"With this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope."

– Martin Luther King Jr.

Dear Comrades and Starians,

I have been touched by a sense of pain and responsibility for the people of Daikondi since meeting Dr. Hassan Sharifi many years ago. His story of struggle and sacrifice has stayed with me for all these years. The push for him to become a doctor was not an easy one. When Hassan was presented with the opportunity to study medicine in India, his father was very ill and his whole family was suffering from the drought in Hazarajat. All the men and women in his family worked day and night to cultivate their meager crops and meet their daily needs. In spite of all their challenges, Hassan’s family made the choice for him to leave Daikondi and pursue his education. It broke his heart and made the choice for him to leave Daikondi.

In spite of all their challenges, Hassan’s family worked day and night to cultivate a few parcels of wheat to pay for the education of their sons and daughters. Guns and bullets were long ago replaced by pencils and paper.

A bright, new Star shines in Daikondi, one of the most under-privileged and under-developed provinces of the country. With integrity and commitment, our team lay the foundations of a new Star branch continuing our quality work to the far reaches of Afghan society. In Nili, we will serve a very brave community of knowledge seekers. The Afghans are long overdue for a brighter future. In spite of the alarming lack of infrastructure, expensive housing and impoverished communities, the young generation is a beacon of hope who will arm themselves with the weapon of education.

Our aim in Daikondi is to promote a sense of self-sufficiency so that the young generation of the local population is equipped to become the future developers of their hometowns in every village and district. By introducing them to opportunities for studying abroad and exposing them to international experiences, more young people returning to Daikondi will be transformed into a local labor force who are not only more internally concerned about the future of their village or districts, but are also bringing new resources back to their hometowns. Star will also focus on bridging the gap between village and city enabling Star students from the region to enjoy greater opportunities in international NGOs in metropolitan cities such as Kabul.

The new Daikondi Branch of Star has reached full operational capability and will be in full service to the local population in just a few days. The countdown has begun. And very soon, we will announce the news of more developments coming from Bamyan.

Planting seeds of hope in Daikondi

A message from Ali Reza Yassa, Chairman and Founder

Join us for a difference

The Top Students of B-B Semester B Branch

See Inside
2. Diaries 6. Star-Related
3. Movie Review 7. Literary
4-5. News 8. Interview
My unforgettable memory as a Star speech contest competitor

About the author: Qasim Mehrabee graduated from Star in 2014 and has also attended the Teacher Training and Creative Writing courses. He is currently in the 11th grade at Mahmod Hotaki High School and plans to study Computer Science in the future.

I began studying English at Star Educational Society in 2011 and have the fondest memories from those days. The memory that I will never forget is when I qualified for a speech contest in 2012. I was a Level 5 student at that time and Mr. Najibullah Rayeez was my instructor. I worked very hard to qualify for the speech contest and was so happy when I qualified.

I worked on my essay and practiced diligently every day with Mr. Najibullah Rayeez. Finally, it was competition day. The students had to arrive in the morning for practice. When I arrived, I was shocked by the amount of chairs which were arranged. Until that moment, I was expecting that the speech contest would be in a classroom with only fifty audience members. I was not prepared to speak in front of hundreds of audience members. Fortunately, I had much time to make myself relaxed. We started practicing. I was fully prepared. Or so I thought. I stood in front of the audience in my black suit. I remember seeing the faces of Ali Reza Yaua, Hassan Yousaf, and Najibullah Rayeez looking back at me. The topic was, "Is Afghan culture under threat?" I was not afraid and my confidence was high. However, I had always practiced my speech in the morning. As a result, when my turn came, I started my speech by saying, "Good morning ladies and gentleman" - except it was in the afternoon. Everyone laughed. Luckily, I did not lose my confidence.

I corrected my mistake and continued. It was an awesome day for me that I will never forget. Although I didn’t win the contest, the experience was very rewarding and I felt a huge sense of accomplishment. For weeks later, I imagined that everyone at Star knew me. I felt like a celebrity. Whenever somebody looked at me, I thought that he or she might have heard my speech or somehow knew me. I think that is a feeling which every person dreams of. In the midterm of my Level 6 class, I had to leave Star for two years. During those two years, I couldn’t study or learn any more English. Worse than that, I forgot many of my lessons.

One of my cousins was in the U.S., so whenever I talked with him and his friends and they started speaking English, it gave me a really bad feeling. I felt backward compared to them. In 2016, I returned to Star and resumed my English studies. Finally, I was able to graduate about eight months ago and I am thankful to my kind teachers and they started speaking English, it gave me a really bad feeling. I felt backward that, I forgot many of my lessons.

I was able to graduate about eight months ago and I am thankful to my kind teachers and they started speaking English, it gave me a really bad feeling. I felt backward that, I forgot many of my lessons.

Society is like a sky with too many shining stars. I am thankful to all Starians for being a part of my many unforgettable memories.

The rise of my faith after the fall of Taliban

About the author: Sulaiman Wafa is a Star instructor and the vice-principal of Star High School. He has been teaching at Star High School since 2009. He graduated from Star in the year 2012. He plans to study political science abroad.

I was born in an impoverished district of Kabul, in an illiterate family whose father was an extra burden for the society. He never went to mosque and school and didn’t buy any pencils, books, notebooks or a piece of paper to write and read. My birth brought so much happiness to my family and to my father, who named me Sulaiman. I grew up in an almost poor family with lots of adversity. My mother, who was also illiterate, sent me to a mosque instead of kindergarten or pre-school. I obtained my primary education during civil war or the militia era, when all the people were disappointed about the situations in Afghanistan. My father was a baker. He was always encouraging me to be an educated and beneficial figure for society and did not want me to follow what he was doing. With all the adversities we had in our life, I continued to study hard and attend my class. In 2000, I was totally disappointed with my studies. The idea of becoming an educated and fruitful person for my family and society turned to a disaster. The tyrannical situation and the Taliban cruel government suppressed students’ talents and converted some schools to religious centers and even closed some of them. My father changed his idea and decided to send me to Iran, where both educated and uneducated Afghans were immigrating. Fortunately, before he sent me to Iran, the Taliban regime collapsed and it was a good opportunity for all people to have a better life. Working in critical situations, suffering severe hunger, tolerating all ups and downs of life, I fought to obtain a normal life. Since 2001, Afghanistan has changed a lot. Hamid Karzai, the former Afghanistan president established many organizations, universities, institutes, new schools and opened the doors of opportunities by the support of cooperative countries. All the people were eager to learn and obtain knowledge. I attended a Teacher Training Organization and graduated in 2006. Then, I started working in a governmental school as an instructor. Besides, I joined Star Educational Society to learn English language. After three years, I succeeded to achieve my English language diploma and became an English teacher at Star Educational Society Branch B. I am so pleased to be a teacher in Star, and grateful to my parents, who helped me a lot, despite different obstacles they had.
Baraka – a descriptive writing response to the film

I watched the amazing film Baraka and wrote a descriptive essay on one short section in response to the film. I strongly encourage everybody to watch this 1 1/2 hour documentary. Here is a short description from Baraka’s official website:

Originally shot in 25 countries on six continents, Baraka brought together a series of stunningly photographed scenes to capture what director Ron Fricke calls “a guided meditation on humanity.” It was a shot of unprecedented technical, logistical and bureaucratic scope that would take 30 months to complete, including 14 months on location, with a custom-built computerized 65mm camera. “The goal of the film,” says producer Mark Magidson, “was to reach past language, nationality, religion and politics to speak to the inner viewer.”

And below is my descriptive essay...

Amazingly beautiful snow-capped mountains tower above me as the somber sounds of an eastern flute fill the air. An eagle calls and breaks the silence with its echoes travelling across the blue sky, over the hills and jagged mountain peaks. Frigid…silent… and virginal. Nature captivates in its absolute essence and beauty – clean and calm and pure.

Entranced by the soothing silence, a monkey soaks himself in a natural hot spring. Steam rises around him as he absently gazes at the starry skies. The monkey, completely drenched in the solace of the warm pool, shuts his eyes.

It is Egypt now, as it was centuries ago. Untouched and unchanged rituals, a few old-fashioned men carry water on their shoulders in baskets. Large temples, with birds flying from one rooftop and settling on the other, and a group of people of the Orient walk with their scales. Large temples, of the Orient walk with their scales. The early morning workers sweep the temple, brushing the dust from one corner to another. Men, old and tired, stand by the temple and apply red stain on the forehead of a Buddha. Next a group of monks are praying. Men who have devoted their lives to promises of beauty and rest in the next world. To this vision and emotion, there is peace like the monkey soaking in the hot spring.

A twisted-haired monk with a large stain on his forehead sits cross-legged reading Avesta… and behind him the smoke of “spand” wards off evil and offers protection from sorcery and witchcraft. There are Jews of different ages with tefillin strapped to their arms and foreheads. The black leather boxes carry scrolls with verses from the Torah and are worn while the worshippers read, pray and prostrate in front of the wall of Jerusalem. More worshippers in search of peace and happiness.

Muslim pilgrims visited a large mosque in Iran and kissed and shook the heavy lock on the shrine of a saint, touched their foreheads and the sides of their faces to the outer walls. Jama Masjid in Delhi comes next reflecting great devotions of time and effort on the massive construction of the mosque with triangular and rectangular patterns representing their advanced knowledge of architecture in ancient times. The scene shifts to Catholic priests in their white cloaks and robes – kneeling, praying and reading the Holy Bible. A priest swings his metal thurible filled with burning incense spreading smoke in the air and around the church – a ritual of purification and sanctification. The smoke rises like the prayers of the faithful lifting up to heaven. I find comfort in the images of people pursuing their quest for a supernatural world. A world that exists and is beyond reach – but which gives them comfort that their love and devotion to those supernatural beings will provide protection in the afterlife. These are the worshippers who believe that beyond the atrocities of their fast moving world, a world exists where they can be taken care of.

Candles, in abundance, illuminate a chamber of a Buddhist temple, as if the whole universe is squeezed and put into a small temple with Buddha being its sun, at the center of this universe, and the silence, meditation and flickering candles give me pleasure and warm my soul.

A monk in a red robe, with hundreds of candles… praying in solitude… moving his rosary in silent prayer. No matter where or who you are, the time to be alone, to meditate, and to contemplate gives strength to our spirits.

Lush, green, terraced crops and a warm sunset catch my attention and my eyes glide down the stratifications of cultivated rice fields glowing in the sunset. In a new scene, a Taiwanese temple carved in stone is decorated with the shapes of dancing women in those temples, a depiction of sex, love, romance and wealth. These temple carvings are used to depict life on Earth and the treasures of a past life or perhaps the promise of an after-life – a life the follower may have after their souls are transferred from this world to the other. The scenes are a hypnotic mixture of peace and glory.

The sounds of men chanting, chartering, and laughing fill my ears. They sit in a semi-circle in front of a temple and wear only a checkered-cloth around their waists. They shake their hands, sit, stand and recline in a rapid, continuous but uniform and disciplined manner. Two groups move up and down in turns. They follow one senior who is bald with wide eyes and excited gestures. I am stunned by the energy, consistency, the vibrant rhythmic movement and the sounds of stomping, clapping, and other movements. Their faces are so lively and their movements captivate me. The senior gives the command and the direction of the quivering hands changes. The uniformity of the dozens of men in this important ritual reminds me of the prayers as a source of discipline and submission.

Next emerges the scene of a huge and merciless volcano, like the opening mouth of a giant mounster or perhaps a door to the inner earth. Layers of lava cut through the surface of the earth, roaring and eating all the living beings in its path, including plants. The heat and smoke ascend in the mid-air and the area is desolate, so far and magical as it scatters the particles of fear and anger around it. The earth is sliding and the life collapses into the mouth of fire and lava. Slightly above the lava-erupting mouth of the volcanic monster, there hangs heavy, pregnant clouds moving in dense, thick layers over the hills and nearby mountains, sending the seeds of their cold mercy into a huge ditch on the face of the earth. A canyon with the flow and fall of heavy water – abundant and powerful – removes my images of volcanic, merciless cruelty. I sense the heat of the volcano, an invitation to the fall of rain and thus the flow of mighty streams have formed silent lakes and trees in a horizon over canyons and rich fields of life and crops for the nearby farmers.

Nature’s thunder or wild aggression, even in the form of volcanic eruptions, give life to the beautiful clouds and nurturing rain and promote the cycles of life. Beneath the mist hanging over a thick canopy of jungle trees, the piercing buzz and whine of a motorized saw cutting the majestic forest makes my heart bounce faster and faster. Machinery, modernity and a solemn aboriginal Indian with his feather-like hair stare at me and disturb my senses as I feel all of the magical scenes I have witnessed being taken from me, taken from the earth, taken from mankind.
In the recent meeting of the cabinet, President Ghani declared that a selection commission is assigned to begin its duty soon to select the new commissioners for the IEC. It shows that the president and all other NUG heads do agree for selecting the new commissioners for the IEC, but the current commissioners still don’t agree to pull back yet. The current commissioners declared that they are acting according to law and can hold parliament election next year if the budget is provided by the government.

The commissioners indicate that they don’t agree with the decision made by the president and other government leaders and they want to remain in their position. It seems that the current commissioners do not have any chance to remain in their positions. They have forgotten that they could not manage the last year’s presidential election. One of the candidates of the second round election accused the current commissioners of systematic fraud.

Later, some documents which were spread were indicating that the IEC officials did not do their jobs as well as it had to be done. In July, last year, the current president, Ghani and the current Chief Electoral Officer, Abdullah Abdullah, signed the bottom of an agreement which is the base of the NUG. According to this agreement, the election system must be reformed. The election system reform contains the reformations of the laws and institutions of the election. The two NUG leaders agreed to reform the laws and regulation of the IEC. The reformation does not mean rather than replacing the commissioners.

It seems like the current commissioners assume that they have some agreements against the government’s leaders and they use those documents as a pressure on the NUG heads. One of the government officials recently warned that if changes applied on commissions, they will disclose the documents. If they really have the documents, which contain the fraud, they had to be exposed long ago. If these documents indicate the fraud, it is obvious that those are being done by the commissions’ officials. Without support of the commissions’ higher authorities, the fraud was impossible.

The current commissioners should not manage the reformation of the electoral system anymore and abdicate respectively. If the election goes with fraud, anywhere around the world, the demonstrators will abdicate. The national unity government’s leaders should not let the commissioners of the independent commission of election take the election reformation as a hostage anymore. The committee must be established and decide about the new commissioners as soon as possible. The new commissioners must be professional and pledged and the civil society should have active role in selecting them, too. The civil society’s action should not be symbolic in selecting the new commissioners. The selective committee, which was arranged when Karzai was president, the civil society’s presence was not very perceivable. Therefore, the people and parties in power hired people from their side in commission and it caused crises in the recent presidential election. The law must be considered in selection of new commissioners.

NUG became one year old

"Passing a year from National Unity Government (NUG), this government has failed in implementing their promises," says the experts.

National Unity Government, began their work after signing a political agreement between Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah on 29th of July 2014.

Maintaining security, economic improvement, creating job opportunities, bringing changes in the life of people, beginning peace talks with Taliban, fighting against corruption, demolishing field of poppy, reconciliation of justice and judicial administration, relation deployment of Afghanistan with regional and world countries, considering the refugees, speedup rebuilding procedures and solving tens of other issues were the promises of NUG’s leaders, given to the people of Afghanistan before the election and adulation.

However, a year has passed from this government, some of the experts say this government couldn’t fulfill more than 5% of the promises they had made. Tahir Hashimi, Lecturer of Law in Kabul University, said “The main reason for the failure of NUG’s leadership is not fulfilling their promises and they were thoughtless about their team and themselves.” He added, “At the beginning of formation of NUG, a lot was expected by the people but gradually their expectation turned into disappointment. NUG’s leaders divided the political power in between themselves 50/50, which belong to the people of Afghanistan. And according to the division of 50/50 of government posts, the posts were acquired by the leader who were around them. From the beginning, they separated themselves from the people and formed a National leader’s government.”

Tahir Hashimi added, “Even 1% of the promises made by NUG’s leaders a year ago aren’t implemented regarding fighting against corruption, creating job opportunities, maintaining peace and security and foreign affairs. He emphasized, “Even though this government was formed in a critical situation. In case, they had a precise short and long term planning, considering the nation benefits they could achieve much more in one year, but unfortunately, nothing was done. As a result, most of our people especially the youths are migrating to other countries because of insecurity and unemployment. As well as, a huge mass of people are busy using drugs and narcotics inside public parks which is the most concerning social issue. The level of corruption and bribery has as well increased in comparison to Hamid Karzai’s government and no one is discerning in order to stop this problem. That’s why, we didn’t have any achievement of or we are having, it is so poor and there isn’t a 1% alteration in the life of the people.”

He said, "He is accurate while checking the papers of the students and he doesn’t give additional marks to the students." He added he would give 1 out of 100 to NUG’s paper in this one year.

Meanwhile, Rahim Jami, a social activist, said the works of National Unity Government were very poor in the last year. He said that the promises of NUGs’ leaders were many but none of them were fulfilled. It means that still Kabul Bank’s case is treated politically. In security concerns and other areas, nothing has been done so far to as name it as NUG’s achievement. He well said that there was disagreement among the leaders of this government and that’s why most of government offices are controlled by supervisors. He emphasized, "If the NUG leaders could have fulfilled the 20% of the promises, which they made, they would have been introduced as Champions.”

Some of the users of Social Media have as well shown dissatisfaction and blamed the government for not having any achievement so far.

Do not confine the Election Reform to yourselves alone

Translated by: Mohammad Hadi Shabbanda
Source: Hasht-e-subh - 2217 Daily

Prison Break Investigations to be Announced This Week

The Ministry of Interior Affairs has announced that researchers who were appointed to investigate the escape of 355 prisoners, have presented their report to the president. The Ministry did not disclose details about the result of the delegation, but reported that during this week, they will share the results. At the point, the attack on the Central Prison was planned. In an interview with Hashte Sobh newspaper, Akbari stated that he had informed the police head of this province about the possibility of such attacks, but they ignored it. The national security and national army forces were ready to recapture the prisoners, but police head of this province opposed. Khalidqul Ahkari said, “We tried hard to convince Ghazi province police chief to organize an operation and arrest the 250 escapees, who were in a major Mangor district to have breakfast according to national security office report. The National Army and National Security forces were ready, but the police did not coordinate because of some vague reasons of Ghazi province police head.”

"After the police head of this province refused to arrest the prisoners, he accused the members of our council," head of Ghazi provincial council said. According to Khalidqul Ahkari, it was better to solve the bribery case by legal and judicial organizations than refusing to detain the prisoners. The Ghazi provincial council had said there is evidence that indicates a number of prison officers were involved in the prison break case. He said the two police officers were arrested from inside the prison. Akbari says, "During the recent thirteen years, our security forces with smear of their brows arrested these people because of inadmissibility of Ghazi police chief commander, they escaped in one night. The provincial council head also said a professional panel should be appointed to have a comprehensive investigation. According to him, the current agents for further investigations on this case are designated by their respective departments. Khalidqul Ahkari expressed concern over the security situation in Ghazi province and asked the Ministry of Interior Affairs to review the police structure in the province. "The council asked the Ministry of Interior Affairs to remove Abdul Hakim Ingar from his job and appoint a more talented and dutiful and active person who could deal better in hard situations and also introduce Abdul hakim to court, but Abdul hakim, police chief of Ghazi province, refused the accusations against him. A group of armed Taliban attacked Ghazi prison at two o’clock of Monday night last week and took 355 prisoners with them. Ghazi local officials said that among 366 fugitives, 146 were arrested in charge of harming the internal and external security. 438 prisoners were kept in Ghazi prison, but after the escape of 355 inmates, only 18 remain in prison.

Translated by: Frosta Hapati
Source: Hasht-e-Subh Daily
Successful evaluation of ten-month government program at SOM Conference

In spite of more than one decade of international community's efforts, Afghanistan has been called "A Wounded Country" by President Ashraf Ghani in Senior Officials Meeting. Currently, Afghanistan has five million immigrants and still faces economic crises. President Ghani said they did not have various types of products to export to other countries. In addition, economic researchers say that Afghanistan could export only about four hundred million dollars every year. Instead, the importing is about eight to eleven billion dollars. Consequently, this commercial imbalance is enough to be a poor country.

Mr. Ghani has emphasized to develop economic and investing opportunities in Afghanistan. He also reminded that national interests and civil liability have been alternated by political demands and ethnic divisions. President Ghani added that Afghanistan has been a country which hosts many large-scale projects but could not find any strong strategy in economic independence.

Mr. Ghani mentioned that Mr. Abdullah and he have presented not only a document but also a framework which included plan of reconstruction of Afghanistan in London Conference. He said, "Rebuilding Afghanistan does not mean rebuild a demolished airport but Afghan Government is calling for fundamental structural changes and this is very difficult to achieve." In addition, President Ghani has admitted the governmental organization weaknesses and low work level because Afghanistan could not use its wealth skillfully. Water and land have been called the main source of agricultural products. He added, "This year products of agriculture have increased than the last three decades. Therefore, the first development program agenda is increasing agricultural products." Moreover, the Minister of Agriculture, Finance and Mines and the governor of Herat and Balkh provinces presented their speech through mutual accountability framework.

Mr. Ghani said, "There were many glitches in Afghanistan. However, it is rich in natural resources. If government has their own strategy and framework for natural resources, this country will progress significantly." He added that last year the government had increased the mines framework to observe the mines' extraction and now government has the ability to cover all mines' projects and strategy because a framework has been designed which is transparent for private sectors such as petroleum, gas and minerals sectors.

Afghanistan was called an efficient government in first day of Senior Officials Meeting (SOM). In the following, President Ghani mentioned that he and Dr. Abdullah Abdullah had promised to take action against corruption. Fortunately, they had seen significant progress against corruption. Ghani said Kabul Bank issue was the first activity to fight against corruption and fortunately this issue has been solved. He declared that creation of the National Procurement Commission as second activity of his government. This commission is led by Mr. Ghani and Dr. Abdullah Abdullah to observe all extractions. Furthermore, he talked about the judicial organizations reforms and added, "Improving the private sector is an important component of government's program." Finally, Mr. Ghani added that government's foremost agenda is empowerment of women and improving the human rights.

Who is responsible for the devastation and destruction of Kunduz?

Amnesty International's report reveals the horrible truths about what happened in Kunduz city. The Taliban that ruled in Kunduz for two nights, looted private properties and raped the female members of the families and civil servants who were not able to leave the city. The report also says that the Taliban shot people on suspicion of spying for the government. Declaration of the ARB also says about the killings and sexual assaults on women. This is not the first time that the Taliban have committed criminal crimes. They also massacred at the time of their sovereignty, scorched the earth and ruined the cultural heritage of the country, and they don't have anything than killing in their minds. But the important question is why seven thousand security forces could not defend Kunduz.

The heads of the National Unity Government (NUG), say that the Taliban created networks in the city and some incidents happened that made the situation out of control. But these explanations are not convincing at all. Why did officers and commanders in Kunduz city, abandon the city and allow the Taliban to disrespect the sanctity of families and kill the people and supporters of the government? People in the city of Kunduz are living just in the hope of that the security forces defend them. If they hadn't relied on them, they would have left the city. Some people left the city of Kunduz in past two days. If they had known that they were not protected, much earlier than this, they would have moved to secure areas.

If the Kunduz's first line defense was broken, why did the security forces not resist in their main bases? For example, why did NDS's Garrison leave the battle? Amnesty International's report indicates that the Taliban prepared a list from the documents which they got from NDS's office and targeted them. Taliban also harassed the media officials and NGOs. Some of these employees have been killed. A number of international aid workers' homes and properties had been stolen. Who is responsible for these lives? Is the commander of the Second Brigade of the National Army, who was responsible for protecting the city, knew that pro-government forces live in the hope of him and his forces in the city of Kunduz? Why was Kunduz's police chief dismissed and the police were not commander of the province didn't defend from his base and his office? The NUG's heads should respond to these questions. Policy of forming and assigning commissions during Karzai didn't have result. At that time, there were also many commissions and they were assigned to different issues but there was no result or finding yet. Heads of NUG should assure the people that this time, all the officials who neglected and caused this incident to happen will be brought to justice. NUG leaders must carefully respond to the question of why seven thousand security forces failed to defend Kunduz. Only if part of the security forces had been resisting in their bases, Taliban would never have found a chance to commit criminal crimes and crimes against humanity. Kunduz city has been destroyed, families have been disrespected, the girls were raped and pro-governments had been murdered. The heads of the National Unity Government should tell the people who is responsible for this situation.

2015 Interstellar Bulletin Essay Contest for current and former Starrians

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 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. 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.
4. Entries must be submitted by email to interstellarbulletin@gmail.com with the subject line "Be the change Essay Competition"
5. Essays must be original and unpublished.
6. Essays 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.

DEADLINE: Entries must be received by October 15, 2015 (23/39 Kabul time).

* Entries not meeting the above guidelines will not be considered.
Star: An indelible legacy of the new generation

On the occasion of 17th anniversary of Star’s foundation

About the author: Murtaza Qareni is a Star Alumna and a current instructor of ESL in Star A Branch. He graduated from the department of Economics, Panjshir University, Chaqandgarh, India. He was the grand representative of Afghan Students in India. He organized numerous football tournaments, declamation and poetry contests for the international students.

Source: Etela’atroz Daily

Whenever it comes to global, civic or city-level education and significant educational activities, the names of some educational centers secure their places as headlines and headwords, and automatically derive the approbation of and connect to the minds and consciences of the people of a country, city or, at least, the shire in which these centers are located - such as London’s Oxford, America’s Harvard, Egypt’s Al-Azhar, Iran University of Science and Technology, or in a smaller locality, Gooyesh Language Institute in Tehran, Tehran Technical Complex, and centers of this type in various countries which the author may not be acquainted with.

In Afghanistan too, within the past one and a half decades, numerous educational institutions have been established and have initiated their activities. Some of these institutions have gained so much fame as no one can be found to easily deny their momentous and significant contributions, and not to shake their heads as a sign of acclamation and admiration. Among these institutions, Star Educational Society, from the day of its foundation in West Kabul, has apodictically the “star” of language tuition in the sky of education and has played a major role in this field which ultimately gives Star a huge claim on the people of its locality.

If we review the glorious chronicle of Star which has acquired the nickname of ‘an indelible legacy of the new generation,’ it will be crystal clear that the afore-made statements are neither exaggerated nor overstated. Yet, this pen may be unable to write about all the extensive activities, attentiveness and competency of the administrators of this educational institution.

As an educational institution, since its establishment, Star has the honor of graduating more than 30 thousand English learners and handing them over to society. During its 17 fruitful years, Star has succeeded to send over 83 students on Fulbright and other prestigious scholarships such as AGFAT to America and other countries, which is still an unprecedented accomplishment!

The works of Star are not confined to this point nor can they be. During all the years since its foundation, Star has never sent deprived students away from its doorssteps and always has strove to provide maximum services in exchange for minimum prices. Meanwhile, this institution has provided free education to more than 720 economically challenged pupils. Some of these students are the reigning pride and glory for their motherland in various prestigious universities around the world.

Another glorious illustration of the activities of Star is that about a quarter of Kabul’s students at the American University of Afghanistan are or have been studying at Star. Furthermore, during the past few years, hundreds of “Starians” have gone to India to continue their education in different universities.

In addition to this, currently more than 50 students from Star are busy studying in American University of Central Asia and we can confidently and positively assert that no other Kabul institution has ever been able to affect its students in such a manner. Inscribed numbers and census of this kind at Star Educational Society is still unparalleled and unprecedented.

Although the main concentration of this institution has been English Language courses, it has never ceased moving beyond its boundaries and plans. As a result, this establishment has expanded to several branches across the city by the efforts and endeavors of its experienced and sentimen tal managers. In addition, in the past three to four years, Star has taken the initiative to lay the foundation of a private school named “Star.” They are looking forward to make this new-found school an imperishable symbol of excellence in the sphere of education. Another significant and distinct achievement and Star’s contribution to extra-curricular activities is its dedication to sports, as is demonstrated by the Futsal tournaments held thrice by its B Branch.

Arts, culture, human rights, and humanitarian activities of this centre include: workshops to “End violence against women”; and “Ban street harassment”; handicraft exhibitions; film-screening of a documentary entitled “Drum of Democracy”; and a “Poem Night.” Such initiatives are among the golden leaves of the gloried memoir of Star, and all of these illustrate that the capable administrators of this institution are equipped to alter and modify an entire generation which was stuck in a declining demeanor and unable to move on. Furthermore, Starians have learnt about civil rights, social conduct, and civic apostleship besides language.

As a citizen who has enough knowledge of Star and its administrators and also who has always had an agent there, I believe that this institution along with few other institutions have had a profound and tangible impact on the people of this order and the ongoing fervent political disorder and security concerns allow, Star will undoubtedly go much further. On this basis, as a citizen of Kabul, it’s my moral obligation to thank the administrators and its dutiful and motivated teachers, and warmly shake their hands and sincerely wish that one day the current hassled condition relinquishes its place to such an era where we can witness Star’s fluorescence and blossoming, and also behold its neoteric educational formats in the near future!
About the author:
Hadi Zaher was the first graduate of Star Educational Society in the year 1999. He is the nephew of the founder of Star in Quetta, Mr. Nabi Arif. Hadi was both first position holder and also one of the first Star graduates who, together with Mr. Hussain Yusufi, was selected as a language teacher. Hadi Zaher has an MA from the University of Wollongong in Australia and is currently a post-graduate student at the University of New South Wales. He is the president of Zahertan, a virtual world of professional photography that he describes in these words: "A land of good people, a free people. A land where flowers bloom in streets, rubab music plays in the samovar tea houses, and kites fly in the skies."

We arrived in Quetta, Pakistan. It was a big, very big city. It had more cars, more people, more noise, and more smoke than I could have ever imagined. The city was airid, and had a pungent smell to it. Whatever little savings we had, was spent on the journey. We began life from scratch; worse, we had to borrow money and food from others. We couldn’t afford to rent our own place, and had to move in with others. At first we stayed with Yousuf in Sar-e-Khartar. His wife was stingy. On our arrival at the end of the journey, they served us Thalhib-Thorosh. We were exhausted. That meal made us sick, especially your mother and Aabay Wahida. Our days were tough. They would ask your dad for money to bring one ser of rice or flour but brought very little of it. Turns out, the measurements in Pakistan were different to those in Iran. We craved for food. Unbeknown to her daughter-in-law, the late Youus’s mother brought us food, especially for you, my grandchildren. You were young then and needed a lot of food. From there, we were taken to Sayedabad. There, it was even worse. Baqir’s wife gave us one room for 7 people. She was very stingy. She didn’t like us. This one time, she lost a pair of scissors. She accused us of stealing it. Frustrated, I sat down with her mother-in-law. "Why would we do that? We will sit outside and you can go in and search our room."

Days later the scissors were found under the rug in her own room. Another time she accused us of stealing her cutlery. Moallem had got us a few spoons and knives. I told her to search the room, look behind the herd of cattle, plenty of food, farm, bags of rice and what at home. We had come to a place where we had nothing. We had left behind a house full of food at the ones we had and figure out if we had hers. She found nothing. She harassed us. It was hard. These people were members of the Saazman. Everything was communal and shared. It was very hard. Those with status got everything. Those at the bottom suffered. From there we went to live in the house of the Punjabis in Nechari, in the upper floor. The owners lived downstairs. They kept sending their kids upstairs telling us to stop you and Abdul from walking around:

"Baba is asleep downstairs."

We were new. Work was scarce. Finding a place to live was very difficult. People saw us for our appearance, for what we wore, for the things we had. We left behind a herd of cattle, plenty of food, farm, bags of rice and what at home. We were new. Work was scarce. Finding a place to live was very difficult. People saw us for our appearance, for what we wore, for the things we had. We left behind a herd of cattle, plenty of food, farm, bags of rice and what at home. We had come to a place where we had nothing. We had left behind a house full of food at home and had come to a place where there was none. We had no pillows and had to sleep on the floor. Often all we had for a meal was tea, sugar, and bread.

Scorpion in the Bowl

English translation by: Hedya Wali Saeqa

Mohammad Sharif Saeedi (born 1970, Jaghoori) is a poet from Afghanistan. Saeedi lost his father at the age of four. He emigrated alone from Afghanistan to Pakistan and then to Iran when he was a teenager. He studied for four years at the Zulfiquar School in Isfahan and then went on to study in Qom. He studied Arabic language and literature and Islamic Studies, English Language, and Political Science at different Universities in Iran. In 2001 he moved to Sweden and obtained degrees in International Relations and another degree in department of Oriental Studies in Persian Language and Literature.

Saeedi began poetry in his childhood. During his time in Iran, his appreciation for literature, especially poetry, grew. His first poems were published when he was 19 years old and continued to be published in different journals and Iranian media. He spent eight years as a poetry critique with the Tales and Poetry Forum of Center of Afghanistani artistic bi-weekly called Golbang. He was a member of Cultural Center of Afghanistani writers in exile and cooperated with the journals of Siraj and Dar-e Dari. Saeedi was a member of editorial board as well as managing poetry and translation section of the journal. Several articles of Saeedi’s were published in this journal. 'Modernism and the obstacles of Afghanistan poetry' was among the most influential articles of Saeedi. Saeedi was editor of the magazine 'Solidarity' and published poetry, stories and travelogues in this weekly journal.

In Iran, Saeedi has been involved in teaching literature and journalism. In Sweden, he has been engaged with interpreting and translation centers of the Swedish Ministry of Defense, cooperation with the international Swedish Radio and also teaching in Swedish schools.

Stories

My Grandmother Told Me

Sharif Saeedi
Grand contemporary poet of Afghanistan

Kوذم دم کاسه

زبرگار
دست ورو را
پای پونه کلی نست

کفست های پر از کاه را
پیشت درواره کوهن آیا در اورد
نز فسنه نان جووا

ایان نوری که روژن نگ
روی حاجیم کوهن گل زرد می کاشت
پهن کرک کاسه نوغ

قطمی یو کچکی از زیستان ی برف را
بر سرگرم سیره اورد
بزرگ شتکی را

کوذم از سقف افتادن در کاسه دوغ
چار گنجشک از تکنی کفستا پر گشدیده

اعتماد یکه 5 2010-05-24
A Pioneer Brave Woman, an Advocate of Freedom of Speech

An Interview with Saleha Sa'adat

Can you briefly introduce yourself? My name is Saleha, I finished my school in Rukshana High School and I have graduated from Journalism Faculty of Kabul University in 2007 (1386). I have been a trainer and teaching journalism in NAY Organization and I worked as a journalist at TOLO television about five years. Besides, I have many social activities such as working with orphans, poor children and women who faced violence and difficulties. Currently, I am a freelance journalist. I live with my parents, four sisters and three brothers in Kabul.

Why did you choose to be a journalist? In Afghanistan, most of the families encourage their children to study Medical Science and become a doctor in the future but when I was in 12th grade in school, I was interested in journalism much more than any other field. I thought that in this way I can work for human rights, violence against women and journalist students. Fortunately, I have reached my goals.

Can you name some of the challenges that female journalists face in Afghanistan? In Afghanistan because we have seen many Medias that work independently but recently there are some negative ideas about women working outside Afghan traditional society. People think negatively about working women in Medias. If we see deeply, there are many challenges for a woman who works in Media especially television and radio. I have been threatened several times by politicians especially when I worked in TOLO television. While other colleagues and I were working on some Transitional Justice reports, we were threatened but we never stopped working in media.

Why do you think TOLO expelled you from your job? Apparently, they expelled me because of the tweet which I tweeted about Jalrez in my personal tweeter. After observing through Freedom of Speech and Supporting Journalists’ Right, the main reason was political issue and TOLO television was forced to expel me although I had evidence and short interviews of war victims. Nobody heard me.

Who was the source of your motivation in your life? When I reported an issue and saw the positive effects of my report and writing in society and that motivated me a lot and I felt that I have to work for human rights. Besides, my family always motivates me to work in media.

What is your message to the female journalists of the country? My message to the female journalists is to work hard for freedom of speech and never fear. We all have to struggle against traditional ideas and superstitions. Life is a challenge, never be afraid of threats. I am optimistic about the future of female journalists in Afghanistan because we have seen many positive changes since 2001.

Why were you nominated for Social Media Award? This process is from German and US Embassy to encourage people using the positive effects of social media in their life. I was nominated as a best user of social media in reporting, I thank all those who voted for me.

How do you see the future of the country? Nowadays, we have seen insecurity in most provinces. Especially, northern provinces and every night we hear news about Taliban and Daesh (ISIS), and it worries that after recent fourteen years Taliban have attacked a province. My family and I faced bad security in most provinces. Especially, I want to be the voice of those who are vulnerable and quiet. I want to be the voice of those who are not allowed to speak and struggle for their rights.

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How do you evaluate the situation of journalism, press and freedom of speech in Afghanistan? Freedom of speech and media had significant progress by previous government. We see many Medias that work independently but recently there are some political parties that prevent media’s activity in Afghanistan like my issue.

What are some of your future goals? My goal is to work for freedom and human rights especially for those women who are vulnerable and quiet. I want to be the voice of those who are not allowed to speak and struggle for their rights.

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