from readers across the world was very encouraging for them.

We also aimed to use Interstellar as an inspirational source for Star readers. We are able to promote opportunities for scholarships, conferences and competitions. We regularly highlight the abundant stories of success and achievements of fellow Starians – like Star’s Best Student winners, Shaista Langari’s first art exhibition, Abbas Karimi’s gold medals in swimming competitions, Basira Daqiq’s participation in international leadership conferences and so many more. We share exciting news about the great work that so many Starians are doing including: Haibah Sadeq’s role as a speaker in an economic forum in India, Jawed Nazari’s leadership in a project researching community-based education in Afghan villages, and Junakah Rahabar’s experience with the Afghan Civic Engagement Program in Daikundi. Interstellar highlights Star’s commitment to civil society activism – like being a screening partner for the Afghanistan Human Rights Film Festival, hosting the 1000 Smiles for Peace exhibition, participating in the Anti-Street Harassment Awareness Campaign.

Through interviews, essays and articles, the message of women’s empowerment is being conveyed on a regular basis. Halima Habibi wrote an essay about how she has been a pioneer for change by running a weekly bicycle-riding club for girls. Jan Afza shared her experience about learning how to drive, we shared Mahsheed Mahjor’s powerful article about feminism. Media has the power to influence many people and Interstellar takes that power very seriously by amplifying Star’s commitment to being an agent for change.

We have had a great team of designers, translators, editors, interviewers and regular contributors throughout the year who have contributed to our success. The weekly deadlines are stressful and we are commonly racing the clock to complete the issues before printing time. I assume I was not the only one to breathe a sigh of relief if an issue was cancelled because of holidays or the end of a semester. An exciting development has been the fact that our editing team has now grown beyond the walls of Star’s Kabul branches to include interns from the University of California in Santa Barbara and Jonathan Greenburg, a committee member of the Afghan Girls’ Financial Assistance Fund (AGFAF).

Some of the highlights of the past year include the essay competition which we held in the fall of 2015 and the very tight race between Wahreed Hadered and Murtaza Ahmadi. The competition also was a lesson for me about how common procrastination is in Afghanistan as I watched 80-90% of the submissions arrive within 15 minutes of the midnight deadline! We had a panel of international judges who were eager to read and score the seven finalists’ essays. I am hoping we can hold another essay competition in year two of Interstellar’s existence. Among my favorite editing projects was a collaborative descriptive essay with ten students from Zakaria Bahaduri’s Level 6 class called “Kabul – a tapestry of the senses,” which appeared in Issue #17. See page 3 here: http://tinyurl.com/zmkndmt.

On a personal note, the most rewarding thing for me about Interstellar has been relationships. I came to know so many new and wonderful people in my role as an managing editor. I felt more like a member of the Star family than ever before. I truly enjoyed working on essays with writers and getting to know them through their writing and through the editing process. Some of those people have become very dear to me and will always hold a special place in my heart. When I arrived in Kabul in February, I felt like I was visiting dozens of old friends and not meeting a hundred people for the first time. Walking into my first staff meeting to see so many familiar faces, hugs, and warm greetings was like a homecoming for me. The experience of being the managing editor of Interstellar also helped me to embrace my need to do things slowly and purposefully. And that is what led me to step down as managing editor and start ROYA Online Writing Center. The beauty of which is that I am still strongly and deeply connected to Star, to Interstellar, and to stay focused on what matters to me.

Happy first birthday, Interstellar! It’s been a phenomenal year!!
Why are they killing us?

By Adela Khurami

It starts with willingness and ends with despair; what change would we want to bring in this world? Deep down, one always asks what and who he/she wants to be? Sometimes, it takes an individual to change something, while other times, many would need to strive together to bring about a change. The change does not happen over a day or two; bringing the change that the world wants to see today would require a lot of time, dedication and commitment. One may think that the part he/she plays in building the world is insignificant or not appreciated, but like it is said that, "Rome was not built in a day." Real commitment and steady efforts can take us there.

So far so good, what change we want to bring? Do we want to change policies, economies, cultures, technologies or the very nature of the world itself? How could we justify those changes so that it is constructive? While we cannot change human nature, we can change human nurture. We can ameliorate our moral visions, create positive thoughts inside our minds, and change our attitudes towards our world. Without presumption or attitude, each of us must be a moral guardian of the earth. Unless we learn to respect and care about each other as neighbours, unless we come to terms with the increasing vulnerability of life of earth, real progress will remain an illusion that is buried in greed, violence and selfish intent. Positive change is simply the currency and responsibility of individuals. If there is any quicker way of changing the world, we can change it by power of humanity. Humanity is the power of positive change and we can do it as quick as the beat of butterfly’s wing.

Changing is not question of ability; it is the question of will. It starts with changing and thinking in those with "can do" attitudes. It is vitally that we start becoming good humans and we are Muslims and we are not terrorists. On that terrifying afternoon of February 13th, like the tears of my mom, the sun was crying and had lost its brightness. Soon it disappeared and sent the sadness of the moon instead. It was like everything was mourning around us. I asked Allah to take me to those who have committed this crime so I could ask them my questions. Why are you killing us? What kind of Islam promotes such violence? What have we done to you? We are humans, just like you.

I was born on 5th March, 1997, when bullets were raining from the sky in my village in Afghanistan. Two years before my birth, the Taliban had killed Abdul Ali Mazari, the leader of my ethnic group, and had taken control of most of Afghan-istan. As the situation became worse, my father, who was also a Mujahid defending our village against the Taliban, was warned many times that they may kill his whole family. Within a week of my birth, he decided to take my family out of Afghan-istan. We left everything we owned and came to Quetta, Pakistan with thou-sands of other refugees to escape the ter-rorism, killing and genocide.

The peace and security we sought in Pakistan was fleeting. Shortly before I started kindergarten, eight Hazara pas-sengers were killed and five severely wounded when gunmen attacked the van they were traveling in. The Laahkar-e-Jhangvi or "Army of Jhangvi," also known as LeJ, claimed responsibility for the at-tack. LeJ is an anti-Shiite Pakistani reli-gious extremist group who, similar to the Taliban, believe that Shiite Muslims are infidels. They have been responsible for many deadly attacks on Hazaras in Quetta and have been targeting Shia Muslims for decades. Hazaras can easily be recog-nized by their Mongol facial features, thus making them the primary victims of the attacks. Thousands of innocent Hazaras and other Shia Muslims have been killed throughout the years in Pakistan.

On 11th March, 2011, I was in my Islamic Studies class at school. It was the last class of the day. Although I was tired, I was happy because it was Saturday and I didn’t have to ride 2 kilometers on my bicycle to my English language course after school. Fifteen minutes remained until the end of the day when a massive, shrieking sound pierced our innocent ears and made them bleed. We all hid under our desks. The windows to my right had broken and pieces of window glass were sent to kill us all. When I was satis-fied that everything was safe, I raised my head and noticed broken pieces of win-dow and blood all around me. We could see the smoke rising through our second story windows. Everyone was yelling and shouting “Allah-O-Akbar.” I stepped to-tward my friends to help them get to the first floor, but my left leg couldn’t hold my weight and I fell down. I looked at my leg and saw that my knee was bleeding and my pants were stained with blood.

My class fellows helped carry me out of the class to the first floor. In every di-rection, I saw innocent students in blood. Questions jumped in my mind. Why are they killing us? Why don’t they under-stand the basic principles of Islam? What have we done to them? We are Shia, but we are humans and that is what is impor-tant.

My teachers were bringing bandages when my brother, Behman, came in the building. He hugged me and said “Take care and go home right away.” Then he left quickly, searching for his friends. After drinking a cup of juice, I rushed to my bi-cycyle to leave for home when I saw armed Hazara men stationed in our school. My class fellows said that they were our guards but they didn’t realize that their presence made the environment even scarier.

When I opened the school door, I saw people running from side to side as if everyone was experiencing doomsday in our peaceful town. A foul smell was com-ing from the corner of the street where the bomb had exploded. I saw a hand without fingers, a head without a body. Our town was soaked in blood and grief. I passed broken families while I walked through streets of terror which were once the streets of passion. When I reached home, my mother ran to me. She hugged me as if she hadn’t seen me for years. She was cry-ing until she saw that my leg was bleed-ing and quickly brought a new bandage to stop its bleeding.

Hazaras have witnessed the slaugh-tering of our loved ones. We are killed because we are Shia Muslims. In the rest of the world, all Muslims, Shia and Sunni, are known as terrorists and criminals. Ev-ery incident of terror makes us ashamed of being Muslims. However, we are the real Muslims – Muslims who prioritize humanity and are religiously tolerant. We are not terrorists. We care for the people who were killed in Paris, the ones who are being slaughtered in Syria, and the ones who were targeted on September 11th. I want the world to know that we are Hu-mans and we are Muslims and we are not terrorists. On that terrifying afternoon of February 13th, like the tears of my mom, the sun was crying and had lost its brightness. Soon it disappeared and sent the sadness of the moon instead. It was like every-thing was mourning around us. I asked Allah to take me to those who have com-mitted this crime so I could ask them my questions. Why are you killing us? What kind of Islam promotes such violence? What have we done to you? We are hu-mans, just like you.

Celebrating Interstellar Bulletin’s First Anniversary August 01st, 2016
ASCEND: leadership through athletics

About the author: Zahra Habibi is a Star alumna and is in the 11th grade at Soria High School. In addition to being on Ascend’s mountain climbing team, Zahra is a member of the Drop and Ride bicycle club, practices mixed martial arts, and is an Afghan Peace Volunteer. She plans to study political science in the future.

Afghanistan, where I live, is a highly religious and male-dominated society. Women are oppressed and not treated equally. Imagine a girl who climbs the mountains and calls herself a mountain climber in such a society. It might sound impossible and dangerous at first, but the girls on Ascend’s mountain climbing team are climbing to the tops of mountains. Ascend, the first female mountain-ambitious mountaineers, envisions a positive change in the view of the traditional society through athletics. Their goal is not only empowering girls through athletics, but also psychologically preparing them to overcome any challenge in life.

The first time I heard about the Ascend team, I couldn’t wait to join them and experience being with a new group of girls doing new things. It was not only me, all the other girls on the team were elated to be a part of a group of active and visionary girls. The first day I climbed the mountain, I felt the challenge represented my real life. We face big rocks as big challenges in life and learned to climb and overcome them. The girls on the team love mountaineering and rock climbing, because that is the only time they struggle for something joyful and that they are free, truly free. The joy of reaching a summit is not comparable with any other joy. Our only thought at the time of climbing is reaching the summit and the one who is in the lead is responsible for showing the way to others.

In real life it is just like leading people. Mountaineering and rock climbing are not the only things we learn. We also learn volleyball, yoga, and swimming. Besides sports, Ascend has many other activities too. For example: Team building, Psychology Class, and Service Project. In team building class, we share our daily problems and difficulties with the team, and we look for a solution all together. Through this program we exercise solving the challenges we face as a team. In our psychology class, we talk about issues like how to build self-confidence, how to be soft-hearted, building trust and so on.

In our service project, we voluntarily take part in various projects with different organizations. One day each week I volunteer at an animal clinic by the name of Nawzad. Unlike most citizens, I don’t want to ignore the stray animals in the street. They have a program named TNVR which means they trap street animals, neuter, vaccinate, and release them. I was able to contact with the animals, communicate with them, take them outside and I clean them every week. Since the time I joined Ascend, I have learnt so many useful things that I can use in my life at any time, in or outside of a team.

We believe as the future leaders of this country and we are proving it through our athletics. I believe that every girl on our team is as strong as a man. We are empowered and educated on how to succeed in our lives. As an Afghan girl, I am so optimistic about women’s future and I am sure the dark past era will never be experienced by women again. In the future, no man can beat his wife and cut her nose and ears, no one can stone a girl, and no one can brutally beat a girl to death and burn her dead body because we the girls are so strong and will not let our rights to be taken away from us. We are the future leaders!

As part of Afghan culture Eid al-Fitr plays an important role in prayer, which is celebrated for 3 days. During these three days Muslims in Afghanistan put on their new clothes, making themselves fashionable with a smiley faces. They go to their relatives’ houses to meet with family. Additionally, the children receive gifts from their parents and their close relatives (in Dari it is called Eidy). This Eid is more familiar within the community than other Eids. Eid Mubarak is the most common salutation that Shahis Muslims receive from each other. They hug each other warmly and say Eid Mubarak. The same greeting is said by Pashtun Muslims, but they call it Akhtar Mubarak according to their mother language. On Eid al-Fitr, Afghans first offer Eid prayers. Then they gather at home with members of their families, embracing each other and saying “Eid Mubarak”. They usually add “Eidet Mobarak Roza wa Namazet Qabood”. It means “Happy Eid” and may Allah accept your prayers and fasting. Also, it is a common practice that every family visits other families and friends.

People begin the first day of Eid with eating and drinking beverages to help keeping fast. Afterward they prepare themselves for listening to the Khutba. Many Muslims go to the mosque prayers. Huge crowds often gather at mosques in Kabul and other 34 provinces for morning prayers as the festival of Eid al-Fitr begins. After mosque they listen to a khutba which is of-fered by Mullah Eman of that mosque. Many prayers are recited this time. These prayers are being recited outside after Khutba in a long line, with cheerful faces embracing each other and saying Eid Mubarak. Many Muslims may travel far to participate in some hobbies and activities, such as football and volleyball. On this day some communities organize different festivities, such as public meals or events for children. Another important duty which is necessary for Afghan Muslims is giving zakat al-fitr. If a Muslim has not given zakat al-fitr during 30 days of Ramadan month, he or she can give this on Eid al-Fitr, otherwise they break a rule of Islam. Zakat al-fitr is a type of charity consisting of a quantity of food, such as wheat, flour, rice, or it may be a contribution of money. This food must be given to the poor families who are not able to provide for their daily and nightly meals.

Often, one night before Eid, Muslims go out from their house to stand outside to look up at the new moon. They try to see it with their own eyes to ensure that this is the first day of the month of Shawwal. Otherwise, they are not allowed to eat food from sunrise to sunset. It is not possible to accurately predict the date of Eid al-Fitr according to the helical calendar. This is because the month of Shawwal begins, and the month of Ramadan ends, after a confirmed sighting of the new moon, either in Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, or locally in villages. The new moon may be sighted earlier or later in specific locations by many Muslims in different communities in the east and west, thus beginning the Eid-al-Fitr celebrations on different dates. Moreover, llal ul gadr’s event happened during the month of Ramadan, which is being kept alive by Muslim people, who believe the first time the holy Quran was revealed in one of these three nights, 19th, 21st or 23rd for the prophet Mohammad. They believe the value of these three nights are equal to 1000 other months.

Celebrating Interstellar Bulletin’s First Anniversary

About the Author: Mohammad Zaki Zaki is a Star alumnus and was an instructor at Star’s Daikondi branch until he returned to continue his studies at Kabul University.

In Afghanistan, Sunni and Shiah Muslims celebrate the last day of the month of Ramadan, a month of fasting and praying. Or it is the first day of the Islamic month of Shawwal as sacred days called Eid al-Fitr. Afghans began to prepare themselves for Eid Mubarak. Many Muslims may travel far to participate in some hobbies and activities, such as football and volleyball. On this day some communities organize different festivities, such as public meals or events for children. Another important duty which is necessary for Afghan Muslims is giving zakat al-fitr. If a Muslim has not given zakat al-fitr during 30 days of Ramadan month, he or she can give this on Eid al-Fitr, otherwise they break a rule of Islam. Zakat al-fitr is a type of charity consisting of a quantity of food, such as wheat, flour, rice, or it may be a contribution of money. This food must be given to the poor families who are not able to provide for their daily and nightly meals.

Often, one night before Eid, Muslims go out from their house to stand outside to look up at the new moon. They try to see it with their own eyes to ensure that this is the first day of the month of Shawwal. Otherwise, they are not allowed to eat food from sunrise to sunset. It is not possible to accurately predict the date of Eid al-Fitr according to the helical calendar. This is because the month of Shawwal begins, and the month of Ramadan ends, after a confirmed sighting of the new moon, either in Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, or locally in villages. The new moon may be sighted earlier or later in specific locations by many Muslims in different communities in the east and west, thus beginning the Eid-al-Fitr celebrations on different dates. Moreover, llal ul gadr’s event happened during the month of Ramadan, which is being kept alive by Muslim people, who believe the first time the holy Quran was revealed in one of these three nights, 19th, 21st or 23rd for the prophet Mohammad. They believe the value of these three nights are equal to 1000 other months.
Celebrating Interstellar Bulletin’s First Anniversary

Vol. 2, No. 46

PAGE 4

Bomiting at Enlightenment Movement peaceful demonstration - a compilation of social media posts

Ali Reza Yasa July 23 at 9:21am

Thousands of Hazara protesters are marching against systematic discrimination against Hazaras. Afghan government has been trying to threaten the movement using different channels to discourage participation of the people in today’s demonstration. But Hazaras believe it is enough of discrimination and cruelty. People won’t step back and end the demonstration unless the government ends the systematic discrimination against Hazaras. A delegation from the movement has already had meetings with various stakeholders, the US Embassy, The Embassy of the European Union, the Embassy of UK and UNAMA, and has made them aware of the discrimination and injustice in the division of resources and discrimination against a particular ethnic group in Afghanistan.

Ali Reza Yasa July 23 at 10:05am

A large group of the protesters are advancing toward the city center. Serious security measures have been taken and the roads to the Presidential Palace have all been blocked by shipping containers. The Afghan government has even filtered the Internet users’ social media networks in order to censor the news of the demonstration. Hazaras began their protest when Afghan President, Ashraf Ghani changed the plan for the 500 Volt importation using different channels to discourage participation of the people in today’s demonstration. But Hazaras believe it is enough of discrimination and cruelty. People won’t step back and end the demonstration unless the government ends the systematic discrimination against Hazaras. A delegation from the movement has already had meetings with various stakeholders, the US Embassy, The Embassy of the European Union, the Embassy of UK and UNAMA, and has made them aware of the discrimination and injustice in the division of resources and discrimination against a particular ethnic group in Afghanistan.

Timor Sharan July 23 at 11:12am

The Afghan government has already had meetings with various stakeholders, the US Embassy, The Embassy of the European Union, the Embassy of UK and UNAMA, and has made them aware of the discrimination and injustice in the division of resources and discrimination against a particular ethnic group in Afghanistan.

Star Educational Society condemns the tragic event at Saturday’s Enlightenment Movement demonstration

Ali Jawad Zawulistani July 23 at 3:28pm

There was a twin explosion in an Ice cream cart. A lot of casualties.

Timor Sharan July 23

This explosion happened right where Enlightenment Movement demonstrators had set up tents. A lot of casualties.

Timor Sharan July 23

No ambulances at the scene yet, police are taking people to hospital Enlightenment Movement.

Jawad Zawulistani July 23 at 3:28pm

Please go to the hospital and donate blood to the needy!

Timor Sharan July 23

MP Behzad, the main leader of Enlightenment Movement is injured.

Timor Sharan July 23 at 4:35pm

Outside Istikqlal hospital. People from all ethnic groups here to give blood. A sad day. Ali Jawad lost 4 of his friends in today’s attack.

Moody Moodster July 23 at 6:02pm

Over 60 ethnic Hazaras who were talking part in a peaceful protest were killed in a suicide attack. The images of men, women and children in bloody pieces on the road makes my heart weep. Once again, terrorism has destroyed innocent lives.

Enlightening Movement July 23 at 7:10pm

Candlelight Vigil Ceremony for Enlightenment Movement Martyrs: after one hour, Deh Mazang Square

Ahmad Shuja July 23

Not ceding ground: 100s of protesters gather for the night at the site of today’s twin blasts. Overnight/longterm protest was original plan.
Ali Shakhid July 24 at 12:24am

As soon as the explosion happened, my sisters and I rushed to the hospitals where the wounded needed blood. My mom tried to stop us. She cried and said “there could be another explosion in the aftermath of the blast.” I didn’t risk you guys. You can’t do without blood. We all need to donate blood sooner or later. Please don’t go now or I won’t forgive you.

I’m not saying that a decision of most of my friends were in the protest where the twin attacks happened and I knew they needed help. I couldn’t sit in my comfy room just to wait until my friends die. I had to ignore my mom’s cries and escape.

All the hospitals were looking for a place to donate blood. But throngs of people, stressed and lost, were flooding in and out of the hospital. I was hearing cries everywhere. Friends of friends were coming one after another. Some were dead, some wounded, and some were lost. My fear and stress were mounting by every news of a friend. It is just devastating to look for a friend you know is injured or possibly dead.

I walked to a nurse and asked where I could donate blood. He directed me to a ward. Once there, screams of the victims were piercing my ears. Blood was all over the place. Some had lost arms, and some legs. I could even smell human flesh and burned bodies and clothes. The whole scene was so depressing that I felt sick. I couldn’t donate any blood. I quickly walked out and found my sisters. Which were lying outside, all of us. My sisters started screaming and calling “Amir,” our family friend. I turned around and noticed his body being moved to an ambulance to be transferred to a different hospital. We were not expecting that view at all. Amir Mohammad had passed out. His hair was burned, his face was full of blood, and his left side was smashed. I was not sure whether to let my emotions out and cry for Amir Mohammad or soothe my sisters who were completely terrified and shocked. For a second, I was speechless and still. Then I hugged my sisters and helped them walk outside the hospital.

Our day has been full of trauma, stress, and fear. The images from today are not going to fade from my mind even for a single moment.

P.S. ISIS claimed responsibility for today’s attacks on protestors in Kabul.

Abuzar Royesh July 24 at 6:10am

Death toll in Kabul suicide attack climbs to over 80 killed, more than 230 injured

At least 80 people were killed and 231 injured when a huge blast rocked a mass demonstration in the Afghan capital, Kabul, the Interior Ministry has announced. The attack was claimed by terrorist group Islamic State.

Officials confirmed to TOLOnews network and Pajhwok agency, as well as to Reuters. Officials have confirmed to TOLOnews that at least three suicide bombers were present at the rally. The first detonated an explosives vest, the second was killed by police, while the third had a defective explosive vest. The fate of the third attacker is unknown.

Graphic photos have emerged on social media showing bodies at the presumed site of explosion.

“No one was prepared for this. I didn’t have any blood,” one of the neighbors said.

TOLOnews reported that the incident took place in Deh Mazang Circle during a major demonstration. Security officials have arrived at the scene of the blast and the injured have been taken to nearby hospitals.

Shortly after the attack, Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid denied the group was behind the bombing, saying it “did not have any involvement or hand in this tragic attack.”

Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIS/ISIL) claimed responsibility for the attack, adding that its fighters detonated explosive belts “at a gathering of Shias,” according to IS-affiliated Amaq news agency.

Islamic State is now trying to claim responsibility for every terrorist attack both in Western countries and in the Middle East as it wants “to impose itself as the only [organization] which is able to carry out such attacks and is powerful enough to have a greater reach,” Katherine Skulad, a political analyst and writer, told RT.

At the same time, she stressed that the attack could also have been carried out by “other groups trying to stir sectarian tensions,” as “there is almost a competition between different terrorist organizations and ISIL is now trying to impose itself as the only worthy of supporting.”

She also said that it is “a worrying trend” because “ISIL is extremely violent and bloodthirsty” and “the degree of its violence is troubling.”

However, there have been conflicting reports about the number of blasts that struck the demo. According to TOLOnews, two explosions rocked the protest. Some reports on social media suggested there may have been up to three explosions.

Following the terrorist attack during a demonstration in Kabul, the Afghan Interior Ministry has announced a ban on “any kind of demonstrations and gatherings” for the next 10 days, the IBC, reports.

The demonstration, organized by the Enlightenment Movement, gathered to protest over the Afghan government’s planned 500kV power line project.

Authorities want to run the power line to Kabul through the Salang area in north-eastern Afghanistan. But protestors wanted the line diverted through the city of Bamiyan in central Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, Russian President Vladimir Putin sent a message to his Afghan counter-part, Ashraf Ghani, and expressed Russia’s readiness to fight all forms of terrorism together with Afghanistan.

“The band of the Russian state strongly condemned this cynical crime committed against peaceful citizens and reiterated readiness to continue the most active cooperation with the authorities and people of Afghanistan in fighting all forms of terrorism,” the Kremlin said in a statement.

Amnesty International said that the attack “on a group of peaceful protestors in Kabul demonstrates the utter disregard that armed groups have for human life.”

“Such attacks are a reminder that the conflict in Afghanistan is not winding down, as some believe, but escalating, with consequences for the human rights situation in the country that should alarm us all.”

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani said he was “deeply saddened” by the massacre.

“Peaceful protest is the right of every citizen, but opportunists infiltrated the crowds and carried out the attack, killing and injuring a number of citizens including some security forces,” he added.

Erdughan: Turkey Considers Rein-stating Execution Law

Source: Toloo News
Translation: Farid Sheftayi

Rajab Tayyeb Erdughan, the president of Turkey speaks of the possibility of reinstating the execution law in Constitution of Turkey.

At the ceremony of burying the victims of the coup, he said, “People’s decision cannot be neglected in a democracy. This is your decision and it will be upheld by one and all to ensure our institutions.”

He also added, “We cannot postpone this decision any longer. Anyone who did this coup have to be penalized.”

Before this Binali Yildirim, the prime minister of Turkey, had announced that the government might consider some changes in the constitution regarding back the execution law. While in 2004, for joining the European Union, Turkey cancelled the execution law and since 1984 Turkey has not executed anyone.

Erdughan also asked his followers to keep demonstrating against the coup. He also added that the threats against jans were not completely terminated.

Following to the unsuccessful coup in Turkey, more than 6000 of officers and high ranking judges have been arrested because being suspected in this coup.
Celebrating Interstellar Bulletin’s First Anniversary

The front pages of the last forty-five issues of the Interstellar Bulletin depict the names and faces of some of Star’s most beloved and honored Starians, new and old. In each of these issues there are reminders of the year’s success stories and words of wisdom from senior teachers, alumni and program directors.

In celebrating the first anniversary of the Interstellar Bulletin, we have so many other things to celebrate as well. Some of the people on these cover pages have started new journeys on the road to self-improvement. Hussain Yousofi is pursuing his master’s in Education Policy at Columbia University, Habiba Sadeqi just left for her master’s in Green Energy Engineering at Pondicherry University in India, Nasrullah Hussaini is a Fulbright finalist who will be leaving us in a year from now to pursue his master’s in Computer Science Engineering at Handong International Law School in South Korea, and Mohammad Salehi has recently left to build a new life in the U.S.

We are sad to see them go, but we are thrilled to see so many of the people who have walked through our doors being selected for Fulbright, DAAD, Chevening and other scholarships. It pleases us to see people pursuing their higher education and seeking and grasping opportunities with such vigor. Their success stories will become our success stories just as our success is also theirs. That’s the family spirit at Star – celebrating our shared achievements!

Feel free to see all of our back issues on our website here: http://star.edu.af/interstellar/
Stories

My Grandmother Told Me

The commander’s own brother, Karblaye stayed out of the fight, and the war, and left the village. My brothers, two of them, joined hands with the commander to banish us, raid our shop, and attempt to kill him. Such were our lives in watan.

Two of my brothers were active members of the commander’s party at the time when they looted our shop and distributed everything your father had among the members of their party. But that’s what the villagers were like. With the exception of a few families, the whole village stood with the commander, and against us. We did not worry much about others, but the betrayal of those close to us hurt us the most, and turned watan into a forbidden place.

Ours was the first house past the pass. The road into the village ran past the front of the house. In the days before we had to flee, I saw the commander walk into the village flanked by my nephew Juma, and another person whose identity I don’t recall. I was cleaning the front of the barn when I saw these figures appear on the pass. I knew it was them. As they walked past the front of the house, they had a look at the house, and then at me. I saw them and I spat in their direction. They stopped, and paused there with their faces all red. I stood my ground and looked them in the eyes. They turned around, and walked away mumbling.

Decades passed, and the next time I saw the commander was when this white-bearded old person visited us in Kabul. He appeared to be a mere shadow of what he had been. I am sure that he remembered the time I had spat at him, in the same way that I remembered everything he had done to my family.

*Watan = The village; Homeland

About the author: Hadi Zaher was the first graduate of Quetta’s branch of Star Educational Society in the year 1999. He has an MA from the University of Wollongong in Australia and is currently a post-graduate student at the University of New South Wales.

---

Hazara and Enlightenment Movement in World Literature

The poem, “Hazara” was written by Neeli Cherkovski about Hazaras and the Enlightenment Movement a few weeks ago at the Moniga Art Festival in Italy. Cherkovski asked for an end to the systematic discrimination against Hazaras in Afghanistan.

Neeli Cherkovski (pictured at left with Afghan poet, Basir Ahang) is an applauded poet, critic, memoirist and literary biographer. He has written twelve books of poetry, including: From the Canyon Outward, the award winning Leaning Against Time, Elegy for Bob Kaufman and Animal; two acclaimed biographies, Bukowsk: A Life and Ferlinghetti: A Biography; his book, Whitman’s Wild Children (a collection of critical memoirs), has become an underground classic. He has resided since 1975 in San Francisco. In 2005 Cherkovski won the Pen Oakland-Josephine Miles Literary Award.

---

HAZARA

We were Hazara when sun
And moon sat
On a shelf
In the palace
Of the fallen star

We were Hazara this dawn
Standing
On a field of stone
A Buddha
On our shoulders
Hazara in the chalk
Noon cruel open sweet
Rain, pools of thought
And acrimony
Wedded into a planet
Where animals perish
And glaciers walk
Into the ocean
Hazards warning lights
Crude desire death in hand
We are born
In the shadow
Of this stone
We are born to rise reborn
On the ocean
Of lips and shoulders

Born to bury
Our dead in mounds
Of dirt, we create a creator
Out of bone
And plant wine
In twisted corners

We are timed
To find two Buddhas
In the sound
Hewn into stone
In a rumor
Torn onto home
Blue splendor
Ride and bring
The embers out
Of hiding

One ring down the
Arena is lit
In body language
Over the skull
Of land

Hazara
Hazards
Were we built
For love
And rage

We are Hazara on a wound
At night
Part of us gone
Down to marble
Down the root
Of mountain scrim

We were Hazara
When the panthers
Were eating lanterns
Blue as dust flew
Out of our cave

We were living proof
Drunk on wine
From this wealthy soul
Of soil, swirls of
Touch and sight

We are serpents
Of obsidian
We dream deserts
And difficult passes
We own fields of grain
We endure.

---

Celebrating Interstellar Bulletin’s First Anniversary
For fundamental change begin with education

- Interview with Ali Reza Yasa, Chairman and Founder of Star Educational Society -

What inspired you to start Star Educational Society in Kabul? We were a group of returnees who were very self-motivated. We had the talent, passion and motivation to bring about change. I was interested in education. I thought, “if the country truly wants to have fundamental change, we have to begin with education.” I laid a foundation that immensely helped the lives of many people in the west of Kabul, an area with a population of around 1 million. People needed the skills to seek better opportunities, find jobs and earn money to support their families and Star Educational Society delivered those skills. I think I have played a key role in bringing that small change, at a time when it was highly needed.

In one of your messages in the Interstellar Bulletin you mentioned “an ideal educational environment.” Can you describe that? When I was around 15 or 16, I worked with my teacher and teaching at a university like U.C. Berkeley was basically doing ethnographic research studies at the American University of Afghanistan and now as a Fulbright scholar at Columbia University doing his Master’s. His role has been tremendous and more serious than mine. Another person who I am always grateful to is Mustafa Hussaini, our Executive Director and Senior Staff Member. He has been an excellent role model, inspiring your students, encouraging their questions and helping them to reach their goals. The reward is when you are alone at night and you reflect on how effective you were during your classes. Of course, if something went wrong or a student minded something, then all night I feel the pain rather than the reward and the next day I commit myself to mend the problem.

What are some of your greatest accomplishments at Star since you opened in 2003? I think the greatest accomplishment is the fact that we have graduated over 30,000 students and we have played a role in around 90 students finding scholarship opportunities in the U.S. alone. Hundreds of students are studying in other countries like Turkey, Russia, Bangladesh, India, even as far as Mongolia, Korea, Japan or the U.K. So basically, I think that our biggest achievement is the fact that we have helped these students to study abroad. In the past 4 years, 25 of our students were accepted in the prestigious and very competitive Fulbright Scholarship Program.

I am proud that Star has this kind of capacity that could change a watchman into a senior staff member. In recognition of Mustafa’s hard work, his faithfulness, and more importantly, his integrity as a manager, he has worked his way to a position where sometimes my decisions are rejected and he is accepted by the staff and students. That is what Star has been capable of.

Before creating Star Educational Society, what career did you think that you might pursue? Hmm, this is a very tricky question. Absolutely! My first day of teaching was a disaster. I messed up everything. I was only 13 or 14 years old studying in advanced classes in Quetta. I participated in a lot of extracurricular activities. I was on a basketball team, had a role in the drama program, and I was the winner of the speech competition. Unfortunately, those things made me proud and partly selfish. I wouldn’t let the teachers teach. When they came in front of the class, we would make jokes at their expense and they would leave our class and never return. One day, when I was about 14, the director of the language center told me that a teacher was absent and ordered me to teach that class. One hour of teaching passed like many years, I was overawed. It was difficult to talk. My whole body was shivering.

I remember turning around to write something on the board but I couldn’t reach the board properly because I was short. The students in the first row imitated my actions and the whole class mocked me. I felt completely helpless. I gradually left one by one. It left a bad impression on me, I did not teach for a year.

But when I turned 13, I started teaching in a barber shop with three students. My students were the barber and two of his customers, and I taught them for free. That experience helped me to overcome my fears of teaching and face the challenges set before me. After one year, I became a very popular barber in Quetta. There was a huge demand for me.

In closing, I want to offer my condolences to you and all other Afghans for the tragic attack on July 23rd. Can you share some comforting or encouraging words for Interstellar’s readers? I would like to quote my dear friend, Timor Shahian, who so eloquently said, “Today I saw the resilience of our nation, the solidarity of our people, and the dignity of a mother. Afghanistan will live long, our flag will fly high, our people will defy terrorism and injustice, and our people will prosper.”