I have had the distinct pleasure of benefiting from the interesting and rich experience of Star’s vibrant Educational Society. First I was a student at Star and then I became a teacher. I always sensed that the secret to Star’s success was its family-like atmosphere. It is an institution in which people stand for and with each other, love each other and bring out the best in each other. In the essence of Star’s philosophy of “gain and convey,” I will now serve in the capacity of Branch Director for Star’s newest Branch in Daikondi. In Daikondi, the needs of the people are great and the resources are few. Star is needed in Daikondi and it is a great honor and privilege to be at the helm of Star’s latest expansion project.

In the past 17 years of its tireless work, Star has focused its efforts on Afghan refugees in Quetta and the poor and deprived people in the West of Kabul. Star’s birth in Quetta followed shortly after the advent of the retrogressive era of the Taliban when the horizon of hope had disappeared. Star’s birth coincided with the horrific Taliban massacres in Mazar-e-Sharif and Bamiyan. The sable clouds of despair hung heavily with repression, bloodshed and injustice and obstructed any views of a future. Schools were closed, education was taboo, and racial and religious discrimination prevailed.

Star was established in Quetta to bring about an ideal educational and cultural environment at the peak of this dark and tragic era. Star extended itself to the refugee population and it became a sanctuary of learning for those who had been forced to flee from their homes and homeland. During these times, Star endeavored to teach, coach, and enhance the quality of lives of thousands of Afghan refugees in Quetta. After the fall of the retrogressive Taliban regime and upon the advent of an era of democracy in Afghanistan, Star came to Kabul. Since then, Star has touched the lives of over 38 thousand students. After many years of hardship and sacrifices, the Star founders, teachers, students, friends and all Starians worked together to secure a dignified status among the educational institutes. Star now operates in five branches. It has expanded from its core as an English language academy to becoming an institute of foreign languages. In addition, it offers translation services, a private high school, library, and computer lab.

I have studied at Star. I have taught at Star. I know what a difference Star can make. In Daikondi, people will sacrifice a meal to buy a notebook so that their children can learn how to read and write. The people in Daikondi hold the value of education in highest regard. As the Director of Star’s new branch in Daikondi, I look forward to creating an educational environment where the people who cross through our doors will feel the “difference” that all Starians strive for. Such is the spirit of the Starians who will support me, encourage me and serve with me in Daikondi. And such is the spirit that we will convey near the Koh-i-Baba mountains in the central highlands of Afghanistan.

On September 6th, nearly 500 students, from Preparatory to Advance Classes, participated in the C Branch “Inter-class Quiz Competition.” We at Star believe that healthy competitions engender positive learning. We encourage students to strive for their desired goals. Such events help prepare students for the scholarship competitions that have enabled many Starians to study in high schools and universities around the world. The quizzes simulate standardized English exams, like TOEFL and IELTS, and were designed to evaluate grammar skills and reading comprehension. Students who received the highest marks were given appreciation letters and accolades from Star instructors and audience members in an auspicious ceremony on September 11th.
A Daikondi shepherd boy’s first experience at school

The hardest five years

About the authors: Ali Jan Tatarkhani received his English diploma from Star in 2011. He graduated from Kabul University with his bachelor’s degree in Macroeconomics and works as a Team leader with the Ministry of Interior Affairs.

I was born in the most deprived, mountainous and remote village of Daikordi province – a village of honest, hardworking people, and mud-brick houses. In the early years of my life, I was a shepherd. For five years, I herded the sheep to graze in the steep hills and soaring mountains of Nawrag Village. The sheep and goats were my constant companions and I loved them very much. Sometimes I kissed the nose of the sheep and even shared my lunch with some of my favorites.

At that time, my biggest dream was to own a strong, stubborn ram. I knew nothing about school. I was around 8 years old when my father, without my knowledge, enrolled me in a primary school 30km from my village. On one summer evening, I came home from pasturing the herds and saw two boys sitting in my father’s guesthouse. My mother told me, “These two boys will take you to school tomorrow. Take a bath and wear these new clothes.”

My father had enrolled me in the First Class of school. And my mother explained that I would leave with these two boys and would only be able to come home two times each year. When I heard this from my mother, I started crying and refused to go to school. My mother insisted and said, “You have to go to school because this is what your father ordered.”

When I realized that I could not disobey my father, I entered the enclosure where we kept our animals and wrapped my arms around the neck of my favorite ram. I never ate dinner and hugged the ram’s neck until I fell asleep in the early morning hours. Just before dawn, my mother came and removed my hands from the ram’s neck.

In the morning, the two boys accompanied me from my village to the school. My father had made arrangements for me to live with my uncle’s family. During the first days of attending school, everything seemed very strange. I was nervous and uncomfortable and was afraid to look at the other students. Even when the other boys and girls were listening to the teacher, I was looking at the classroom floor and playing with my fingers. I didn’t know the rules of the school. One day I arrived late to class and my teacher punished me by slapping me. When he raised his hand to slap me a third time, I took off my old and dusty shoe and hit him across his face. Afterward, I ran from the class as fast as I could while other students ran and tried to catch me. When I escaped from school, I didn’t return to my uncle’s home. Instead, I ran all the way to Nawrag Village.

My parents tried to send me back to school, but I preferred to endure the hard work and chores as a shepherd rather than returning to school. For the next eight years, I herded sheep and goats like the many other simple-minded workers in my village. Sometimes my parents told me, “You are a good worker. You should stay home to care for and feed the herds. Let your other siblings continue their education.”

In hindsight, I understand that I paid a heavy price for the mistake of escaping from school. Though now I reproach myself for reacting so impulsively toward the teacher, remembering my dusty shoeprint on his face always makes me laugh. Fortunately, after eight years, when I understood the difference between literacy and illiteracy, I registered for school again. I started school from Eighth Class and after four years I earned my high school diploma with the first position. After four more years, I earned my bachelor’s degree from Kabul University. I no longer dream of owning a strong, stubborn ram. Today, I feel an unquenchable thirst for studying and am excited to begin my next adventure in learning.

About the authors: Lael Shafiiyar is a former student and current teacher of Star. He graduated with a Bachelor’s degree from the Plant Protection Department, Agriculture Faculty of Kabul University and aspires to have a career in water management.

It was a dark and cloudy day and the Taliban’s presence was expanding rapidly in Afghanistan. Day-by-day they were occupying new places in the country, especially Hazarajat. I woke up and ate breakfast, prepared for school, and left the house. While I was on the way, my elder friends were murmuring that the Taliban had come to Jaghori and occupied the whole area. They said that today they will come to our school first. When I arrived at school, my doubts changed into reality. We were greeted by ten mustached men and a strong, stubborn ram. Today, I feel an unquenchable thirst for studying and am excited to begin my next adventure in learning.

Holy Quran and told us that they were here to bring peace and equality. He said that they had come here in order to bring the real Islam and instructed us to have a beard and wear a turban. He told the small boys that they should wear a hat and that they had brought the newest Islamic books. The crowd of boys was silent and fearful and listened intently and obediently. Finally, the commander’s lecture was finished and they left.

When I returned home, my family quickly asked me what had happened. Did you see anybody? I told them the whole story. My father was very worried about the Taliban’s appearance in Jaghori and sat quietly and pensively. After two days, my father disappeared. Only my mother knew what had happened to him. After some days I learned that he had left us to go to Iran.

The hardships in my life and the life of my family began at that moment. My father was no longer with us and the whole responsibility for my family fell on the shoulders of me and my brothers. We were small and knew nothing about our new responsibilities. We began to prepare the wood for fires, buy food for the family, cultivate our land, participate in village social issues, and buy notebooks and supplies for school.

We woke up at 2, 3 and 4 o’clock at night to bring firewood from the mountain in order to prepare bread for our family. For more than five years we did this work. In spite of many hardships and difficulties, my two elder brothers and I were happy and united to help the family. We thought about our father and didn’t know what kind of hardships he faced while working in Iran.

The Taliban continued their cruelty and tortured innocent people, demanding their weapons. Everybody was exhausted from the harsh government of the Taliban. Finally, America came to Afghanistan and the Taliban began to escape from our area. They forced students and citizens to go to schools and public places and say, “Down with America! Long live the Taliban!” When they were purged from Jaghori, we finally had relief. We felt better and better and were finally able to relax. Day-by-day things became normal again. My father returned from Iran and helped us to study hard and leave the world of illiteracy and ignorance and follow our dreams of a bright future.
Reducing girls' dropout rate in Daikundi

About the authors: Jumah Khan Babayab is an alumna and new teacher at Star. He is a junior at Kabul University majoring in Political Science. He currently works as a program manager in the Youth Development Association (YDA) and shares his report below about how YDA is advocating for girls in Daikundi through research-based programs, training workshops, conferences and public awareness programs.

The Afghan Civic Engagement Program (ACEP) is a five year project which is funded by USAID and implemented by Counterpart International (CPI). The Youth Development Association (YDA), through a sub-agreement with CPI, administers the project in Daikundi that is reported on below.

Daikundi is one of the most remote provinces in Afghanistan and the home of the most deprived people, especially women. The citizens in Daikundi still don’t have access to their very basic rights. Access to education, the foundation of a stable country and one of the basic elements of a developed society, is still a challenge for girls in Daikundi. There are countless girls who have never been enrolled in school. However, a more serious problem and a threat to one of Afghanistan’s success stories, girls’ education, is the high dropout rate among Afghan girls – girls who leave school before they graduate. To raise women’s contribution in the society and their key role in different aspects of life, the only way is to eradicate illiteracy. Therefore, YDA focused on a problem which has been neglected. This research-based project aimed to identify the causes for the high dropout rate among girls and to advocate for solution. The project was composed of different stages and programs to bring this issue to the attention of the government and to raise awareness among the people about this problem.

The project covered one district, the Nili District, and lasted five months, from March 22, 2015 to August 21, 2015, including two phases: research and advocacy. 108 respondents were interviewed; both through questionnaires and in-depth interviews. Advocacy programs were delivered in the target community by holding workshops, printing publications and holding an advocacy conference. A short duration workshop on the importance of girls’ education was conducted. The workshop trained ten female and four male participants about laws, conventions and other documents related to girls’ education. The trainees received certificates at the end of the workshop. An article writing competition was announced with topics mostly concentrated on girls’ education and girls’ dropout rate. Three writers won the competition and were awarded new laptop computers for their winning articles. A publication named “On Girls’ Drop-out in Nili, Daikundi - Obstacles and Solutions” containing different articles and reports concentrating on different aspects of girls’ education was published. Banners with different messages were installed on billboards in crowded areas and a radio message to encourage families to send their daughters to school was repeatedly broadcasted by a local radio. An advocacy conference was held. High government officials, CSO delegates and other influential society members and project beneficiaries were invited and participated in the conference. The research findings were presented and many speakers, including the governor of Daikundi, addressed the issue in this conference. Masuma Muradi, the governor, pledged to work on specific programs to decrease the girls’ dropout rate. She said that the government would work on additional courses, a rapid training school, providing training facilities and other programs to encourage girls to attend school and continue their education.

The project broadly publicized the problem and was widely covered by local and national media. It was a great stride to inspire Daikundi girls to achieve a better and brighter view for their future. Finally, YDA warmly thanks Counterpart International and USAID for their support and engagement for making a fair world for the oppressed women and girls of Afghanistan, especially in Daikundi.

"Think and Create"

About the authors: Qumair Nia is a Star alumna who is currently a senior at St. Margaret’s School, a private high school in Virginia, U.S. She is supported by the Afghan Girls’ Financial Assistance Fund.

When I was younger, I observed many of the challenges faced by Afghans such as economic problems and lack of security. I began to wonder how I could help to address these problems in my adult life. This is when I realized that the only thing that can bring change is education. I worried that schools in Afghanistan would not be able to provide me with the education I need and I began to work toward finding an opportunity to continue my education in the U.S. It was hard to believe that I could get such a chance because it is really challenging to get accepted in American schools and to find scholarships.

Something that served as a great inspiration for me was a book written by an Iranian psychologist, Alireza Arzmandian, in which he talked about his life and how he changed it. When I read his book called Technology of Thought, I began to change my thinking and beliefs. The main theme of his book is “Think and Create.” He explains that whatever you dream of today, you will get it tomorrow. If you think positively, you have positive results. If you think negatively, you have negative results. In order to achieve your goal, start working toward it and believe in your ability to succeed. That was when I resolved to get a scholarship to study in America.

I started learning English language in 2010 and I took the TOEFL test in 2013. Then, my English teacher, Hussain Yousofi, introduced me to the Afghan Girls’ Financial Assistance Fund (AGFAF). When I sent my TOEFL score to AGFAF, the organization sent my score to many schools. Fortunately, I was accepted at St. Margaret’s School, a private high school in Virginia. Without the support of the Afghan Girls’ Financial Assistance Fund, financial problems could have been an impassable obstacle.

This experience has shown me the difference in our educations systems. Teachers are well-educated in the U.S. Also, there are fewer students in a class, so the students have the chance to participate and ask questions from the teacher. Another thing I have experienced is the importance of time management. I am very busy with studies and sport activities, so I have to schedule my time effectively. When I came to school the first day, I was surprised by the amount of homework because I didn’t have much homework in Afghanistan. I decided to reduce my sleeping hours in order to have enough time to do my homework and I woke up an hour and a half earlier than all my classmates. Since I came to the U.S., I appreciate the security, especially for girls. In addition, I have many more opportunities here than in Afghanistan. I never had the chance to play sports at school and enjoy the different types of sports and kind coaches at my school. All of these opportunities that have been available to me make me feel more compelled to be a leader in Afghanistan and to support Afghan women. I want to solve the current problems to the full extent of my abilities. My hope for my lovely country is to see security among all Afghan people and see all people united. I have positive hope for my country because now most of new the generation is getting educated compared to the past. Together, the new generation will bring wonderful changes.
**Palestine’s flag to fly at United Nations**

Translated by: Adela Khurram
Source: Daily 8AM

According to reports of Agence France-Presse (AFP), the United Nations voted for a commitment on Friday 12, Sunbala, in which they permitted Palestine to raise their flag in the United Nations’ headquarters and offices.

119 member countries of the United Nations had a positive vote for raising the flags of Palestine and other non-member observer states, 8 member countries had a negative vote and 45 member countries abstained from the vote. The countries which voted against this movement Australia, Canada, Israel, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Palau, Tuvalu, and United States. According to this resolution, Palestine, which has a temporary membership in the United Nations, is permitted to raise its flag besides the flags of other member countries.

The United Nations has 20 days to implement the resolution. The flag will be raised in time for Palestine President Mahmoud Abbas’ visit to New York. Riyad Mansoor, a representative of Palestine in United Nations, said, “It is a symbolic thing, but another step to solidify the pillars of the state of Palestine in the international arena.”

*This article appears in a section of Daily Hashti-e-Subh that presents issues in a satirical way. The title of the section is “Dega che gapa ast?” which means “What else is going on?” Read the following piece in the context of political satire.*

**South Africa’s Request from Afghanistan**

Written by: Dai Chepani
Translated by: A.R. Bill Nazari
Source: Daily Hashti-e-Subh, 22/13

To Afghanistan’s Government:

In the next two months, South Africa’s government (SAaG) will commemorate the second anniversary of Nelson Mandela’s death. SAaG wants to commemorate the second anniversary of Mandela’s death in a different way than last year’s commemoration ceremony. After reviewing and studying many models for commemoration ceremonies such as death anniversaries, SAaG found Afghanistan’s model of commemorating death anniversaries both different and unique.

Permitting us to copy your model, it will help us to satisfy the soul of South Africa’s grand leader for a while. Since it is our first time that we are commemorating such a ceremony, it may have some shortcomings. By getting useful information from you, we want to minimize the shortcomings. If you answer our following questions, we will never forget your kindnes.

1: To commemorate a good death anniversary,

how many people need to be injured and killed? And how should the victims be chosen?
2: In your country, which type of guns are used by mourners to kill the people? After the people are killed, will they be sliced as well or not?
3: In order to satisfy Mandela’s soul, how many car accidents do we need?
4: How many flags does each car need? Do not forget to mention the size of the flags, JIGAR!
5: What should we do to the people who do not seem to be mourners? In her/his heart, how should we learn who does not like Mandela’s aunt?
6: By force, in which places should we stick black flags and Mandela’s photos?
7: For the satisfaction of Mandela’s soul, which parts of Johannesburg city must be blocked?

Please! Send the answers to our questions as soon as possible to our embassy in Islamabad, Pakistan, so it will enable us to take the essential preparations for the second anniversary of Nelson Mandela’s death.

Sincerely,
Jaish Zuma,
President- South Africa.

**Religious mottos and racial operations**

Written by: Sabihzad Hafez
Translated by: Waliat Rahmany
Source: Etilaat-e-Rahbar

Most people don’t know about the controversial discourse which is going on in media about placing the terms Afghan and Islam on the new ID card. This unawareness doesn’t mean that they don’t consider themselves Afghans or Muslims. On the contrary, for most ordinary people (whether we like them, or not) this question is already solved. It means that these people consider themselves just an ordinary Muslim; as a result, it is not necessary to mention these terms on new identification cards.

I know that many Afghans believe that this approach about their identifications as Afghans is not right. Among those who oppose adding these terms on new identification cards, the number of people opposed to adding “Afghan” is more rampant than those who are opposed to adding “Islam." It is rare that people want to resist the word “Islam,” because they know that religious people’s response would be hazardous for them. But opposition to the word “Afghan” is not treated like the word “Islam.” Why? Because now all the people know that in Afghanistan Afghans are religious and actions are racial.

Those who insist on being Afghan and being Muslim, in fact their premise is being Afghan, not Muslim. This truth ceases to resist the fight against Islam (because this war is against facade and extravagant costs). But opposition to the word “Afghan” is not an anti-religious motto; it is an opposition to a racial action. In other words, the extension of the motto, “in Afghanistan, the mottos are religious and the actions are racial” paved the ground for the citizens to realize the common factor between religious Taliban and ethnic Talibah is not a religious motto, it is their racial actions. This means that if they appear by religious figure or by ethnic appearance, their first and last word is tribal racism and superiority. The slogan “we want Afghan culture, we want Islamic culture,” isn’t linked to what critics say. No one has resisted against Islam in Afghanistan so far, but why racism? Setting these words together cannot disguise the tribal Talibah’s racism.

2015 Interstellar Bulletin Essay Contest for current and former Starians

**THEME:** "Be the change you want to see in this world."

Star Educational Society was created 17 years ago to ‘be the change’ that the founders wanted to see in the world. They adopted the motto, “Join us for a difference,” and built the foundations of their institution on that enduring principle. What does it mean to be the change you want to see in the world? How can you incorporate that advice into your own life? What can ordinary people, like the members of the Star family, do to make the difference that we want to see? Please illustrate your ideas with your personal experiences.

The judging criteria includes creativity, structure, adherence to topic, grammar and the “wow!” factor. Essays will be read and judged in a three-round process by an international panel of judges. Winners will be announced by November 15, 2015.

**GUIDELINES:**
1. Essays may be submitted by any current or former student, and current staff members and teachers. Submissions will be divided into two or more categories depending on the ages of writers submitting entries.
2. Essays must be 500 words or less in English. Essays may be typed or printed.
3. Essays must have a cover page indicating (1) name (2) essay title (3) date of birth (4) email address (your or someone you know) (5) phone number (6) gender (7) current relationship to Star (student, alumna, teacher, staff) (8) the years that you attended and/or worked at Star.
4. Entries must be submitted by email to starbulletinbulletin@gmail.com with the subject line “Be the change Essay Competition”.
5. Essays must be original and unpublished.
6. Entries must be written by one person. Co-authored essays are not accepted. Writers are encouraged to self-edit their submissions and are not permitted to receive outside editing assistance.

*Entries not meeting the above guidelines will not be considered.*

**DEADLINE:** Entries must be received by October 15, 2015 (23/9) Kabul time.
Recently a large number of high-ranking representatives of the world and regional countries gathered in two international-level meetings in Kabul.

In the first session, entitled "RECCA 6," representatives from more than 70 countries and international organizations came together and discussed regional economic cooperation. The second meeting, "SOM," the high-ranking officials of Afghanistan’s donor countries participated to continue cooperation and follow-up on the Tokyo and London commitments.

Holding these two important meetings in Kabul was a great stride which the National Unity Government (NUG) has taken successfully. Holding and managing these two important meetings nowadays is a great achievement. During the past year, NUG faced numerous challenges and had many problems. Disputes between the heads of NUG, financial and economic problems, low legitimacy and increasing insecurity have portrayed a vulnerable and fragile image of the National Unity Government. Despite these problems, holding and managing two important international meetings simultaneously was a significant and worthy action.

Regardless of the symbolic importance that the management of these meetings had in Kabul, the RECCA summit is also an important and fruitful event.

The summit aimed to attract regional economic cooperation and highlighted Afghanistan’s importance and its role connecting the countries at the regional level. Geographically, Afghanistan occupies an important position in the geopolitics of the region and its potential role as the engagement point between the countries of the region cannot be ignored. The major economic projects planned in Afghanistan has great benefits for Afghanistan, but also will culminate in economic growth and the creation of numerous job opportunities in the region. Afghanistan has two leading positions in the region. First, the transnational position which connect different regional countries to China as a global economic hub and also connect India, Pakistan, Central Asian countries, especially Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. Second, the natural resources in Afghanistan could accelerate the industrial enterprises in the region. To invest in mines in Afghanistan, regional countries have better opportunities than any other countries, and can benefit from production at a lower cost.

The potential for economic cooperation can play a key role in a successful peace process in Afghanistan. Encouraging economic cooperation between regional countries is the most effective way to develop friendly relations that could lead to the establishment of political relationships.

The National Unity Government, especially the president, has a good vision of this available capacity in Afghanistan. President Ghani, from the beginning of his career, has made some efforts in this area. His emphasis on the Silk Road Project, joint economic projects in the region and considering China as the main potential for investment in this area, all demonstrate a positive approach to strengthening regional economic cooperation. In fact, the economic approach in regional cooperation can establish a positive deal in the region and defining common interest will definitely improve political cooperation. Therefore, an economic approach to regional cooperation is an appreciated approach to be taken in order to facilitate this cooperation.

It should be noted that joint economic projects require the presence of the state. There are many joint projects, but because of the lack of security and the associated high risk in investment, the projects remain stalled. Security is the first step that needs to be addressed in regional joint venture investments. It is necessary for the government, especially the president, to treat this issue seriously and act firmly against those who are connected to the country’s insecurity. In recent years, Hamid Karzai’s inadequate policies against terrorism just strengthened the groups that are responsible for the country’s insecurity, and if the policies and definition of terrorist groups is not justified, regional cooperation will not succeed. Currently, the major roots of insecurity are nurtured from internal resources and linking this to foreign policies is not justifiable. Consideration for internal sources of insecurity is important and the government and decision-makers should change their view and policy against terror groups so that they will act against them decisively.

96 Years after Independence: where will Modi take India?

India, on its 69th Independence Day is standing as Asia’s third largest economy and plays one of the most critical characters in regional relations and the world. The country’s political power is indebted to the wisdom and foresight of the founders of the Democratic Republic. 68 years ago, India began its campaign for freedom and attained its independence from "The Great Britain." But there was a high cost for this freedom. English people supported the theory of separate lands for Muslims and Non-Muslims in order to make revenge on Gandhi and other freedom fighters. Independence and independence of the subcontinent occurred at the same time. On 15 August 1947, Jawaharlal Nehru became India’s first Prime Minister after independence and raised the national flag of this country above the “Lahore Gate” in Red Fort Delhi. Based on this custom, every year the flag is raised in the same place.

Standing 68 years on their own feet, depending on their own individual skills and talents become something that is much suffering. Still, this country is confronted with many problems. Youth in India had many expectations from their new government but there problems still are ongoing and considered and the country suffers from high levels of corruption and unemployment. Women in India remain the victims of old traditions and violence against women is the most prevalent violence in India. However, hundreds of thousands of people are now living above the poverty line and their condition has improved; nevertheless, according to United Nations’ estimates, approximately 1 billion people are living below poverty line in India.

Modi’s era: change and hope

The 2014 election was a crossroad in the history of modern India. The election instilled hope and desire in the youth and women in this country. One of the promising aspects of the election was the rise of a new political group (Bharatiya Janata Party – B.J.P.) that surpassed the Indian National Congress party and gained the majority of seats in India’s parliament. This is the first for any party since 1984 to gain the majority of seats in parliament.

Likewise, the 2014 election resulted in a vital “leadership” with Modi hailed as the most powerful leader since Indira Gandhi. Narendra Modi, the current Prime Minister, according to his leadership assets and individual appeal, had a great role in attracting the public’s vote. According to a survey which was prepared by the Center of Studies for Developing Countries, one quarter of the voters stated that if Narendra Modi was not the candidate, they wouldn’t vote for “B.J.P.”

The uniqueness of this election which made it different from former elections, was the focus on economic progress and an improved approach to public services seriously addressed during Modi’s election campaigns. Youth and women were the essence of these results. Modi: Women make a large numbers of voters in this country, in addition, in 2014 elections more women than men went to the polling stations.

Great promises, minor action

After a year of government authority, “B.J.P.” in the leadership of Modi couldn’t fulfill the promises as expected by the people. Whatever has been accomplished in more than one year is not satisfactory and people are losing interest in him. The reasons for all of these miseries are obvious. Modi’s struggle to bring money and persuasion of transnational investment has not been successful so far. Employment has not been effective for the youth. Corruption levels have not decreased in official and governmental offices.

No effective steps have been taken against corruption and still corruption can be seen in most government offices. An independent organization acting against corruption was suggested by civil society but has not been established yet. And the government is not following the promises which they made. Establishment of the Commission Against Corruption, Commission of High Information and Commission of High Investigation have been omitted from the government plans. Another large project proposed by Modi was environmental cleanup which was supposed to start from the Ganga River but, so far, precious little has been done.

Most importantly, after "B.J.P," came to power, fundamentalism and religious conflicts have been on the rise. Everyday Muslims are being provoked against the government and are in the process of forming opposition groups. “B.J.P.” is following a religious-based Nationalism policy which has resulted in various problems between the religious groups. And, the members of this party are struggling to convert Muslims to Hinduism. Terrorism, violence and insecurity in Kashmir are other problems which have increased since B.J.P.’s government. Even though Modi has formed an opposition party against P.D.P. in Jamu and Kashmir, it seems the party will not last for long.

Foreign Policy, Modi’s winning field

Modi has several achievements in foreign policy. He not only committed his time to develop economic relations with countries such as: United States of America, China and Japan, but also gained prominence and established India’s geopolitical importance with countries in the region. Contract agreements with Bangladesh, visiting Nepal and establishing a coordinated relation between India and Sri Lanka were among their efforts. India’s economy has also found its path and economic growth at between 7%- 8%.

Modi and his nationalists have four more years to prove to the people that they are a having a Democratic Party. Their destiny will be clarified at the end of this period when the people vote or reject him and his party in the current government.

The democratic structure in India, and the world’s largest democracy, are much stronger than any other time. Democracy in India has the capacity to elect weak leaders, moreover, she has also built up potential advantage in herself. Politicians in India know this clear and bright matter better than any others.
On 11th of September 2015, Star’s C Branch hosted another spectacular Speech Contest. The successful and stimulating event was enhanced by the tableau group’s performance, apple eating competition, local Hazaragi music and much more.

The program began with poetry read by announcers, Khalilullah Baha and Ms. Farida Qasimi, and was followed by some verses of the Holy Quran recited by Mr. Yadullah Rezayee. Mr. Ali Reza Yasa, the president of Star Educational Society, was then invited to the stage. After providing a brief history of C Branch, he praised the efforts of every individual who has contributed to C Branch’s success. He emphasized that the sense of community at C Branch has been at its peak, its instructors are role models in teamwork, and he commended their sacrifices. Mr. Ali Reza Yasa’s encouraging words were met with the crowd’s thunderous applause and all were inspired to work harder, awaken their latent abilities and bring more positive changes.

Next on stage came the performance of young girls who sang a beautiful and captivating song. Their sweet voices and peerless performance were very much appreciated by the audience. Then the competition began. With the topic of “What shapes our destiny - chance or choice?”, the first round of the speech contest was initiated by Ms. Roqaia, a student of Level 2. Ms. Roqaia was followed by Mr. Mohammad, a student of Level 1, and Ms. Hakima, a student of Level 2, who delivered their informative speeches.

The first round of the speech contest was followed by Star’s Level 4 student-comedian, Ramazan, who entertained the crowd with some hilarious jokes. Afterwards, the announcer invited the students to volunteer for the apple eating competition. The audience cheered and roared with many enthusiastic volunteers.

Finally, four volunteers were selected from the crowd and the competition began with the audience’s countdown. The competitors struggled to be the first to finish eating their apples while audience members loudly encouraged them. Two participants were eliminated after the 1st round and the 2nd round was even more dramatic and entertaining. The final two participants raced to finish their apples. The audience was divided in supporting the two finalists and shouted delightfully with cheers, boos and applause. Finally, Masooma, a Level 4 student, won the competition and was awarded with a prize.

Next began the second round of the speech contest with the topic of “Technology made the world a better place to live. Do you agree or disagree?” The contestants were Ms. Farzana, a Level 6 student, followed by Mr. M. Reza, student of Level 4, Ms. Amena, student of Level 4 and, finally, Mr. Hakim, a student of Level 6. Their speeches were scored very carefully by the members of the jury panel. While the judges deliberated, Mr. Elham came onstage with his Dambora, a traditional musical instrument, and entertained the audience singing and playing a fascinating Hazaragi song. The audience accompanied Elham by repeating after him and with their applause. Then, vivacious girls of the tableau group came to the stage and ‘wowed’ the crowd with an outstanding singing performance of Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star.

Finally, the judges made their decisions. Mr. Nasrullah Hussaini, a jury panel member, stated that all the speakers’ performances were sensational. He added that the selection was extremely difficult as all contestants spoke well. At last, Mr. Hussaini announced that Ms. Hakima of Level 2 and Ms. Amena of Level 4 were the winners of the speech contest and the crowd burst into wild applause. Ms. Hakima’s speech was very informative and she supported her ideas with very logical reasons and a strong conclusion emphasizing that choice shapes our destiny with the words, “It depends on you whether you want to make your life as bright as day or as dark as night.” Ms. Amena exhibited great self-confidence when delivering her speech. The judges and audience were impressed with her beautiful pronunciation and gestures. She supported her ideas with facts and figures. In part of her speech she said, “Technology has magnificently enhanced the quality of life and also boosted the economy of the world.” The finalists were awarded their prizes by Mr. Yasa. Shortly afterward, the diplomas of six graduates were distributed. Later on, the appreciation letters for the winners of the quiz competition and position holders of the previous semester were distributed. The program ended with the appearance of Mr. Bahaduri, a senior member of C Branch, thanking everyone for their participation in the program and appreciating the students, instructors and staff for making the program a true success.
To be or not to be

William Shakespeare wrote the play *Hamlet* in which: “To be, or not to be...” is the opening line of a soliloquy spoken by a despondent Prince Hamlet in the “Nunnery Scene.”

To be, or to be not: is the question.

Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them? To die; to sleep;
No more; and by a sleep to say we end
The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to, 'tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wish'd. To die, to sleep;
To sleep: perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub;
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Must give us pause: there's the respect
That makes calamity of so long life;
For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,
The pangs of despised love, the law's delay,
For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to, 'tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wish'd. To die, to sleep;
To sleep: perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub;
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The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,
The pangs of despised love, the law's delay,
First, tell us the main reason you travelled to Afghanistan. I have been study- ing migration for many years, but always how people were treated in Europe. In the last few years, more and more people were being deported from Europe, including people who said they were fleeing persecution, who said they were refugees. European governments were sending people back but they didn’t check to see what happened to them afterwards. In 2008 I got to know many Afghans in Paris who were having a hard time. Some had been deported two or three times but they kept coming back. I decided to come to Afghani- stan myself so that when I returned to Europe I would be better able to write about the reasons people leave and the problems they face if they are sent back.

How did you find Afghanistan and its people? Afghanistan almost broke my heart. It is a harsh, tough country, but it is possibly the most beautiful country I have ever visited. I love the mountains, Band-e-Amir, the Shomali Plains. I have seen Mazar and Herat, Bamiyan and Ja- lalabad, Parwan and Kapisa but there are so many other places I want to see. I was also overwhelmed by the amazing hospitality I received. People brought me into their homes and treated me first as an honour guest and then as a member of the family. That touched me very much.

As a foreign citizen, how is the behavior of Afghans with you in general? In general, most people have been really kind and warm with me. And very pa- tient – especially because I don’t speak Dari well, even when I make mistakes, people encourage me to try. The only thing that made me a little sad, was that often people would stare at me as though I was a strange animal. Outside Afghan- stan, when I walk in the streets people do not usually stare, and if they do look at me and catch my eye – we smile at each other. Here people don’t look so friendly in the street.

What do you like most in Afghanistan? Shir yak flavoured with ell – or maybe bolani – or aush... or crossing the Salang when there is snow – or just sitting drink- ing tea and chatting with friends in their homes with their children.

What made you stay here, in such bad security, when you could return to your country and continue a safe and comfortable life? The people – espe- cially the young people. People had been so kind to me that I felt I had to stay. It made me sad to leave but I need to spend some time with my family and friends in Europe. And I was very angry with Eu- ropean governments and how they treat migrants so I had to come back for some time. But I will go back to Afghanistan.

What is the best thing you have ever done in your life? Live in Afghanistan. And spent 3 weeks cycling alone through Thailand and Laos.

Let’s ask about your career in Kabul, are you satisfied with it? It was a huge honour for me to work for ACKU at Ka- bul University. That was a very special time. I really hope to go back and spend more time there. But it was also very challenging trying to work in the Afghan Higher Education system. It has very many problems, and it will need a lot of support for a very long time.

As a research instructor how do you consider Afghan Students? Afghan stu- dents are as intelligent as students any- where in the world, but they value edu- cation very highly. The biggest problem is that there is not a reading culture here – I mean people are not used to reading academic works. And there are very few of those in Dari or Pashto – that must change.

In your perception why are universities in Afghanistan not productive enough? It is because staff don’t conduct academic research. They also do not have access to the latest knowledge through recent books and journal articles, but also be- cause they are not given the time to re- search. In Europe, permanent university staff teach maximum 6 hours in front of the students. They are expected to spend a great deal of time preparing those courses, marking coursework and, very important, creating knowledge through research and analysis. That doesn’t happen in Afghan- stan. In addition, every University also needs subscriptions to the best academic journals, and staff should spend a lot of their time reading the latest debates, dis- coversies and ideas in their field.

As an educated lady, have you had any study or research on Women’s status? How do you consider the situation of women in Afghanistan? I have not done gender specific research but from my time in Afghanistan, I do have concerns for women – they are being suffocated by men who love them and want to keep them safe, and by bad men who treat them without respect. I found it difficult to understand why, as a woman, who was fully covered and wore the scarf, I was much less safe in this Islamic country than I was in any other country. I found it hard to understand how I could travel anywhere alone dressed as I like and I was harassed very little, but here in Afghan- stan girls are called prostitutes if their veil slips. This is a real paradox.

In your perception, how effective has international aid in Afghanistan been? Unfortunately, while there has been a great deal of aid sent to Afghanistan, much of it has been wasted because the international community did not take the time to learn how to do things correctly and they invest- ed in too many quick fixes, and because of corruption with Afghans and foreigners stealing so much of the money that should have been helping the poorest people.

What problem troubles you most about Afghanistan? To see how powerful people can do what they like – steal, murder – and the judicial system and security forces can- not stop them. The people of Afghanistan deserve peace, but until these powerful beasts are stripped of their arms, wealth and power that will not happen. Every- thing else can be fixed but not until people can live in peace and security.

What do you suggest for ambitious Af- ghan students who want to have bet- ter future through higher education? READ – read academic articles! I am sorry but there are very few really good ones in the national languages, so it is important that they read as much as they can in other languages so that they can then write lots of wonderful articles in Dari and Pashto and help the next generation of students. And they should do their Masters and PhDs abroad and then come back to Af- ghanistan to reform this system.

Do you think about leaving Afghan- stan forever? No – not forever! I will come back – Afghanistan has stolen my heart and I cannot live long without a heart.

As a successful and inspiring instructor what is your message for the readers of this text? Read as much as you can and question everything you read!