I have joined Star Educational Society as the director of Star Compu-Aid, Star’s brand-new computer lab and computer department. My background as a first position holder in Kateb University’s Information Technology department is one of many qualifications I bring to this exciting new position at Star. In addition to my studies at Kateb, I attended IT classes in Pakistan and earned international certifications from Microsoft. I was in charge of capacity building classes and Microsoft Certified Solutions Expert (MCSE) for two years in Kateb University and served as the head of the Computer Science Department at KarAmoz Institute of Higher Education.

I am proud to introduce Star Compu-Aid, a window to the fast changing world of Information Technology, technological science and academic excellence. At Star Compu-Aid, you can learn the latest and most practical programs including Networking, Database, Programming, Graphics and Web Development. Star Educational Society, with the motto “Join us for a difference,” is committed to offer the most sophisticated and comprehensive programs designed to meet the intricacies and requirements of complex administrations and help young applicants of computer science master long term and short term programs.

Star Educational Society has always been a glittering star in the sky of education in Afghanistan. Its differences are remarkable compared to other educational centers leading it to become a reliable source of quality education for thousands of avid learners. Profuse programs such as English, Chinese, and Russian languages, computer training, and Teacher Training Classes are a few of the programs offered at Star. A library with myriad books, a fully-equipped computer lab and Interstellar, Star’s weekly newspaper, are other distinguishing features of Star Educational Society.

The team at Star Compu-Aid consists of veteran and skilled members who have been working diligently and incessantly in the computer field. In addition to completing their university educations, they are internationally certified in different courses such as Microsoft, CISCO, TMG, LINUX, and Virtualization. As the head of this department, I assert that my team members and I will provide Star’s computer students with top quality and up-to-date computer training programs so that they can become professional and can successfully pass international tests. Let me not be verbose as it is said, “Actions speak louder than words.” Therefore, join us and experience the difference.
I was born on 5th July 1992 in a lower-middle class family of nine members, in Kabul city, the capital of President Najib's government which later on became his grave. Like all the other newborn infants, I too inherited a country with deep-rooted rivalry and antagonism amidst her myriad ethnicities which had consequently destroyed the very foundation of political stability, national unity and economic self-sufficiency. However, my childhood went on normally as a kid, my environmental consciousness and comprehension of on-going situation was limited. So to say; I was an insane being in this insane world. That is what kept me happy…

Later on, I was sent to “Saied Jamalludin High School” to enjoy the right to free education. The school I joined was a public school and looked more like abandoned houses of a defeated minority. It had no teacher, benches, doors, boards, windows or any other necessities to meet the standards of being categorized as "school". Lucky for us, we did have few teachers and a school principal who would approach students violently enough to practically illustrate the wrath of ‘Abdurrahman Khan’ against the minorities of his kingdom. He would spend most of his time “disciplining”, either by thick cables or stick from a berry tree (his two loyal companions).

During the reign of Taliban we had to emigrate from Afghanistan after my father’s incarceration by the government. My father was accused of anti-Taliban propaganda and activities. He was put behind the bars without a proper trial and evidence for nearly two years. After his release, the situation got even more chaotic. Taliban had begun to purge, expropriate lands, extend their coercive approach and deteriorate the crippled economic order. We had to runaway and seek refuge to a better place, sadly, we couldn’t make it to the West, and the only possible chance was to get to the land of Mohammad Ali Jinnah; Pakistan, the evil neighbor state. Pakistan was a safe haven those days since General Pervez Musharraf, who became the 10th president succeeding Prime Minister “Nawaz Sharif” by a military coup, had labeled “security” as one of the top priorities of his presidency. During our stay in Quetta, Pakistan, I got the chance of schooling in “Ferdowsi High School”. This school was named after one of the most eminent and influential Persian poets of Ghaznavids reign Hakim Abu ‘l Qasim Firdausi (935-1025 ce) the author of the epic “Shahnamah” (book of kings). There, I successfully completed 3rd grade but had to leave Quetta for Peshawar henceforth because of my father’s new occupation. Two seasons of a year of my life was wasted in Peshawar without even learning anything new or beneficial.

The coming days were not at all expected, and no one had imagined everything (in Afghanistan) would change this instantly as to surprise the world. A new chapter was being added to the history of Afghanistan. The supreme leader of one of the most recognized international terrorists group who was a guest to the Taliban government had ordered a devastating attack on the American soil. The twin towers of “World Trade Center” at New York City were targeted by the Al Qaeda group on 11th, September, 2001 at around 8:45 am. The event which is also referred to as 9/11, aroused the nationalistic sentiments of the Americans. They had to be avenged to rehabilitate their international status by any means necessary.

According to some sources, Taliban were ready to cooperate and let the U.S force arrest the leader of the convicted terrorist group after providing ample evidence suggesting Al Qaeda’s involvement in organizing and undertaking the recent attack, nevertheless, America adopted a intrusive approach and the Taliban’s proposal was denied.

Once again, Afghanistan became the battlefield of international rivalry and selfishness of the power-mad countries, this time for the battle between America and Pakistan’s puppets; Taliban. Mullah Mohammad Omar led Taliban government was overthrown by the U.S and her allies after nearly 6 years of ruling over Afghanistan, in 2001.

We were watching cartoon while my father rushed in and changed the channel to BBC world news. It was the live coverage of the twin towers’ collapse. My father said: “Well, it’s time for all of us to pack and return to Kabul because Taliban have excavated graves for themselves.” We immigrated back to our own land. I had had heard a lot that Afghanistan had abundant trees and green valleys and mountains, yet, I could merely see a non-asphalted, unpaved single way route penetrating through an arid terrain for hundreds of miles from Qandahar to Kabul. The highway which was supposed to be traversed within few hours took us an entire day to travel through.

Kabul was an utterly transformed city; women could be seen walking around freely, girls and female teachers attending lectures with happy faces and men and adults well dressed and mostly shaved. People of this territory who were completely disillusioned and hopeless under Taliban seemed hopeful and enthusiastic once again. Citizens were encouraged to provide required facilities for their children to get education and send them to schools. I too, like any other school going Afghan kid joined others in experiencing a coeducational system for the first time in Afghanistan. Unluckily, I had to repeat 3rd grade.

My father, who was a senior employee of the foreign affairs ministry, was appointed as a secretary to the ambassador of Afghanistan in Ankara, Turkey. As diplomat’s family, we had the right to accompany our father and stay with him till the end of his three year tenure. I got fortunate to get admission into an Iranian school but sadly I had to study 3rd grade for the third time since my documents and level of education could not meet my new school’s standard. Within few months, I could fluently communicate with my classmates and staff members in their own accent, and after a year I could top at all subjects, surprising my mates and teachers. My three brothers, two sisters and I were indiscriminately treated during our three year study. We were persuaded to read our topics, tell jokes and sing the school anthem before the students without any hurdle or prejudices. Whenever I stand before a group and talk with confidence, I subconsciously thank my Iranian teachers and realize that the people of every territory no matter which ethnicity they belong to, is the same human beings and what makes them stigmatic and notorious is their political leaders’ policies and propagandas.
Join AIESEC today - a platform for youth leaders

AIESEC: AIESEC is an international, non-governmental, and not-for-profit organization that provides young people with leadership development, global internships and volunteer exchange experiences across the world, with a focus to empower young people so they can make a positive impact on society. It is the largest youth-run organization in the world with 100,000 members in 126 countries. AIESEC in Afghanistan was founded in 2002 by a young mastermind who believed that this organization could make a more positive impact on the minds and lives of young people in order to bring peace and prosperity to Afghanistan.

AIESEC Opportunities: AIESEC offers thousands of opportunities for students and recent graduates to intern and volunteer abroad. In 2014-2015, over 80 students from Afghanistan were among 30,000 from our global network to enjoy exchange experiences. Activating and developing the leadership potential of youth is accomplished through Volunteer Experiences, Internships, and Experiential Learning. Kofi Annan once said, “In an era of globalization, AIESEC’s programs have helped young people around the world to develop a broader understanding of cultural, socioeconomic and business management issues.”

Global Citizen, is an AIESEC program which offers unpaid internships around the world for students and recent graduates. They are usually short term in nature and involve working on diverse community projects and in different organizations. Projects include teaching, promoting HIV/AIDS awareness, working in human rights, environmental sustainability, leadership development and more. AIESEC members work with NGOs, schools and local institutions to run volunteer projects that recruit participants from all over the world. AIESEC is a perfect choice if you want to make an impact on the lives of others combined with having a great cultural experience.

Global Talent, is an AIESEC program which offers global paid management and technical internships for graduates. They are normally long term in nature and involve working on diverse business projects and in different organizations while enjoying a unique cultural experience and the opportunity to truly integrate a new environment. The AIESEC network of partner companies and organizations allows AIESEC to provide paid internships, and to provide talented and motivated graduates with a way to stand out from the crowd and develop a variety of new skills.

Global Leader, is AIESEC’s experiential learning and development platform created for youth by youth.

Why not join AIESEC today?
We are a global movement of “doers” gaining the unique advantage of experiencing positions of leadership and acquiring a global mindset. These experiences allow us to acquire the leadership traits needed in the world such as: empowering others, being a world citizen, self-awareness, and being solution-oriented. Students across Afghanistan gain relevant professional experience. Our leadership development model encourages members to share knowledge, experiences, and a passion for world issues. Enhance your university experiences with real opportunities. You can intern, volunteer abroad or even lead a team. Feel a shared responsibility for the world and gain the tools to change it. Join us today!

About the author: Nasrullah Hussaini is a senior English instructor at Star Educational Society, chairs the TOEFL-IELTS Department and is the head of Star’s Capacity Building Program. He also teaches Computer Programs at local Universities. His dream is to establish a software company in Afghanistan to meet local needs.

A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens

About the author: Naqsholdh Bighad is a senior English instructor at Star Educational Society, chairs the TOEFL-IELTS Department and is the head of Star’s Capacity Building Program. He also teaches Computer Programs at local Universities. His dream is to establish a software company in Afghanistan to meet local needs.

The story begins with a covetous, tight-fisted, introverted and avaricious man who had repudiated all his kith and kin away from himself. This old man, Scrooge, was done with his sole business partner’s mourning and funeral party. Marley was his lonely colleague and confidant. Notwithstanding, he was no longer alive. He was deceased. Almost 30 years later from Marley’s death, approaching Christmas Eve and Christmas, his nephew disrupted him amidst his job by telling him, “Merry Christmas, uncle.” For these occasions didn’t mean anything more precious than wealth to Scrooge, he replied sternly and voraciously, “What do you mean by merry Christmas?” he added. “You are as much a humbug as ever.” Scrooge. He exceedingly perturbed his nephew.

Nevertheless, he was invited for a dinner with his nephews, his broken and upper nephew. Due to Christmas, his clerk, Mr Cratchit, was also beseeching for a furlough so that he could stay with his family members longer in Christmas. It was Christmas Eve, the epilog of people’s cheer, hearty laughter and screaming all were defuncting Scrooge. He decided to go to his chamber and lock himself in. He proceeded to his chamber, which was rack and ruin. He tried to lock it when he observed Marley’s face by his very eyes. Yes, it was Marley with ghostly spectacles turned up on his ghostly forehead. The hair was curiously stirred and though the eyes were wide open, they were perfectly motionless. Thus, and its livid color, made it horrible. It was Marley’s phantom, which had haunted Scrooge’s chamber. Scrooge felt the whole world was turning upside down. It was the most bizarre feeling ever. They had long dialogue about their past and business. The phantom warned Scrooge to alter himself in his future else he wouldn’t have a cozy and comfortable life after his death. The apparition added that he, Scrooge, would be haunted by three more spirits, which prompted Scrooge to start begging with tremulous voice and shivering hands not to torture him.

Marley’s spirit vanished and left him and his family members to continue his life. He was flaring from inside each moment, nothing but rue over his own past evil deeds.

The second ghost was ghost of present Christmas. He was a joyous,cordial and tender-hearted one. This specter was responsible to take Scrooge to various places and show him what the others were saying about him. Being reluctant, unwilling and somewhat agitated, Scrooge was dragged to his nephew’s home by the ghost. Scrooge and the ghost were invisible to all. He found his nephew assembling with his co wining and dining with hearty and jolly laughter owing to Christmas. “my uncle is a scoundrel,” said his nephew with hatred,” he is such a materialist....” Everyone else was divulging a barrage of complaints about Scrooge. Hearing the facts, Scrooge got upset and crestfallen exceedingly. He was flaring from inside each moment, but he had to hear the truths about himself. Notwithstanding, he was acknowledging how mean, miserable and ill-tempered he was. The third ghost was the ghost of future Christmas, which haunted him afterward. He was not uttering even a single word. He was communicating with Scrooge non-verbally by just pointing with his index. This ghost took Scrooge to future and showed him what bad words people will say about someone who isn’t good. Finally, these ghosts wholly changed a mean, miser, ruthless and stone-hearted Scrooge to a kind, benevolent and generous Scrooge.
About 80 Thousand Afghan Refugees Entered Europe

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said that since the beginning of January, this year, thousands of Afghan refugees have tried to go illegally to European countries.

Nader Farhad, the spokesman of UNHCR in Afghanistan, said to the Radio Ashna that since the beginning of January, 2015 approximately 500 thousand refugees from different countries have tried to reach to Europe, including thousands of Afghan refugees as well.

Mr. Farhad said, “There are between 75 to 80 thousand Afghan refugees among them. But we cannot say an exact statistic, because some of them may be on the way or not registered as a refugee yet.”

According to Mr. Farhad, All of these refugees have not gone from Afghanistan alone but a number of them are the people who were living in Iran or Pakistan.

The spokesman of UNHCR in Afghanistan said that most of the Afghan citizens who are leaving Afghanistan are not aware of the risks and do not know about the laws of the European countries, even in some cases, some of them are deported from the European Countries and returned after reaching to Europe.

Mr. Farhad said: “The refugees pass very risky paths in the deserts, mountains and the seas. And might not know about the laws of the countries and some of them face death risks.”

According to Mr. Farhad, from the beginning of the January of this year, about 2,500 refugees have lost their lives on the way to Europe which includes Afghan refugees also.

Two Attackers killed in a restaurant in Kabul

National Department of Security (NDS) has announced, two terrorists who entered District 3 in Kabul, opened fires on the guests in a restaurant, were killed.

NDS in a news report which were posted on its official Facebook page had written that two of the National Security Forces were as well busy taking their meal while the incident happened, and took down the two terrorists at the very beginning of their attack.

A Hundred Member Terrorist Group Leader Arrested

The National Security forces in Khost; arrested Nematullah of Haqqani Terrorists group who was the commander of one hundred terrorists at ‘Dowmanda’ district. According to the national security press, Nematullah was arrested while he was trying to illegally cross the Durand border; wearing female outfit and veil in order to terrorize people in Khost province.

The National Security Press Office in a manifesto asserts: “the arrested criminal has confessed that he was appointed by Haqqani terrorist group as the military commander of a group of 100 terrorists in Meramshah and he has the responsibility leading terroristic activities in Dawmandi district of Khost province.”
The ministries of Defense and Internal Affairs have proclaimed that during the past 24 hours of joint operations of military forces of the two organs; more than 180 rebellious Taleban were killed. The Defense ministry in a statement asserts that as a result of joint operations of military forces for suppression and elimination of the rebels in outskirts of Afghan district of Nangarhar, Manogy of Kunar province, capital of Kapena province, Barke Bark of Logar, Zormot, Kanai and Dandepan districts of Paktya, Moqor and Gelaan districts of Ghzni, Nesh of Kandahar, Seyori of Zabul province, Khaas of Orozgan, Chora, Chenarbach, charcheno, Saraab, Chalakjoy, Dehraawood and Gezaab of Orozgan province, Kajaan of Daikundi, Shkamech of Tahkaar province, Kohistanar of Sar-e-Pol, capital of Faryab province, outskirts of Kunduz city, and Sangen and Musa Qala of Helmand; 150 Taleban militants were killed. The Defense ministry also added that as a result of these operations, around 54 Taleban were injured, and some weapons and ammunitions of the defeated enemies were obtained.

The Interior Affairs ministry, too, has stated that 32 Taleban militants were shot death during the joint military operations. This ministry also has announced that 28 more militants have been severely wounded.

Meanwhile, the Defense Ministry had also informed about the death of 9 soldiers of military forces. The ministry says that these soldiers were killed as a result of road-side mines and direct armed contact of the Taleban militants.

The Interior Affairs ministry also has announced that 150 Taleban militants were killed. The ministry says that these soldiers were killed as a result of road-side mines and direct armed contact of the Taleban militants.

Mehrgan’s Second Film Festival Inaugurated in Kabul

The Mehrgan’s second international film festival was held by Academy of Arts in Kabul. This festival was held in the Science saloon of Ministry of Education participating artists, counselors from the president office, ministry of information and culture and other cultural entities. Ali Mahdi Keyan, the festival director, told that last year was the worst year for artists and a large number of artists left Afghanistan and became said that a large number of artists at this year once again forced to leave the country and went to abroad.

He said that Afghan film industry was born in the first half of the twentieth decade, growth in in the fifty and first half of the sixtieth decade, but by the end of the sixtieth decade destroyed and now only the short films are alive in Afghanistan. He warned that if the government does not pay attention to art and cinema, short films will also die.

But Mussadiq Khalili, the Cultural Deputy of Ministry of Information and Culture, mentioned the Mehrgan’s Film Festival as an important cultural event, and says that holding this festival is an important step to strengthening the Afghanistan’s cinema.

This festival will last till Thursday, simultaneously commemorating the artist’s in Afghan Film Saloon and performances and shows in the saloon of Academy of Art.

180 Taleban killed in military operations

The Interior Affairs ministry also has announced 150 Taleban militants were killed. The Defense ministry also added that as a result of these operations, around 54 Taleban were injured, and some weapons and ammunitions of the defeated enemies were obtained.

More than five thousand six hundred terrorists killed during the past six months

Kabul: Ministry of Interior officials say that in the recent six months, 5636 terrorists were killed and 3102 were injured in operations led by Afghan National Forces. Siddiq Siddiqi, Ministry of Interior spokesman, said these number of terrorists were killed and injured in 2637 military operations during the reporting period.

Compared to the first half of last year, the amount of terrorist activities have increased thirty percent this year. He added, “Afghan military forces have also increased their operations due to the expansion of terrorist activities. These forces have been able to kick “crushing blows” to the terrorists.

Siddiq Siddiqi also said that in the past six months, 539 terrorists have been captured from the battlefields and 631 others were arrested on suspicion of terrorist activities. In the first half of the current year, Afghan Military forces confiscated about 3000 light and heavy weapons of terrorists.

The Ministry of Interior spokesman said police have made good achievements in arresting suspected criminals. The police had arrested 12,000 suspected people in charge of 539 criminal cases. He emphasized that the amount of crime has increased eight percent compared to the first half of last year. Sediq Seddiqi said that more than thirteen tons of opium, about fourteen tons of hashish, three tons of heroin and a large amount of alcohol was discovered and captured by the police.

The director of the Mehrgan’s film festival mentioned the Mehrgan’s Film Festival as an important cultural event, and says that holding this festival is an important step to strengthening the Afghanistan’s cinema.

This festival will last till Thursday, simultaneously commemorating the artist’s in Afghan Film Saloon and performances and shows in the saloon of Academy of Art.
I clearly remember the moment when I was in 2nd grade and the Taliban closed the door of our schools. I dreamed of the day we would go back to school and learn to read and write. Finally, after the Taliban was driven out of the country, the day arrived and the schools’ doors were opened again. On one early morning when I was in 10th grade, we were studying Physics at Marefat High School when many stones broke through the windows and flew into our classroom. We all escaped from the class and saw the school door shaking as it was being hit with sticks and stones. The attackers were trying to get inside the school. This time it was not Taliban. It was a group of ignorant people who believed that Marefat High School was teaching Christianity. The protests and attacks on the school lasted for five days. It was during this time that I began to feel that I should do something to prevent people from attacking schools. This fear was still haunting me. I felt that every Afghan had a responsibility to stop violence, war, bombings and explosions that kill innocent civilians. So I started working as a peace volunteer. With the help of Aims Peace Village Organization (APVO), I learned many skills and received many certificates. I gave seminars on nonviolent communication and seminars about peace. I was honored as a Young Ambassador for Peace from the Universal Peace Federation (UPF). Now I have more work to do and more responsibilities. Through APVO, I work and give seminars to secondary school and university students to spread the idea of peace and help participants to use the message of peace to improve their homes and communities. Each of us has a key role to play in ensuring that we leave a better world for posterity.

Recently I attended the 10th Global Youth Peace Festival-GYPF 2015 in Chandigarh, India where delegates came from different backgrounds and different countries, mostly south Asian countries, U.S., Russia, Africa, and Malaysia. As a delegate from Afghanistan, it was very exciting for me to meet and share ideas with different delegates and peace activists from across the world. The delegates from thirty countries were united in their commitment to peace and happiness in their countries. Delegates who were awarded with the Global Youth Icon Awards included Mr. Fabolke Douglas Deeka from Nigeria, Mr. Ediola Pasholaari from Albania and Mr. A. R. Patil from India.

One of the most memorable peace activists was Bernie Meyer, nicknamed American Gandhi, who recently made an NGO for Afghan youth by the name of #ENOUGH! War. As he explained, their mission is to abolish war in Afghanistan. He wants people to work together and understand that we do not belong to a specific country, religion or tribe. We should break the boundaries and work for global peace together. They work online with Afghan youth and they have weekly online discussions where every youth from Afghanistan can join and share their ideas with people from across the world. As one of the delegates said, “A person in school asked me if I was Shia or Sunni. I went home and asked my mother whether I was Shia or Sunni. My mother told me that I am neither Shia nor Sunni. I am a Human.” Yes, we are all human. Let’s work and walk for humanism and world peace.

One important GYPF program was the 2nd meeting of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in Punjab Engineering College. The delegates of South Asian countries discussed the situation of terrorism in the South Asian countries and ways that we can work together to make our countries more secure. After eight hours of discussions in the SAARC meeting, we were invited to PTC News Channel to Talk about Terrorism and the Peace Fest which took place in Chandigarh, India. After all these programs we made a forum by the name of ‘Young Global Peace Forum’ in order to work together for global peace. Finally, all the delegates were awarded a certificate with Gandhi’s picture by Paramos Sharma, director of Yuvsatta organization which work for peace and was the main organizer of GYPF Chandigarh, India, 2015.
I would I were a careless child,
Still dwelling in my Highland cave,
Or roaming through the dusky wild,
Or bounding o’er the dark blue wave;
Place me among the rocks I love,
Take back this name of splendid sound!
Fortune! Take back these cultured lands,
And woman, lovely woman! Thou,
Associates of the festive hour.
Three busy scenes of splendid woe,
Without a sigh would I resign
When e’en thy smiles begin to pall!
Associates of the festive hour.
Three busy scenes of splendid woe,
Without a sigh would I resign
When e’en thy smiles begin to pall!

Diospel awhile the sense of ill—
Though pleasure stirs the maddening soul,
The heart—the heart—is lonely still.

How dull! to hear the voice of those
Whom rank or chance, whom wealth or power,
Have made, though neither friends nor foes,
Associates of the festive hour.
Give me again a faithful few,
In years and feelings still the same,
And I will fly the midnight crew,
Where boist’rous joy is but a name.

And woman, lovely woman! Thou,
My hope, my comforter, my all!
How cold must be my bosom now,
Of those I love—of those I love.

It was the wedding of Aatay Rasheed’s daughter. The party was ready, and on horse-back and on foot, the villagers set off for Thayna Jaar — soon to be the bride’s home. As we set off, the groom’s party sought Aatay Rasheed’s permission to play some music and dance in celebration. He gave a hesitant nod. No sooner had the music started, that these bearded few people began screaming. They were the mullahs, and they pushed their way to the front. They were fuming with anger that someone had dared play music.

“IT’S HARAM!” they declared.
One of the mullahs, my Iran-based nephew Baseer, picked up the cassette player over his head and threatened to smash it to the ground if any more music was played. He frothed.

“Music invites the devil. Prayers bring blessings.”

The villagers and the procession began chanting prayers and salawat. There was no more music, no more laughter, just a loud chorus of salawat. It felt like a funeral procession.

Once the procession had reached the outer limits of the village, your father, still young, walked to the front. He held his arms up, jacket in the one hand, and began dancing. The children clapped, some of the men joined in. The women beat the drums. There was music, and the procession danced and laughed all the way to Thayna Jaar. Fearing backlash from your father and the youths, the mullahs could do nothing but watch in anger and despair.

It was a good day. But once that was over, they stopped inviting us to the weddings. My nephew Mohammad Hussain got married. They didn’t invite us. Your auntie got married. They didn’t invite us. They didn’t like your father’s dance.

*Haram = Arabic for sinful; forbidden on religious grounds
*Salawat = Prayers wishing peace upon the prophet and his family.
Changing the vision and mindset of a community

An interview with Mr. Aziz Royesh, teacher, advocate for equal access to education and social activist

Azizullah Royesh founded Marefat High School for Afghan refugees in Pakistan in 1994 to combat the existing culture of violence, misogyny and extremism and lift disadvantaged populations through civic education. In 2002, the school moved to Afghanistan where it teaches more than 4000 Afghan students now, about half of whom are girls. Royesh is a former Yale World Fellow, former National Endowment for Democracy (NED) Reagan-Fascell fellow and was one of 10 finalists for the Varkey Foundation’s Global Teacher Prize.

He is a frequent speaker on the concept of a tolerant community. Royesh and his colleagues established the Marefat Civil Capacity Building Organization (MCCBO), which is working to strengthen and expand democracy and civil norms of life.

Why did you choose to be a teacher?
This was not my choice. I was 16 years old and had just returned from exile to my village in Jeghatoo District of Ghazni province. I was one of the few individuals who could read and write or could claim to be educated. I started teaching my brothers and sister and a number of other kids from the neighboring villages. Later, I was introduced to the local authorities who were Jihadi commanders. They invited me to help them establish the first modern primary school in Quhig, a valley around 25 kilometers away from the center of Ghazni. That was the first step for me to get the title of “Teacher.” In the next three years, I travelled to Pakistan and brought supplies for five schools which provided primary education to more than 3000 kids, all of them boys, in the district. After the establishment of Marefat High School, my career as a teacher became part of my personal identity and that is why I am called “Teacher.”

What is the most fascinating memory from your years of being a teacher? The most fascinating memory for me is the smiles on the lips and faces of the kids who are looking to their future with great hope and optimism.

What are the most dominant challenges you faced during the years of being a teacher? Teaching in Afghanistan is a profession of challenges. Poverty, insecurity, corruption, and most of all, old vision behind the system of education is posing myriads of challenges for a teacher.

Is this how you became a candidate of the Best Teacher in the world? I think my career to face and counter the challenges of a traditional war-stricken community was one of the main factors which helped me all the way towards the position of Top 10 in the Global Teacher Prize. I participated in the competition with a vision and achievement that could easily transform the vision and mindset of the community.

How was the reaction of Afghans when you were selected as one of the Top 10 teachers in the world? Afghan political authorities reacted with a heavy silence. None of the individuals or officials in the authority expressed a single word to show their support and encouragement to the achievement. But, public support, especially when I could reach the position of Top 10 in the competition, was highly encouraging and inspiring. It was just great and wonderful to see the lively environment created around the achievement.

How do you evaluate the education system in Afghanistan? The education system in Afghanistan is not more than a mess. We are spending a huge budget on education of our kids, but the result at the end of the day is just hundreds of thousands of youth with hostility, a bitter sense of nihilism and frustration. There is a single way to improve it: to change our old vision and look at the system of education as a tool to help our young generation to understand and embrace the modern world and its exigencies. We cannot imprison our young generation in the circles of our traditional, fanatical mindset and wish them to counter the challenges of the contemporary world.

You have recently been a candidate for the Human Rights Tulips prize, please give us more information about it? Human Rights Tulips award goes to one of the most successful figures or institutions who have shown an extraordinary achievement in strengthening the basis of Human Rights in their respective communities. This award started from 2008. I am one of the candidates for this year’s competition.

What are your plans if you win the Human Rights Tulips prize? Winning the prize will enable me to work more on my vision about Human Rights and its conformity with the culture and exigencies of the community. I will donate the entire prize to Marefat which will be used for its infrastructure and enrichment.

Why is it so important to win this prize? It is important both in terms of its credibility for Afghan civil society as well as for Marefat High School and our Human Rights’ vision on the basis of its education system. Besides, it will help us share our inspiring message with our audience throughout the world.

What is your perspective for Afghanistan’s educational system in the future? Given the negative impacts of our past anti-democratic political history, the changes in the vision and mindset of the community at large are highly encouraging. I think we will manage to bring about a fundamental change in the culture and mindset of the community. This has already happened and there are great signs showing the further positive changes in the future which will not be too far. There are attempts in the Ministry of Education to bring changes in the system of education, the curriculum, the textbooks, and especially the way they look at the requirements of the modern system of education.

What makes you a successful person or teacher? My methodology of conducting my role as a teacher is something different. I regard my students as my partners for a mutual cause. I am flexible, not strict and rigid. I regard education and teaching as showering water. It puts its impacts gradually and the recipients, i.e. the students, get them gradually. So, there is not a rush. There is only steps to be taken forward.

You know Star Educational Society since its establishment, what is your opinion about this center and how do you consider it generally? Star has been a “STAR,” indeed. It has changed the lives of thousands and thousands via the English language. English language is not simply a language or means of communication. It is a window to another world OR to the entire world. Star has helped the New Generation of the community to explore this world.

What is your last sentence for this interview? We are together working for a better environment; an environment of wisdom, knowledge, beauty and prosperity. Let’s take our role more seriously.