Welcome to Bal Sandesh
Editor’s Note

Welcome to the first edition of the newsletter Bal Sandesh. It is produced and created by members of Bal Sabha, the local Indian youth group. Bal Sabha, meaning a gathering of children, is made up of dedicated parents and children of all ages. Founded in the mid-eighties by a handful of interested families, Bal Sabha has grown into a large group of about thirty families. The primary goal of the group is bringing Indian children together to learn about Indian culture. At monthly meetings children make presentations on topics such as people, historical events, religion, and places relevant to India. It is an important learning experience as it allows children to learn about their Indian heritage. For many years members of Bal Sabha have played an active role in the Indian community. Participating in the various Indian programs and festivals has always been a Bal Sabha tradition.

Bal Sandesh was created to share and exhibit the children’s talents. It contains articles, drawings, quizzes and poems written by members of Bal Sabha. This first edition coincides with the celebration of Republic Day, a program primarily produced by Bal Sabha, as well as the greater celebration of the 50th anniversary of Indian independence. As editor, I would like to thank all of those who submitted their work, and would like to invite submissions of any kind for the next edition. This newsletter gives children a unique opportunity to expand their knowledge and share it with the community. Enjoy!

Tara Chandrasekhar

"The time is 11 p.m. in India, we hope you all have had a pleasant flight with Captain Rugorain. Please fasten your seat belts and prepare to land. On behalf of all the staff, I thank you for flying British Airways."

The lights are turned back on, ensuring that the journey is at last at an end. All of a sudden, the plane creates a thundering noise, your head is forcefully jerked back, and your ears pop. A final message is announced.

"Please stay seated until further notice. Once again signing off is Captain Rugorain. Thank you for flying with us." Your heart skips a beat, your breath comes in quivers, as the fact that you’ve finally reached India sinks in. India, your homeland, the country where the imagination is stirred. Just thinking of that name creates a stir in the heart. Why? What lies in that land that moves our soul every time we think of it?

Let’s think about it. India, our homeland, the place where many of us were born, and a place to which each of us belongs. No matter how India has changed over the years, it will always hold a special place in our hearts. It is there that our souls lie although we physically reside in America. Every time we visit India, an undercurrent of melancholy sets in our subconscious, underlining the finiteness of our stay.

For many, all that is dear to us, is in India. Our relatives, some of whom we have never met, look forward to seeing us. Although we might have been born in foreign lands and are strangers to them, our relatives have maintained and cherished the common bond of Indian heritage with us. It is this selfless and pure love which beckons us back to India, every time filling our hearts with tremors of longing and sadness. Though logistically lands and oceans separate us, our souls navigate down the same spiritual path which...
The Nightingale of India

Indu Chandrasekhar
Fifth Grade
Russell Boulevard Elementary

Sarojini Naidu, the Nightingale of India, was born on February 13, 1879 in Hyderabad. She was a poetess, as well as a political leader, freedom fighter and helper of Mahatma Gandhi. A plump lady with plain features and a sweet smile, Sarojini Naidu always wore plain cotton saris. Gopal Krishna Gokhale, the famous nationalist was her guru and friend. She was also the wife of a doctor in the service of the Nizam of Hyderabad. During her lifetime, she published two volumes of poetry, The Golden Threshold and The Bird of Time.

Although she wanted to be remembered as a poetess, Sarojini Naidu was better remembered as a political figure devoted to Gandhi. She met Gandhi in 1914 at the age of 35, and became his lifelong friend. She liked to call him "Mickey Mouse."

She substituted as a leader of the raid of Dharasana Salt Works when Gandhi, the original leader, was arrested. She warned the protesters that they would be beaten "but," she said, "you must not resist; you must not even raise a hand to ward off a blow."

The protesters never got into Dharasana, because there was a waterlogged ditch and a barbed wire fence blocking their path. Those who managed to wade through the ditch didn't get over the barbed wire, because British Police Officers were waiting at the other end of the ditch. They repeatedly beat the protesters with their iron-tipped poles. During the raid at Dharasana, the British Police arrested Sarojini Naidu and some other leaders. The earth was covered with bloodstains, and stretchers, which were actually blankets, were completely blood red.

At 8:30 a.m. April 6, Gandhi picked up a lump of salt by the ocean, and heard Sarojini cry, "Hail, Deliverer!" This lump of salt was carefully preserved, and was sold at an auction later for 1,600 rupees. It became the most expensive lump of salt ever sold in the world.

What you just read was the preamble of the constitution of India. The constitution was adopted by the Constituent Assembly on November 26, 1949, and came into force on November 26, 1950. On January 26, 1950, India changed its status from a dominion in the British Commonwealth to a fully fledged republic.

As we gather to celebrate India's Republic Day, it is timely to reflect on the structure of the Indian Government. India's government is of the Parliamentary form, unlike the United States which has a Presidential form of government. The Parliamentary form is similar to the Presidential form in that it has three branches: the Legislature, the Executive, and the Judiciary. India has adopted into its constitution the better aspects of governance from the constitutions of the United Kingdom and the United States.

The legislative branch of the government in India consists of the President, the Lok Sabha, and the Rajya Sabha. The Lok Sabha is made up of representatives of the people chosen by direct election. As of now, the Lok Sabha consists of 545 members with two that the President nominates. A Lok Sabha term is five years. The Rajya Sabha consists of 245 members. Of these, 233 represent states and union territories, and twelve members are nominated by the President. All legislation requires the consent of both houses of parliament.

The President and Vice President are elected by members of an Electoral college, which consists of elected members of both houses of Parliament and Legislative Assemblies of the states, with suitable weightage given to each vote. The President and Vice President's terms are five years.

The Union Executive consists of the President, the Vice President, the Council of Ministers, and the Prime Minister. The President is the constitutional head of the Executive branch of the Union. Real executive power rests in a Council of Ministers with the Prime Minister as the head. The Council of Ministers, headed by the Prime Minister helps and advises the President, who is bound by law to take the advice of the Prime Minister.

At the apex of the Judiciary is the Supreme Court, the head being the Chief Justice who is appointed by the President. At the state level, the highest court is the High Court, with the lower courts being divided into districts at each state level.

The three branches of government are set up so that there are adequate checks and balances in the system just as in the United States.

The Pond

Meghna Srinath, Third Grade, Fairview Elementary

In the stretch of daylight, a silent sound.
Of a shimmering pond.
That's as still as snow.

Birds chirping, sun shining, mountains rising,
The pond sparkles as the sun shines brightly.
Swans gaze at the soft pond as they swim swiftly.
Frogs hop, lotuses bloom

What a wonderful day on the first day of June.

Sarojini Naidu was involved with many political leaders in Gandhi's jail cell many times to discuss political and freedom
HOLI
Sagar Vengurlaker, Second Grade, Ridgeway Elementary

If you are in India in March and one day some one comes up and throws color powder all over you, don't be angry. This is Holi, the spring festival. Next to Diwali, the festival of lights, Holi is the most important Indian festival. Celebrated on the 15th day of Phalgun, the 12th month of the Hindu calendar, Holi or Phalgun Purnima, is a boisterous celebration, in which people throw colored water on one another. During this festival, every one is equal and everything is forgiven. Rang, raas and raag (color, dance and songs) reign supreme.

At night people light huge bonfires and worship them by offering coconuts, flowers and freshly harvested food grains. They dance around the fire and some people even walk through it as if in a trance. The atmosphere gets charged with cries of "Holika is dead." Holika is a female demon described in Indian mythology. Here it represents winter.

Ashes of bonfires lit on previous night are considered sacred. The next day people smear these ashes on their foreheads in some parts of the country and take a dip in the holy water. This day is therefore also known as Dhuli Vandan - dhuli means dust, in this case ashes, and vandan means to bow down. People use pistons like bicycle pumps to squirt blue, red and green liquid on one another. Powders of various colors can be washed out easily but I would not wear my best clothes on this day if I were you.

Stories about Holi abound. The best known is about a young prince named Pralhad, who worshipped Lord Vishnu. His father, an ambitious warrior sect of the Sikhs. They wear blue knee-length tunics and yellow turbans, laced with steel discs. They have processions and carry swords, spears and daggers.

Holi is also like many other spring festivals celebrated around the world. The festival has a psychological and social significance, too. It is an outlet, a sort of safety-valve, for the pent up emotions and passion built up in human hearts by the spring. The winter is over and it is time to be happy. In India, the first harvest of the wheat comes around this time of the year. In Rajasthan,
I would like to share with you my 1996 trip to India. I would like to focus on one of the seven wonders of the world, the Taj Mahal. The Taj Mahal is situated on the banks of the river Yamuna in Agra, India, about 3 hours from New Delhi.

Shah Jahan built the Taj Mahal. He built it in memory of his beloved wife Mumtaz Mahal, who died in 1631 while giving birth to her 14th child. Although her given name was Arjumand Banu Begum, her husband renamed her Mumtaz Mahal meaning "Ornament of the Palace."

Jahan brought to Agra the most skilled artisans from all over Asia and Europe. He had originally planned to build a white marble mausoleum for his wife, a black one for himself and connect them with a silver bridge. Unfortunately, the enemy of immortality, death, never gave him a chance to finish his project.

He did, however, complete the Taj Mahal. This breathtaking beauty, started in 1632, took 22 years and 20,000 artisans to complete. Nothing, I mean nothing, was done by machine! Unfortunately, Shah Jahan severed the fingers of the artisans once it was completed so that no other Taj Mahal may ever be built.

When I visited the Taj Mahal, it was noon, and boy, was it hot! We had to take off our shoes to not get the marble dirty, and also to show respect. The marble was scorching hot and we had to risk burning our feet. My brother and I did a tap dance on the floor.

The Taj Mahal is called the most beautiful building in the world, and I'm not surprised after looking at it.

- People used to believe that the earth was flat. They thought ships would fall over the edge.
- For centuries, people believed that the sun orbited the earth.
- The earth gets slightly heavier each year because it picks up dust from space.
- Fossilized footprints of early humans have been found in rocks.
- The biggest dinosaur was Seismosaurus. It weighed as much as 15 elephants.
- People once thought that fossils were the remains of dragons and giants.
- The stegosaurus was 30 feet long, but had a brain the size of a walnut.
- On average, the earth's plates move between half an inch and four inches per year.
- The Atlantic Ocean is getting wider, but the Pacific Ocean is shrinking.
- Diamonds are harder than any other natural substance.
- Children playing on a beach made the first discovery of a South African diamond.
- Diamonds are made of the same substances as coal soot and other carbons.
- In 1783 an Icelandic eruption threw up enough dust to temporarily block out the sun over Europe.
- About 20 to 30 volcanoes erupt each year, mostly under the sea.
- The longest earthquake known lasted for 38 days.
- There are thousands of earthquakes a year. Only 20 to 30 are felt by people.
- The Andes and the Himalayas are still rising, but their rocks are being worn away.
- The lowest officially named hill stands 15 feet high on a golf course in Brunei.
- Mount Everest is 20 times higher than the worlds tallest building, the Sears Tower in Chicago.
- A huge underground river runs underneath the Nile, with six times more water than the river above.
- Lake Bosumtwi in Ghana formed in a hollow made by a meteorite.
- Beaver Lake, in Yellowstone Park was artificially created by Beaver damming.
- The world's shortest river is the D River, Oregon. It is only 121 ft long.
- Off the coast of Florida there is an under water hotel. Guests have to dive to the entrance.
- There is four grams of gold in every million tons of seawater.
- The sea level is likely to rise 12 inches in the next 100 years.
- In 1940 a tornado uncovered buried gold and showered the coins over a Russian town.
- The Baobab tree can hold up to 260 gallons of water in its trunk.
- In Saudi Arabia there are solar-powered pay phones in the desert.
- The biggest animal found on inland Antarctica is the housefly.
- The USA uses 29 % of the world's gasoline and 33 % of the world's electricity!
- It would take you 6 months to jog around the earth without stopping.

Once there was a reindeer. One day it got lost while looking for food. It was a baby reindeer. Then, I saw the reindeer. I ran and picked it up and took it home. I had to think of a name. First, I thought for a moment and asked myself: is it a girl or a boy? Then it looked in my eye. Right then I knew it was a girl. I named it Sarah. Every morning when we woke up we ate breakfast and went outside to play catch. When we were done playing catch we took our afternoon nap. When Sarah woke up I had milk and cookies on a tray. One day when we were done playing something was wrong. My reindeer could not bend its hoof. She had to go to a vet. But, they don't take reindeer! I was in big trouble. Then I discovered something new. I could cure it myself.

We started to play again. I had to teach my deer the ABC's. That was the most ridiculous thing my mom and dad had ever heard of. So, I could not. I was thinking of something we could do when I heard a big bang. I went downstairs as fast as I could and I accidentally left my reindeer behind. My poor reindeer was left behind. Then I just remembered, I had left my reindeer behind! But it was too late. My reindeer was gone. Then I looked out of the window and I saw the class bully running away with my reindeer. He could not get away from me. He never had. So I ran down the stairs once more. I ran to get my reindeer back. The class bully got lost.