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Binder - Mrs. Bush's Press Clips and Photos, Afghanistan, India and Pakistan, 03/02/2006-03/04/2006 [1] - [2]

Mrs. Bush's Press Clips & Photos
Afghanistan, India and Pakistan

March 2-4, 2006
Mrs. Anita McBride



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Press Clips

Afghanistan

Newsday

February 27, 2006

HEADLINE: Afghanistan Not Part of Bush's Itinerary

BYLINE: Associated Press

WASHINGTON -- Will President Bush go to war-rattled Afghanistan when he visits India and Pakistan this week? The White House isn't saying, but there's a lot of speculation here and in South Asia that he will. Both Vice President Dick Cheney and **Laura Bush** have visited Afghanistan.

"Even if we were going to other countries, we would announce that at an appropriate time -- not before," White House press secretary Scott McClellan said Monday.

Bush leaves Tuesday, first for India and then to Pakistan, which shares a border with Afghanistan.

Security tensions already are high for Bush's trip to South Asia, and a stop in Afghanistan would heighten those concerns even further because of the risk posed by al-Qaida and Taliban militants. More than 200 U.S. personnel have died in the Afghan conflict since the United States invaded the country in late 2001.

The size of the U.S. force in Afghanistan is in flux. Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld announced in December that the number would shrink from about 19,000 at the time to about 16,000 by the summer.

Marvin Weinbaum, a former State Department analyst for Pakistan and Afghanistan, said Bush likely would confine any visit to heavily guarded Bagram Air Base north of Kabul.

"He has to go," Weinbaum said at Brookings Institution briefing on the president's trip. "He's in the neighborhood. **Laura Bush** went. Can he not go if **Laura Bush** took the chance and was more exposed actually -- not much more, but more exposed than the president will certainly be?"

Associated Press Online

March 1, 2006

HEADLINE: Bush Makes Surprise Visit to Afghanistan

BYLINE: Terence Hunt, AP White House Correspondent

President Bush made a surprise visit to Afghanistan on Wednesday, flying here secretly to support its fledgling government in the face of rising violence from al-Qaida and Taliban militants.

Bush's entourage flew into the city from Bagram Air Base in a flotilla of heavily armed helicopters. Two door gunners on a press helicopter fired off a short burst of machine gun fire at unknown targets as the aircraft flew low and fast over barren countryside.

Bush arrived safely at the presidential palace where he was greeted by Afghanistan's leader Hamid Karzai. The two men walked down a red carpet past a military honor guard to begin their meetings.

"Welcome the president to Afghanistan," Karzai said as they paused for photographs.

Eight weeks ago when Bush signed off on the India-Pakistan visit he was presented with the option of also going to Afghanistan, said White House press secretary Scott McClellan.

The White House closely guarded the secret, but there was widespread speculation that he would make the stop in Afghanistan.

"This is an opportunity to show our support for a good friend and ally and emerging democracy," McClellan said. "We stand firmly with the people of Afghanistan as they are charting their own future."

While Bush and Karzai met, their wives, **Laura Bush** and Zinat Karzai met over lunch with other women.

Bush also was to preside over a ceremonial ribbon-cutting for the U.S. Embassy. Before leaving Afghanistan, Bush was to get a pep talk to troops back at Bagram Air Base.

It was Bush's second visit to a war front. His first was a secret trip to have Thanksgiving Dinner in 2003 with U.S. troops in Iraq.

Speaking of secrecy concerns, McClellan said, "There are security precautions that were taken and we are confident in the security precautions that have been taken. One of those was not informing you of the trip until now."

The United States invaded Afghanistan after the terrorist attacks of Sept 11, 2001, to unseat the Taliban regime that harbored Osama bin-Laden and his terrorist training camps.

Despite intense manhunts and a multimillion dollar reward, bin-Laden remains at large, believed

to be in hiding in the rugged border area of Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The president and his wife Laura stepped off Air Force One at the air base under a bright, sunny sky against a background of snowcapped mountains. Secret Service agents were deployed around the plane with automatic weapons.

There are about 19,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld has said the number will be reduced to about 16,000 by summer.

It was Bush's first trip to Afghanistan, but Vice President Dick Cheney has been here.

Bush flew into Afghanistan on what was supposed to have been a flight to India, where tens of thousands gathered in New Delhi to protest his visit.

The United States and India were bargaining over the terms of a landmark nuclear agreement even as Bush made his way to New Delhi for the first visit there of his presidency.

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said sticking points remained in the way of an agreement and singled out one particularly contentious subject.

"The one thing that is absolutely necessary is that any agreement would assure that once India has decided to put a reactor under safeguard that it remain permanently under safeguard," she said.

Rice and national security adviser Stephen Hadley briefed reporters on Air Force One as Bush flew from Washington to a refueling stop in Shannon, Ireland.

The provision Rice cited would prevent India from transferring a reactor from civilian to military status and thus exempting it from international inspections.

Bush and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh signed an agreement in July that would provide India with nuclear fuel for the country's booming but energy-starved economy. But the pact, which faces some political opposition in both countries, hinges on determining how to separate India's civilian and military nuclear facilities.

Rice said she was uncertain whether there would be an agreement during Bush's trip but said the success or failure of his visit wouldn't be determined by that. "We're still working on it," she said. "Obviously it would be an important breakthrough" for the United States and India.

"We very much would like to have a deal," she said. "We are continuing to work on it." She expressed confidence that if no deal results from this trip, the U.S. and would get one at a later date.

During the refueling stop, Bush shook hands and posed for pictures with U.S. Marines on their way to Kuwait. The young men, in camouflage uniforms, lined up to shake hands with the commander in chief.

Rice said that India's neighbor and nuclear rival, Pakistan, would not qualify for the same sort of nuclear treatment as New Delhi. "Pakistan is not in the same place as India," Rice said. "I think everybody understands that."

The United States says India has an unblemished record on nuclear proliferation and has not sold its technology to any outsiders. Pakistan, on the other hand, has acknowledged it has secretly sold nuclear technology to a number of countries.

Deutsche Presse-Agentur

March 1, 2006

HEADLINE: 3RD LEAD: Bush says bin Laden will be "brought to justice"

US President George W. Bush Wednesday made a surprise visit to Afghanistan Wednesday and said he was confident al-Qaeda leader Osama Bin Laden would be "brought to justice."

The US president also stressed that Iran must not be allowed to develop a nuclear weapon.

"I am confident that he (bin Laden) will be brought to justice," Bush said, adding that US, Afghan and Pakistani forces were making progress in dismantling the al-Qaeda network.

He was addressing a joint press conference with his Afghan counterpart, Hamid Karzai, after a bilateral meeting at the presidential palace.

Referring to bin Laden's Taliban associate, Mullah Omar, Bush said it was only a matter of time until he too would be brought to justice.

Bush said he would discuss strategies to capture bin Laden in his talks with Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf.

Bush, who is on his first visit to South Asia as president, is scheduled to meet with Musharraf on Saturday.

In their talks at the presidential palace in Kabul, Bush and Karzai reportedly discussed operations against militants in Afghanistan and the reconstruction of the war-ravaged country.

The United States is the country with the largest contingent of troops in Afghanistan with 19,000 soldiers, but it wants to gradually reduce its forces in the volatile south to about 3,000.

The International Security Assistance Force, which now operates only in Kabul and northern and western Afghanistan, is to take more responsibility in the south.

Bush's brief visit to Afghanistan was not announced ahead of schedule because of security concerns.

At his press conference in Kabul, Bush said Iran must not be allowed to have a nuclear weapon because it would be the "most destabilizing thing" to happen in the region and the world.

Bush made his surprise visit to Afghanistan en route to India. He was scheduled to arrive in New Delhi on Wednesday evening, and is due to hold talks with the Indian leadership on a civilian nuclear deal, as well as accords in varied areas on Thursday.

Bush is accompanied on his three-nation trip by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and his wife, **Laura Bush**.

Chicago Tribune

March 2, 2006

HEADLINE: On Afghan soil, a vow to capture bin Laden;

Bush starts Asia tour with surprise visit

BYLINE: Mark Silva

Four years after the United States and allies toppled the terrorist-supporting Taliban regime of Afghanistan, President Bush arrived here for his first visit Wednesday to face questions about the still-elusive Osama bin Laden, who has found refuge in the region.

"I am confident he will be brought to justice," Bush said of the fugitive Al Qaeda leader during a news conference outside the Afghan presidential palace.

"What's happening is that we've got U.S. forces on the hunt for not only bin Laden but anybody who plots and plans with bin Laden," said Bush, making an unannounced stop at Bagram Air Base en route to New Delhi and Islamabad, Pakistan, this week. "It's not a matter of, if they are captured and brought to justice, but when they're captured and brought to justice."

It's a particularly sensitive question on the president's three-day trip to India and Pakistan, where bin Laden and chief lieutenants have long been suspected of hiding in a renegade region along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border that has remained resistant to Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf's campaign to track down terrorists. Bush will meet with Musharraf on Saturday in Islamabad.

Musharraf, an army general who seized power in a 1999 coup and quickly allied with the U.S. in the aftermath of the terrorist hijackings of Sept. 11, 2001, boasts of having captured 700 terrorists in cooperation with the U.S. Yet bin Laden, mastermind of the Sept. 11 attacks, remains the most notorious and elusive of a besieged Al Qaeda leadership.

"There are Afghan forces on the hunt, for not only bin Laden but those who plot and plan with him," said Bush, promising to raise the issue on his visit to Pakistan. "We've got Pakistan forces on the hunt. Part of my message to President Musharraf is that it's important we bring these people to justice."

During Bush's five-hour stop in Afghanistan, he met with President Hamid Karzai and other government leaders at the presidential palace, had lunch, appeared at a news conference, visited the U.S. Embassy and addressed American troops at Bagram. Vice President Dick Cheney and **First Lady Laura Bush** had made separate visits before the president's trip.

The White House did not announce the visit until Air Force One was en route, recognition of the security problems inherent in a presidential visit to what remains a war zone.

Nearly \$1 billion a month

For Bush, the emergence of a democratic government after the ouster of the Taliban in late 2001 is a showcase for what has become the central theme of his presidency: spreading democracy and

defeating tyranny worldwide. Yet unrest in Afghanistan, where the U.S. still spends nearly \$1 billion a month, remains a challenge for the American and Afghan governments.

"People all over the world are watching the experience here in Afghanistan," said Bush, standing alongside Karzai outside the presidential palace, where the leaders fielded a few questions from American and Afghan reporters. "As democracy takes hold, you're inspiring others, and that inspiration will cause others to demand their freedom. And as the world becomes more free, the world will become more peaceful."

Bush, who had vowed to capture bin Laden dead or alive after the terrorist assaults on New York and the Pentagon, faced questions from American and Afghan reporters about the failure to capture Al Qaeda's leader.

It is not the only contentious question that the president faces during this heavily guarded visit. He headed for New Delhi on Wednesday without an agreement between the U.S. and India to fulfill his administration's promise of supporting a growing civilian nuclear power industry in India.

As part of the agreement announced last summer, India has promised to separate its civilian nuclear power generators from its military nuclear weaponry program.

But questions remain concerning how many nuclear reactors will be within the military control of a nation that never signed the nuclear non-proliferation treaty and has tested atomic weapons twice, and how many civilian reactors India will yield to the oversight of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

The lack of a final deal on dividing India's nuclear program has prevented Bush from sending Congress an agreement it can use to consider changes in U.S. law that would allow assistance to India's civilian nuclear industry. Some lawmakers oppose the plan because of New Delhi's refusal to sign the non-proliferation treaty.

Bush has been careful in recent days to downplay expectations for a nuclear power agreement.

"Our relationship with India is broader than discussions about energy," Bush said in Afghanistan. "Ours is a strategic relationship. . . . This is a difficult issue. We'll continue to dialogue and work it. Hopefully we can reach an agreement. If not, we'll continue to work on it until we do."

Symbol of commitment

Bush made a ceremonial ribbon-cutting at an already open new U.S. Embassy that he offered as a symbol of commitment to Afghanistan.

"My message to the people of Afghanistan is, take a look at this building," Bush said. "It's a big, solid, permanent structure, which should represent the commitment of the United States of America to your liberty."

Later, at a large recreational building at Bagram, Bush received a rousing welcome from about 500 troops, mostly American. Bush, wearing a blue presidential windbreaker, spoke on a stage with a backdrop of GIs.

"The United States doesn't cut and run," Bush said in a brief speech at Bagram, underscoring themes he has been voicing in addresses across the U.S.

"The enemy cannot defeat us militarily," he said. "The only thing they can do is to kill innocent lives and try to shake our will. But they don't understand the United States of America. We will never be intimidated by thugs and assassins."

Bush and bin Laden continue war of words

In Afghanistan on Wednesday, President Bush said he was "confident" Osama bin Laden would soon be brought to justice. Since the Sept. 11 attacks Bush and bin Laden have had plenty to say about each other, with the Al Qaeda leader speaking via footage aired on Al Jazeera TV.

President Bush

Sept. 17, 2001:

"... When I was a kid I remember that they used to put out there in the Old West, a wanted poster. It said: 'Wanted, Dead or Alive.' All I want and America wants him brought to justice. That's what we want."

Oct. 11, 2001:

"... We'll get him running. We'll smoke him out of his cave, and we'll get him eventually."

Dec. 17, 2001:

"Osama bin Laden is going to be brought to justice. It may happen tomorrow, it may happen in a month, it may happen in a year. But he is going to be brought to justice."

Mar. 4, 2002:

"He's been awfully quiet. I don't know why. But I know he's on the run, if he's running at all. And I know there's no cave deep enough for Osama bin Laden."

Oct. 28, 2005:

"... What this man who grew up in wealth and privilege considers good for poor Muslims is

that they become killers and suicide bombers. He assures them that this is the road to paradise -- though he never offers to go along for the ride."

Jan. 25, 2006:

"... Listen to the words of Osama bin Laden and take him seriously. When he says he's going to hurt the American people again, or try to, he means it. I take it seriously and the people of the NSA (National Security Agency) take it seriously. And most of the American people take it seriously, as well."

Osama bin Laden

Oct. 7, 2001:

"Every Muslim after this event should fight for their religion, after the senior officials in the United States of America, standing with the head of the international infidels, U.S. President George W. Bush and his staff who went on a display of vanity with their men and horses."

Nov. 4, 2001:

"Whoever stands behind Bush has committed an act that stands as an annulment of their Islam. This war is primarily a religious war. The issue is a matter of beliefs and not as portrayed by Bush, a war against terrorism."

Dec. 27, 2001:

"Bush has used the word crusade. This is a crusade declared by Bush."

Late Oct. 2004

"The American economy bled, and Bush became embroiled in the swamps of Iraq that threaten his future."

On the same tape, bin Laden criticizes Bush for continuing to read the book "My Pet Goat" to school children in Florida while the Sept. 11 attacks were under way: "It appeared to him that a little girl's talk about her goat and its butting was more important than the planes and their butting of the skyscrapers."

That gave us three times the time we needed to carry out the operation, thanks be to God."

The Rutherford Institute

March 6, 2005

HEADLINE: Women, Rape and Death Penalty in Iran

BYLINE: John W. Whitehead

On January 6, 2006, the Republic of Iran sentenced a young woman to death for the so-called crime of defending herself against three male attackers. The case, that of 18-year-old Nazanin, presents the United States with an opportunity to take a stand for basic equality and women's rights.

In March 2005, Nazanin, who was 17 at the time, and her niece were attacked by three men while walking in a park in Tehran, the capital of Iran. When the men began throwing stones at them, the girls were abandoned by their boyfriends, who left them alone to defend themselves from the brutality. Out of fear and panic, the girls did the only thing they knew to do—try to run away. Yet despite their desperate attempts to escape the grasps of the three ill-minded men, the young girls were caught, thrown to the ground and forced upon by the strangers attempting to rape them. Acting on instinct, Nazanin tried to protect herself and her niece. Drawing a knife she kept hidden beneath her clothing to guard against this type of attack, Nazanin stabbed one of the men in the chest as he was forcing himself upon her. Although Nazanin persists that she merely intended to use the knife to force the man off her, the stabbing resulted in the rapist's death. Nazanin was subsequently arrested, charged and convicted for the death of the rapist and is sentenced to die by hanging.

Nazanin's plight is not uncommon in Iran, which has been criticized for its treatment of women and its use of capital punishment in a country where more women are reportedly executed per year than in any other country. Since 1979, when the Ayatollah Khomeini assumed power, Iran's penal system has been marked by so-called "Revolutionary Law," which is derived from Islamic and Sharia law. It is particularly brutal in its treatment of women, especially those who are found guilty of breaking the law and condemned to die for their purported crimes. And according to an Iranian doctor who has witnessed many state executions of women, women and girls are commonly raped by guards prior to their execution. Ostensibly, this practice ensures that the woman is not a virgin when she dies, thus preventing her from entering paradise.

Death sentences imposed on women in Iran are typically carried out by hanging or stoning. When a sentence calls for death by stoning, the woman is buried up to the shoulders, covered over the head and beaten to death with stones of a size dictated by Iranian law. Death by hanging typically involves either the use of a hydraulic crane or a low platform to ensure a slower, more painful death. A strong thin rope or steel cable in the form of a noose is placed around the neck to crush the larynx, inflicting as much pain as possible and prolonging the moment of death.

Such a brutal death is what awaits Nazanin unless the United States, the United Nations and other international agencies exercise their moral leadership and demand that the Iranian government grant her clemency. Indeed, the United States should lead the way in raising an outcry over Iran's inhumane treatment of Nazanin. In fact, America has long been a champion of human rights in word, if not always in deed. And although America's reputation as a defender of human rights has been tarnished by allegations of prisoner abuse at Guantanamo and Abu

Ghraib, Nazanin's plight presents the Bush Administration with an opportunity to stand by its much-avowed commitment to human rights. This is one important reason why at least limited diplomatic ties with despotic regimes should be maintained by the U.S. Otherwise, it renders the U.S. helpless to do anything in this kind of situation.

Just as international pressure succeeded in granting Sufiyatu Huseini clemency from an unjust death sentence, so the international community—led by the U.S.—must take on the burden of advocating Nazanin's cause. Huseini was charged by Nigerian officials with the crime of adultery after having been raped and was sentenced to death by stoning. However, as a result of international pressure and several months of negotiations, she was granted clemency.

As a signatory to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Iran must be challenged to stand by its commitments to respect the fundamental human rights of women and to treat all persons deprived of their liberty "with humanity and with respect for the inherent dignity of the human person."

First Lady **Laura Bush** has been vocal in speaking out against the severe repression and brutality of women in Afghanistan. She is to be commended for admonishing our nation to take a stand. As **Mrs. Bush** stated, "Civilized people throughout the world are speaking out in horror—not only because our hearts break for the women and children in Afghanistan, but also because in Afghanistan we see the world the terrorists would like to impose on the rest of us. All of us have an obligation to speak out. We may come from different backgrounds and faiths—but parents the world over love our children. We respect our mothers, our sisters and daughters. Fighting brutality against women and children is not the expression of a specific culture; it is the acceptance of our common humanity—a commitment shared by people of good will on every continent."

However, it's time to move past the rhetoric. Indeed, if people like **Laura Bush** are really sincere about what they're saying about women's rights around the world, then it is incumbent on them to act and to persuade her husband the president, a world leader, to act affirmatively in this situation.

What this means is that in order to truly end the horror being enacted against women in Iran, particularly on young Nazanin, it is incumbent upon the U.S. to act now. To remain silent about this horrific incident amounts to turning a blind eye and it is a travesty of justice that renders meaningless anything the United States has to say about women's rights.

The New York Times

March 6, 2006

HEADLINE: Trip Abroad Gives Bush a Respite From Domestic Woes

BYLINE: Elisabeth Bumiller

There were no questions about the Dubai ports deal. There was little talk of Vice President Dick Cheney's accidental shooting of a fellow quail hunter. The words "Iraq" and "Katrina" hardly came up at all.

Through five days and three countries last week, George W. Bush got a little of what beleaguered American presidents always look for on foreign trips: a chance to set aside problems at home.

True, the trip had troubles of its own. Anti-Bush riots led by Islamists exploded from Hyderabad north to Kashmir, Islamabad was in lockdown because of the risks of bringing the president into Osama bin Laden's backyard, and an American diplomat died in a suicide bombing in Karachi. But compared with Mr. Bush's most recent trips to South America and Asia -- one dominated by demonstrations led by President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela and the other by problems in Iraq -- the president's visit to the subcontinent was a relief for him.

India, where Mr. Bush spent two packed days, embraced him in a way the president had not experienced in a long time.

"He felt very warmly received," Andrew H. Card Jr., the White House chief of staff, said from the lawn of Islamabad's presidential palace on Saturday morning. The night before, in an open-air speech in New Delhi at a 16th-century fort, Mr. Bush said he had been "dazzled" by the spectacle of "this vibrant and exciting land."

This is not to say that all of India adores Mr. Bush, and its Muslim minority in particular is furious about Iraq. But over all, the United States is highly popular in India and Mr. Bush bestowed on the nation such an astonishing gift -- last week's nuclear deal -- that Indians greeted him like an American maharajah. Even before his arrival, a survey in the Indian newsweekly Outlook found that two-thirds of Indians "strongly" or "somewhat" regarded Mr. Bush as a friend of the country.

Mr. Bush, who can look miserable on foreign trips, often appeared moved and delighted as he raced around India. "I have been received in many capitals, but I have never seen a reception as grand as the one we just received," Mr. Bush said after a majestic arrival ceremony with horses and honor guards at Rashtrapati Bhavan, the 340-room pink and cream sandstone mansion built for the last of the British viceroys.

Rashtrapati Bhavan, now the home of the president of India, evokes all the romance and hubris of the dying Raj. But as evocative as the ceremony was for Mr. Bush, aides said he was more captivated by the India of the present -- a functioning democracy of a billion people, a counterweight to China, a huge market for American goods. One of the president's favorite stops on the trip, they said, was a meeting with entrepreneurs in Hyderabad, the booming high-tech

city.

"Yesterday I met with some Indian C.E.O.'s and American C.E.O.'s, kind of the old folks," Mr. Bush told a dozen men and women in their 20's and 30's at Hyderabad's Indian School of Business. "Today I'm meeting with the C.E.O.'s of tomorrow, the people that are going to help drive this great engine of economic prosperity for India -- for the good of the world, is how I view it."

India cooperated with exquisite spring weather -- it was only in the 80's in New Delhi, where lush gardens burst with dahlias and bougainvillea -- and huge headlines. "It's a Deal -- A Very Big Deal," screamed The Times of India across the front page on Friday morning, over a picture of Mr. Bush with his arm around the shoulders of the Indian prime minister, Manmohan Singh. The two had just announced the pact that would give India help with nuclear power for its energy needs while allowing it to continue to develop nuclear weapons -- a tough sell in a skeptical United States Congress, Mr. Bush acknowledged.

Indians made light of Mr. Bush's one faux pas, skipping a three-hour trip from New Delhi to the Taj Mahal, the tomb that a heartsick Mogul emperor built for his wife and still considered the world's greatest monument to love. "I am truly sorry that the president is not taking you to Taj Mahal this time," Mr. Singh said to **Laura Bush** as he toasted the first couple at a lunch on Thursday. "I hope he will be more chivalrous the next time you are here."

Mr. Bush bookended his trip to India with a surprise four-hour stop in Afghanistan and a 24-hour stay in Pakistan, where Mr. bin Laden is believed to be hiding in the remote tribal areas near the Afghan border. But Mr. Bush, the first American president to visit Afghanistan since President Eisenhower in 1959, and the first to visit Pakistan since President Clinton in 2000, bounced around Mr. bin Laden's terrain with defiance.

Unlike Mr. Clinton, who slipped into Islamabad for six hours on an unmarked military jet, Mr. Bush arrived with a roar on Air Force One. (Although Air Force One, the most recognizable 747 in the world, landed with its running lights off and shades drawn, making it a more difficult target for any ground-launched missile.) Mr. Bush also stayed the night at the fortress-like American ambassador's residence and took time out the next day to take a few swings with a cricket bat with students from the Islamabad College for Boys.

"Terrorists and killers are not going to prevent me from going to Pakistan," he had vowed in New Delhi.

Mr. Bush got home at 5 a.m. on Sunday and returned to his normal life, going to church later that morning, then taking a bicycle ride. On Monday, he would face Iraq, the ports deal, fallout from Katrina, rebellious Republicans, approval ratings in the mid-30's -- and a Mr. bin Laden still on the loose.

His trip to the subcontinent was over.

India

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WebIndia123

February 27, 2006

HEADLINE: **Laura Bush** to visit NGO, interact with children

US First Lady Laura Bush will visit the Prayas Juvenile Aid Centre here and interact with students at the alternative educational centre run by the organisation on the second day of her visit Thursday.

Rajib Haldar, the director of Prayas, a leading NGO working for the welfare of the street and neglected children, said the wife of the US president would spend over an hour at the complex in south Delhi's Tughlaqabad area that also houses an educational centre and a shop run by the inmates.

"She will interact with the students who were earlier victims of drug and human trafficking. She has also wished to know about our functioning and successful venture in the field of juvenile justice. We are quite anxious and happy to comply with her wishes," Haldar told IANS. He said Bush will share her views on how to improve the various vocational courses like computer classes, tailoring and typing that the NGO runs.

She will also visit Sanchay Prayas, a shop run by juvenile girls of the NGO.

"It's an honour for Prayas to host the **US First Lady**. It's a great recognition and definitely a morale booster for all of us, who have been working on the field of development.

"Unless we Indians give enough attention towards developmental work, economic benefit holds no meaning. I think March 2, 11 a.m. will be the time of our reckoning in the global sphere," said an elated Haldar, who would love to see the president accompany his wife.

Other than work, the **US First Lady** and her delegation will be treated to Rajasthani folk dances performed by children at the centre.

Prayas, which started in 1988, looks after approximately 10,000 neglected and orphaned children in Delhi and runs several educational centres across the city.

DNA India

February 28, 2006

HEADLINE: The better half will regale kids

BYLINE: Sanghita Singh

NEW DELHI: While US President George W Bush comes armed with nuclear deals and energy pacts on his mind, **First Lady Laura Bush**'s maiden visit to India is going to be all about spending time with under-privileged children, destitute women and even visiting the sets of the Indian version of Sesame Street, her favourite children's television show.

During her stint in the Capital, **Laura Bush** will visit Prayas, an NGO that supports a children's home in Tughlakabad as well as Jivan Jyoti, a home for mentally challenged children run by the Missionaries of Charity at Jangpura.

Laura Bush, who is actively involved in issues of national and global concern, with particular emphasis on education, health care, and human rights, had evinced an interest to spend time with under privileged children in India and to understand their problems.

"The children are extremely happy at the prospect of having the **First Lady** amongst them and have prepared a Rajasthani folk dance number that they will present before of her," informs an official at Prayas. During her hour-long visit on March 2, **Laura Bush** will go to the education centre and the skilled training centre before joining an informal round-table conversation with the children. "We have also worked out a meeting with destitute and slum women as the **First Lady** has evinced a keen interest in understanding issues pertaining to education and women rights," informs a spokesperson of Prayas. The women have made a special Madhubani painting for the US President's wife, which they are going to offer as a token of appreciation from their side.

At Jivan Jyoti, **Laura Bush** will spend time with the mentally challenged children. "Since these are special children, we cannot do any preparations. Mrs Bush will come here and spend sometime interacting with the children," informs the Sister Superior at the institution.

Mrs Bush is going to spend time at the Pogo channel studio, where Gali Gali Sim Sim, the Indian adaptation of Sesame Street, is being shot.

NDTV.com

March 1, 2006

HEADLINE: Shelter kids looking forward to Laura's visit

BYLINE: Karishma Rao Erraballi



The children of Shelter Habitat, an NGO in the Capital, are literally counting the minutes till Thursday when they are scheduled to meet **First Lady Laura Bush**.

Sunita is busy practicing her English, as she knows it will come in handy when she meets the **First Lady**.

"I very happy that Mrs Bush will be coming to meet us," she said.

Although US President George W Bush and politics may dominate the headlines, it's Mrs Bush who matters here.

"We are very excited. Prayas is being done up, fresh paint is being applied and we have all got new dresses," said Praveena, Shelter Habitat.

Star power

This NGO on the outskirts of Delhi is home to nearly 70 young girls who have been victims of abuse.

Here, they are looked after and rehabilitated. The list of high-profile visitors who have visited the shelter includes former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the Serbian Princess and the Queen of Bhutan.

But the **First Lady** brings a new degree of star power.

"We are going to put up a dance, a welcome song and are going to speak in English," said Shona, Shelter Habitat.

'Desperate housewife'

Laura Bush with her charisma and her sense of humour has established herself as a **First Lady** who can steal the show.

She may live in the White House, but jokes that she's really just a "Desperate Housewife".

"I am married to the President of the United States and here is our typical evening: 9 o'clock and Mr Excitement here is sound asleep. And I'm watching Desperate Housewives," she said.

With this short speech packed with potshots at her husband, **Laura Bush** proved that she's

finally comfortable with being in the spotlight.

Conventional **First Lady**

In sharp contrast to her dynamic predecessor Hillary Clinton, **Laura Bush** spent her husband's first term playing what many described a conventional **First Lady** role.

But now, she's more open and more relaxed. The benefits, some say, of a second term that doesn't carry with it the pressure of a re-election.

America's 43rd **First Lady Laura Bush** is only the second to have a post-graduate degree, a master's in library science from the University of Texas.

Once a teacher, she now champions educational causes and in honour of her mother, a breast cancer survivor, she has also furthered women's health issues.

She also describes herself as a very hands-on mother to her 24-year-old twin daughters - Laura and Barbara - named after their grandmothers.

Agence France Presse -- English

March 1, 2006 Wednesday

HEADLINE: Snake-charmers scout Mughal fort for cobras ahead of Bush visit

Snake charmers have given the all clear for US President George W. Bush to go ahead with plans to deliver a speech from a medieval fort here during his three day India visit, officials said Wednesday.

City police roped in the snake charmers after curators of Purana Qila expressed concern that reptiles would gatecrash Bush's scheduled address Friday from the 16th century ramshackle fort.

"It was part of our drill to sanitise the fort as it is flanked by a porous zoo on one side and a large lake on the other and the president will be delivering his address from a lawn which has shrubs on its fringes," a senior police officer said.

The snake charmers, who are often accused of clandestinely trading in reptilian products despite a national ban, completed their search of the area on Monday but would sweep the Mughal-built edifice again Thursday, said the officer, who asked not to be named.

Experts, however, said it was wasteful exercise.

"At one point of time the Purana Qila teemed with various species of cobras but tourism and the city bustle have forced them into retreat, possibly into the zoo," said wildlife enthusiast R.P. Kataria.

"There could be water snakes in the lake but they are harmless," he said.

Security sweeps for Bush and his entourage have extended to New Delhi's drainage system, which has been scoured for explosives, another official said.

New Delhi has placed its entire police force of 71,000 officers on high alert and sealed off the hotel where Bush and his entourage will stay during the trip, the second to India by a US president in six years.

The Maurya Sheraton reserved for Bush and his team has been declared a no-fly zone and the army has positioned batteries of anti-aircraft guns as a precaution against airborne attacks.

On Wednesday, surveillance helicopters flew overhead as detectives carried out surprise checks of budget hotels and guest houses as part of the stepped up measures, a police spokesman said.

Special security is also being provided to US **First Lady Laura Bush** who will visit a facility Thursday in the New Delhi suburb of Noida, one of northern India's most crime-prone districts.

VOA News
March 2, 2006

HEADLINE: **Laura Bush** Focuses on Children During Indian Visit



U.S. **First Lady Laura Bush** focused on children's issues on her first full day in India, Thursday.

She visited the television studio where the Indian version of the children's show "Sesame Street" is taped to record a guest appearance. After chatting with several characters on the program **Mrs. Bush** helped one learn to count to five in English.

She also met with boys and girls at a center providing shelter and education to neglected children.

One stop the **First Lady's** schedule will not include is the famous Taj Mahal. In a luncheon speech, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said he was sorry President Bush was not taking her to the romantic landmark, and hoped he would be more chivalrous on a future visit.

Associated Press Worldstream

March 2, 2006

HEADLINE: U.S. **First Lady** visits set of Indian "Sesame Street"

BYLINE: Neelesh Misra

Big Bird and Elmo weren't there, but U.S. **First Lady Laura Bush** met the 5-year-old heroine of the Indian version of "Sesame Street" on Thursday before heading off to visit charities on her first visit to India.

After attending a ceremonial reception with cavalry soldiers, a gun salute and a military honor guard for U.S. President George W. Bush at New Delhi's presidential palace, **Laura Bush** broke away from the presidential entourage.

Her first stop was Film City, an enclave of television studios in New Delhi's eastern suburb of Noida, where she took part in a film shoot of "Galli Galli Sim Sim," an Indian take on the hugely popular puppet show. The episode is expected to reach an estimated 40 million households when it airs in the coming months.

The show is centered on Chamki, a girl who lives by herself on a narrow street with her friends, and is partly funded by the U.S. government. It's aimed at India's 157 million children under age six.

While Big Bird and Elmo, the hugely popular international stars of Sesame Street, aren't on the show, there is a giant, colorful lion named Bhoombah, who believes he is a descendant of one of India's many former kings and loves "Bhangra," an Indian music and dance form.

At the show's set designed to look like a middle-class Indian neighborhood Bush, along with Indian social activist Nafisa Ali, met Chamki at a phone booth that doubles as a cybercafe. Then they stopped outside a house to greet Bhoombah, who asked in his gruff voice how the **First Lady** was doing.

"I'm doing great," replied Bush, who was wearing a striped gray suit and green shirt. "I love to be with characters from Sesame Street."

Afterward, she shot her scene with Chamki, who sat on a swing hanging from the branch of a tree as Bush and Ali helped her learn to count.

It took two takes, and then Bush headed for "Prayas," a home for adolescent boys and girls, that helps care for 50,000 neglected street children.

There, she was greeted by children dressed in the bright flowing robes of the Indian state of Rajasthan. The children danced on a floor covered in marigolds and rose petals and sang songs, including one by girls celebrating their beauty.

After checking out the center's computer training, typing and beauty classes, she sat down for a question and answer session with some of the children.

One girl asked if American women faced the same kind of discrimination as Indian women.

"A little bit, not as much anymore," Bush replied. "Now more women are in college and more women than men are graduating."

A girl who had been sexually abused as a child asked the **First Lady** if there was child abuse in America. There was, Bush told the girl, explaining that such children were removed from their homes for their safety.

The **First Lady** will wind up her outing with a trip to a center run by Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity. Mother Teresa, who started her international order in the eastern city of Calcutta in 1950, became a global icon of humanitarian causes before her death in 1997.

The U.S. president and his wife met with Mother Teresa's successor, Sister Nirmala, in New York in September 2004.

Associated Press Online

March 2, 2006

HEADLINE: Singh Gives Bush Grief Over Taj Mahal Snub

BYLINE: Deb Riechmann

Add India's prime minister to the list of people giving President Bush a hard time for not visiting the country's famed Taj Mahal.

As the leaders toasted each other and their nation's ties Thursday before lunch alongside several hundred guests, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh briefly paused and addressed Bush's wife, Laura.

"I am truly sorry the president is not taking you to Taj Mahal this time," Singh said. "I hope he will be more chivalrous next time you are here."

The president said Singh was not alone in his disappointment. "I've been hearing about it from Laura ever since I told her that we weren't going," Bush said.

The majestic 17th-century white marble mausoleum is a monument of love, built by Mogul Emperor Shah Jahan in memory of his favorite wife, Mumtaz Mahal.

But it's in Agra, 130 miles east of New Delhi, a distance that apparently was deemed too far for the president, even to demonstrate his affection for the **First Lady**.

In an interview with Indian reporters before the trip, Bush blamed the decision on his scheduler and said he'd have to come back to India to make up for it.

"Look, if I were the scheduler, perhaps I'd be doing things differently," he said. "But you want me doing one thing. I'll be the president, we've got the scheduler being the scheduler. I'm going to miss a lot of the really interesting parts of your great country."

Besides nuclear diplomacy, Bush also succeeded at mango diplomacy.

The sweet, juicy staple of Indian chutneys and dessert tables was a feature of the joint agreement between the two countries. Bush said the United States would reopen its market to Indian mangoes, banned 17 years ago over concerns about pesticide use.

"The United States is looking forward to eating Indian mangoes," Bush said as both leaders stood side-by-side before the media in a garden at Hyderabad House.

Now, Indian farmers will instead irradiate the fruit to kill any pests, making them fit for consumption in the eyes of U.S. agricultural officials. The fruit should again be available in U.S. markets in about 18 months.

Bush followed through on his promise perhaps sooner than he thought. On the lunch menu were fresh mangoes, served with creme brulee.

To honor India's independence leader, M.K. Gandhi, Bush and his wife, Laura, followed Indian tradition to the letter by kicking off their shoes.

Bush, in black socks, and **Mrs. Bush** in white slippers, laid a wreath at a memorial to Gandhi and bowed their heads for a moment of silence. They then walked around the slab of black marble, marking the spot where Gandhi was cremated in 1948, for the customary tossing of flower petals.

But it's doubtful that what happened next is in any of the protocol books.

An Indian photographer apparently didn't get the coveted shot of Bush throwing colorful petals on the memorial, and so called for a redo. With a somewhat quizzical look, Bush complied, and then threw even more petals to make sure photographers had snapped what they needed.

Bush worried about reaching a nuclear deal. The Secret Service was worried about keeping him safe. Demonstrators worried about everything from globalization to gay rights.

But for tens of thousands of local teenagers, Bush's visit meant only one worry: test stress.

India is an exceedingly education-conscious country, and students and parents particularly in the growing middle class are known to tie themselves into emotional knots over major exams.

So for days, Indian officials and newspapers have warned that New Delhi would be a commuter's nightmare during Bush's stay, and that students should plan ahead to make sure they weren't late for the national Board exams.

The rigorous three-hour tests are held over a series of days in various subjects for high school students in grade 10 and 12. On Thursday, 10th-grade students faced their social science exams.

Newspapers printed maps showing alternate routes. Some even listed phone numbers for counselors who could soothe particularly angst-ridden test takers.

"We were worried," said 15-year-old Kadi Panmei. "In fact, we took another route today to escape the jam and I reached the center on time."

In the end, there was far less traffic disruption than expected.

Agence France Presse -- English

March 2, 2006

HEADLINE: US **First Lady** makes appearance on Indian "Sesame Street"

When the Indian version of the hit US kids' show "Sesame Street" airs on television later this year, Indian pre-schoolers can learn to count to five along with **First Lady Laura Bush**.

The **First Lady**, who accompanied President George W. Bush on his maiden trip to India, followed a separate schedule Thursday that focused on children's issues, including a visit to a TV studio where the show is in production.

As Bush toured the Indian capital and sealed a landmark civilian nuclear cooperation deal with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, the **First Lady** was complimenting an Indian muppet on his multicolored dreadlocks.

"I like it," she told the storytelling character Aanchoo after he asked her what she thought of his hairdo.

In another scene she greeted the audience in Hindi and then helped the educational show's main character, a little girl called Chamki, count to five in English.

"This is my new friend -- **Mrs. Bush**," Chamki told the audience, according to a copy of the script of "Galli Galli Sim Sim," the Indian name of the show. "Galli" means alley in Hindi.

The Indian show is partly funded by the United States Agency for International Development as part of its drive to create universal primary education worldwide.

After the taping **Laura Bush** visited a home providing shelter and education to abused adolescents and fielded questions about the United States.

"I want to congratulate each one of you for studying hard and changing your life," she told youngsters at the center.

Because of the US president's packed schedule, the **First Lady** will miss out on a visit to India's famed monument to love, the Taj Mahal, during their three-day trip to India.

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh apologized on her husband's behalf for the failure to show her the monument.

"I am truly sorry the president is not taking you to Taj Mahal this time and I hope he will be more chivalrous the next time you are here," Singh said in a lunchtime speech.

Newind Press

March 2, 2006

HEADLINE: Manmohan teases Bush for not going to Taj Mahal

BYLINE: Reuters

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Manmohan Singh could not resist teasing US President George W Bush on Thursday for not taking his wife, Laura, to the Taj Mahal on his brief trip to India.

Bush has blamed "the George W Bush schedulers" for not arranging a trip for him to the monument to love, although the truth is Bush is never much of a tourist on overseas travel.

In toast remarks during a US-Indian luncheon, Singh told Mrs Bush: "I'm truly sorry that the President is not taking you to Taj Mahal this time. I hope he will be more chivalrous the next time you are here."

The audience chuckled, then Bush took the microphone and said the sore subject had come up at home.

"Mr Prime Minister, I'm sorry you brought up the Taj Mahal. I've been hearing about it from Laura ever since I told her that we weren't going," Bush said.

"So we pledge to be invited back and come back and we'd love to see the magnificent part of your country that we will be unable to see this trip."

The Taj was built by emperor Shahjehan as a tomb for his lost wife. The white marble structure on the banks of the sacred Yamuna river took 20,000 workers 22 years to build.

The 350-year-old Taj, one of the wonders of the world, is just a short drive from Delhi.

Rediff India Abroad

March 02, 2006

HEADLINE: 'The queen of America had come'

Laura Bush was early.

It was just by five minutes, but when powerful dignitaries arrive before time, it does leave a mark.

So when the American **First Lady** arrived in her gleaming limousine at Prayas, the home for abused children in Tughlaqabad in Delhi, she had made the perfect entry.



After that, the hour-long visit went like a dream.

Prayas had seen other important guests before -- like the princess of Bhutan, former American deputy secretary of state Richard Armitage, Bollywood actors Manisha Koirala and Jackie Shroff -- but never had someone of the stature of **Laura Bush** come calling.

Obviously, Seema, Arti and Shilpa, who had to welcome her with bouquets, were nervous. They had stood in position for over an hour to make sure everything went as rehearsed.

Arti, 18, a mute girl, explained in sign language that they had prepared for seven days for the big day and would have liked to see Mrs Bush stay longer with them.

Seema, the oldest of the three, an alumnus of Prayas, had travelled from a shelter home in Kolkata for the event.

"She was so cute, spoke so gently and was so well dressed. India when in the name of fashion girls wear such short clothes, I think she kept in mind the Indian sensitivity and worn clothes that covered both her arms and legs," Seema said.



Shilpa, aqll of eight years old, the youngest and most shy, pulled the gift from her lap that the **First Lady** gave her -- a visiting card which said '**Laura Bush**' and a light blue diary on which was embossed 'The Seal of the President of the United States.'

Another group of children had practiced for a dance performance for **Laura Bush**. Decked in traditional finery in tune with a Rajasthani theme, the kids performed a folk dance soon after the bouquets were given to Mrs Bush.

"She loved our dance, said thank you to us and we said welcome," said a little girl through her rather large nath (traditional nose ring extending from the nose to the ears). "You know who she

was?" another sprightly girl questioned precociously. "America ki rani aayi thi (the queen of America had come)!"

Laura Bush was accompanied by Jeannie Mulford, wife of American Ambassador to India David Mulford. Security, naturally, had been strict. US security personnel had been going in out of the shelter for weeks and the staff and children had been asked to be present by 7.30 am, almost four hours in advance.



The names of all children along with details like father's name, home address, date of birth, colour of skin had been sent to the US embassy and identity cards had been issued to all children by Prayas. The staff were given security clearance by the Delhi police and had to wear IDs bearing their names, blood group, date of joining and addresses.

After the traditional welcome, **Laura Bush** saw the various vocational training courses run by the shelter and then went on to the most important part of her morning programme – a roundtable with Sartaj, 12, Karishma, 12, Komal, 14 and Tabassum, 16.

"Good Morning, I'm **Laura Bush**," this is how she introduced herself," said Tabassum. "She said she liked talking with children and had been a librarian."

The girls asked her few questions and her answers were translated to them in Hindi. "We asked her if there was discrimination between boys and girls in America like it was in India. She said there was but there were fewer cases."

"We asked her whether poor children found it difficult to go to school like it was in India and she said that sometimes teachers went to childrens' home to teach or kids went to special centres to study," Tabassum said.

After some coaxing, a quiet Kashmira said: "We asked if children in America became independent at the age of 15. She told us that it did happen but if the kids were not independent by then, their parents looked after them till they became 18."

One child who had suffered abuse wanted to know if children suffered rape and abuse in America.

The **First Lady** admitted there were problems of trafficking, child neglect and abuse. Most of such exploited children received foster care support.

"We liked her very much. She looked so pretty, her makeup was perfect and she wore such nice clothes," said Komal.

The **First Lady** gave the children diaries, White House mementoes, soft toys and sweets. While Prayas gave Mrs Bush a candlestand and a Madubani painting.

After spending an hour and eight minutes at Prayas, **Laura Bush** signed the visitors book and wrote: 'With thanks for your devotion to children and with much love. **Laura Bush**'

When the girls had woken up at 6 am they had been nervous but by noon they were a confident and delighted bunch. They wanted to share their experience with everyone who asked them about it and wanted their pictures shot. They danced to dhols long after **Laura Bush** had left and got an American to join them too.

Her husband may be the most powerful man on earth. He may have signed a landmark nuclear deal with India. But here at Prayas the star was a former librarian named **Laura Bush**.

Rediff India Abroad

March 2, 2006

HEADLINE: Laura's day out in Delhi

US President George W Bush and **Laura Bush** left the Rashtrapati Bhavan for Rajghat shortly after 9 this morning.

From Rajghat, President Bush will leave for Hyderabad House near the Rashtrapati Bhavan.

Laura Bush will speed east across town to Noida in Uttar Pradesh. She is headed for the television studios at Film City in Noida to participate in an episode of the Indian version of Sesame Street, which is soon to air on Indian television. She will meet the little girl who stars in this desi version of the popular American children's television show.

This was confirmed by David Kennedy, press secretary at the US embassy.

She will also visit Prayas, a home for abused children in Tughlaqabad, where she will interact with five children for about an hour. Mrs Bush will visit Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity too.

Laura will also accompany the US President to Hyderabad tomorrow morning.

Express India

March 2, 2006

HEADLINE: Kalam to Bush: We are the world

BYLINE: Shiv Aroor & Nitya Rao

THIS 1985 chartbuster will set the tone when US President George W Bush bites into ginger prawns and American pineapple salad with French dressing at the Rashtrapati Bhavan banquet tomorrow evening.

Written by Michael Jackson and Lionel Ritchie, and sung by over 40 of America's top popstars to raise funds for Ethiopia, this number is not a random selection. As Cyndi Lauper's words waft across the Mughal Gardens— Let us realise that a change can only come when we stand together as one—the theme is clear: the new warmth in Indo-US ties.

But before President A P J Abdul Kalam receives his US counterpart, PM Manmohan Singh will have hosted a special luncheon for President and Mrs Bush at the Taj Palace's Durbar Hall.

Laura Bush is expected to join her husband after her morning engagements.

The afternoon banquet that will feature no chicken dish is being prepared by Hemant Oberoi, Group Chef, Luxury Division, Taj Hotels group. "The brief specified that this was to be a working lunch, and that it was to cover all aspects of regional Indian cuisine," said Oberoi who has been flown in from Mumbai.

At the Rashtrapati Bhavan, three of the 11 items on the menu will be American dishes, including red cabbage, pineapple with French dressing and broccoli soup that President Bush is known to relish. And, of course, the all-American peach melba, a favourite of the **First Lady**.

Chicken will stay off the menu again and instead, be replaced by tandoori fish, mutton kebabs, mutton korma, dal bukhara and curried vegetables to be relished with rice and a choice of rotis. Hosting Presidential banquets in the Mughal Gardens is a new development — it began as an experiment when French President Jacques Chirac visited last month. An officer on Kalam's staff said: "Chirac loved it. It'll soon be hot, so we decided to make the best of the pleasant evenings."

Seattle Post-Intelligencer

Thursday, March 2, 2006

HEADLINE: Singh gives Bush grief over Taj Mahal snub

BYLINE: AP

NEW DELHI -- Add India's prime minister to the list of people giving President Bush a hard time for not visiting the country's famed Taj Mahal.

As the leaders toasted each other and their nation's ties Thursday before lunch alongside several hundred guests, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh briefly paused and addressed Bush's wife, Laura.

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Bush followed through on his promise perhaps sooner than he thought. On the lunch menu were fresh mangoes, served with creme brulee.

To honor India's independence leader, M.K. Gandhi, Bush and his wife, Laura, followed Indian tradition to the letter by kicking off their shoes.

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Hindustan Times

March 2, 2006

HEADLINE: And Laura goes shooting

BYLINE: Moushumi Das Gupta

With Chamki, Aanchoo and Boombah

LAURA BUSH has won a new set of pals — Chamki, Googly, Aanchoo and Boombah — all muppets. On Thursday, the US first lady acted in an episode of Gali Gali Sim Sim, an Indian adaptation of the hit US TV series for pre-schoolers, Sesame Street. And she instantly hit it off with her co-stars, particularly Chamki, the five-year-old girl muppet. Here is how the exchange went:

Chamki: "I just got to know that we all have different ways of counting but the interesting thing is that we all love counting. Isn't it so?" (Laura nods)

Chamki: "Now, listen to how Mrs Bush counts."

Laura: "One, two, three, four and five."

Though the shoot (at Noida) was over in just five minutes, the muppets got some more time with her.

"She taught me counting till 5," said Chamki. Aanchoo, the story-teller muppet, said: "Laura admired my long hair." As for Boombah the lion, well, he was totally bowled over.

Gali Gali Sim Sim will go on air in July (on Cartoon Network and Pogo).

BBC Worldwide Monitoring

March 2, 2006

HEADLINE: Bush apologizes for not taking Laura to India's Taj Mahal - PTI

Text of report by Indian news agency PTI

New Delhi, 2 March: I am sorry. Maybe next time.

This is what President George W. Bush promised to his wife Laura Bush about paying a visit to the Taj Mahal which they could not make this time round.

"I am sorry for not making it to the Taj Mahal. I have been hearing about it from Laura for several years now. We will come back ... [agency ellipsis] and we will be able to see the magnificent Taj Mahal," Bush said in response to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's remarks that he was "truly sorry" that the US president could not take his wife to the Taj Mahal this time.

At the banquet here, Singh told the First Lady "I am truly sorry that the president is not taking you to Taj Mahal this time! I hope he will be more chivalrous the next time you are here!"

The entire exchange between Bush and Singh evoked laughter and applause from the whole lot of VIP guests present at the banquet.

Hindustan Times

March 2, 2006

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THE WASHINGTON TIMES

March 3, 2006

HEADLINE: Bush praises India's tolerance

BYLINE: Joseph Curl

NEW DELHI -- President Bush, declaring "I believe in Almighty God," yesterday praised India's religious leaders for recognizing the importance of discussing respectfully the differences among their faiths to promote peace.

"We have just had a -- a very important discussion about the role of religion, not only in India, but the role that religion can play in helping the world become a more peaceful place," Mr. Bush said after meeting with nine leaders from five religions.

"One of the things that struck me during the conversation is, in India, is -- it's a country that recognizes the importance of religion and welcomes interfaith dialogue; understands the importance of faith, and understands the importance of people of faith, discussing thoughts and views that are -- that are deep in their hearts," Mr. Bush said.

Although the meeting was closed to the press, the Hindustan Times newspaper in New Delhi reported that Mr. Bush told the nine men that "the world can have peace only if people of religion live together in peace, and India is a good example of that."

The men he met with include Ammar Rizvi, a Shia Muslim scholar; the Rev. James Massey, a scholar from Punjab who specializes in India's lower castes; the Rev. Dominic Emmanuel, spokesman for the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India; Sardar Tarlochan Singh, a Sikh former chairman of the National Commission on Minorities; and Daboom Tulku, representing the Dalai Lama.

Each participant got three minutes to speak at the meeting, which ran 20 minutes past schedule. Mr. Bush opened the meeting by declaring himself "a firm believer and a Methodist."

According to the Times of India, Mr. Singh said Mr. Bush told the Indians he had "come to listen to the views of all religious representatives to further my own belief in India's plurality and religious freedom."

The meeting occurred as tens of thousands of communists, leftists, students and angry Muslims poured into the streets of India's capital yesterday in a noisy demonstration to protest Mr. Bush's foreign policy, marching to the city's center hub and chanting "Bush go back."

"We hate George Bush. He is the real terrorist," said a young man, who would not give his name but identified himself as Muslim. "He is against us, against Islam. But we will win."

Some in the throng carried signs that read: "Hands off Iraq and Afghanistan" and "No to U.S. occupation."

"George Bush, he is an enemy of freedom," said Piara Singh, standing in a dusty field holding a sign for CPI, the Communist Party of India.

Mr. Bush noted that India, the world's largest democracy that is mostly Hindu but has more than 140 million Muslims, is able to bridge religious gaps.

"Just look around the table and you'll see different religions represented. But everybody around the table also was so proud to be in India. In other words, their nationalism was equally important then, as their religion," Mr. Bush said.

Less than a mile away from the protests, Mr. Bush and first lady **Laura Bush** attended a wreath-laying ceremony honoring nationalist leader and peace activist Mohandas K. Gandhi at the site of his cremation in 1948. By Indian custom, the president and **Mrs. Bush** were both shoeless, a sign of respect.

The two bowed their heads for a moment of silence after the wreath was placed, then tossed flower petals on the memorial.

Security was extremely tight throughout the city, snarling already horrific traffic and forcing some of the thousands of scooter riders to drive off-road, cutting through dirt fields between streets.

Daily Record

March 3, 2006

HEADLINE: OFFTHE RECORD

BYLINE: Pat Roller

CREDIT where credit's due. Police in West Lothian have come up with an idea that could be a winner. But we fear it needs some work.

The Record reported yesterday that they are going to send daffodil-emblazoned cards to the people against whom they have some 600 outstanding warrants, mostly for unpaid fines.

So far, so good. But the message attached is pretty lame - something about the subjects needing to spring-clean their lives or be dragged into court.

Oh, come on. Clinton and Hallmark would hang their heads in shame. If they're going to send greeting cards to offenders, they should at least come up with a decent verse.

How about:

Hoy you, this isn't funny

When are you gonna give us our bleedin' money?

Or, more harshly:

If you don't stump up soon, you liah

You'll see the inside of a black mariah.

Or for those who don't turn up in court:

If you don't get your lazy ass shifted

Guess what? You're gonna get lifted.

Over to you, inspector.

SO, it's the weekend, or very nearly. As a service to readers, here's a chat-up line for you to try out. It comes from none other than Hollywood hunk Bruce Willis, here describing Halle Berry, his co-star in upcoming movie Perfect Stranger:

"It's almost like looking at an eclipse of the sun. You have to take a pin and poke it through an index card and look at her through that, because you could hurt yourself looking directly at her. "

As we say, feel free to try it out this weekend, gratis, free of charge. We only ask that you do the object of your desire the courtesy of making sure there is a handy loo nearby, upchuck, for the

use of.

ACTRESS Melina Kanakaredes, one of the stars of CSI:NY, has revealed that she was given her first name, which is Greek for "honey", after nurses in the hospital where she was born realised they couldn't say "Kanakaredes baby" and instead announced: "She's such a honey. "

Just think, if she'd been born in Glasgow, she would now be listed in the credits as Weedollsosheis Kanakaredes.

HERE'S America's First Lady, **Laura Bush** visiting the set of India's version of Sesame Street, while accompanying her hubby on his official visit to the country. Note the trademark forced smile that says for all the world that she'd quite like a break from glad-handing muppets.

No luck, Laura. You're back in the White House next week.

SPOTTED at the Mardi Gras in New Orleans this week . . . come on Ricky Gervais, own up, we know it's you.

ENGINEERS called to investigate the problem of the loose beam in the roof of the debating chamber at Holyrood were complaining yesterday about being forced to work around several awkward planks. Eventually, though, the MSPs went to the pub.

Times Of India Delhi

March 3, 2006

HEADLINE: 'She knew our culture, told us to stay in touch'

BYLINE: Rumu Banerjee

New Delhi: "Hello. My name is Karishma. I've been in Prayas for six months. I want to become a doctor." It may have taken the 12-year-old from Gorakhpur five days to learn her lines in English but on Thursday, when US First Lady came calling to Prayas, there was no sign of stage fright. Said Karishma, "I was a bit nervous earlier, but when I met her and saw how comfortable she is to talk to, I was okay."

In fact, "comfortable" seemed to be the adjective used most often by both staffers and inmates to describe the one-hour visit that culminated with the First Lady asking the girls to mail her back home. "She thanked me for the flowers and then told us to write to her once she returns," added Seema, a former inmate who had specially come down to "meet ma'm". "She obviously knew our culture too...she was wearing full sleeve clothes. It was very thoughtful," she added.

The visit, which officially started at 11.15 am with **Laura Bush**'s arrival, actually took off much earlier, with the police cordoning off the area by 8.30 am and sniffer dogs coming in for a check at 10. Said a student of a nearby institution: "We'd been asked to come early as the gates were closed by 9 am." In fact, security measures ensured that the gift for the First Lady, a Madhubani painting, was sent earlier. "We presented a candlestand to her instead when she came," added Rajib Halder, executive director, Prayas.

On her part, **Laura Bush** presented spiral diaries to all the children and White House memento to some staffers.

The day obviously belonged to the girls, who were thrilled by the visit. Said Sartaj, one of the five girls who interacted with Laura: "We asked her if there's trafficking in the US and she said yes, it's a problem there too." Questions on whether gender discrimination existed in the US also got a candid answer, though the First Lady was quick to point out that the situation of women was better there, with voting rights being conferred more than 95 years ago.

"The First Lady's visit was an attempt to understand the voluntary sector in India. She complimented us on the Prayas model which rehabilitates the victims of trafficking," added Amodh Kanth, founder of Prayas. For Karishma though, the meeting with Laura was much more than just a validation of her home's efforts. "I want to become a Hollywood star now," said the girl. Obviously, being in the limelight agrees with her.

The Washington Post

March 3, 2006

HEADLINE: U.S., India Reach Deal On Nuclear Cooperation;

With Fuel Imports Allowed, Arms Program Could Grow

BYLINE: Jim VandeHei and Dafna Linzer

President Bush and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh announced Thursday an unprecedented agreement that would provide U.S. nuclear power assistance to India while allowing the country to substantially step up its nuclear weapons production.

The agreement, which marked a significant break from decades of U.S. nuclear policy, highlighted the increasingly close relationship between the world's two largest democracies and enabled both leaders to declare Bush's visit a success. But it also drew protests from some politicians in both countries.

In Washington, where the pact is subject to approval by Congress, some lawmakers said the goal of improved bilateral relations must be balanced against the need to curb nuclear proliferation. In India, a number of protests were held to oppose Bush's visit, and socialist groups warned that India should not succumb to U.S. pressure on nuclear issues.

Under the agreement, India is to separate its civilian and military nuclear programs over the next eight years in order to gain U.S. expertise and nuclear fuel to meet its rapidly rising energy needs. India's civilian facilities would be subject for the first time to permanent international inspections.

Bush and Singh praised the deal at a joint news conference, but they did not mention that it would allow India to produce vast quantities of fissile material, something the United States and the four other major nuclear powers -- China, Russia, France and Britain -- have voluntarily halted. The pact also does not require oversight of India's prototype fast-breeder reactors, which can produce significant amounts of super-grade plutonium when fully operating.

The Bush administration originally sought a plan that would have allowed India to continue producing material for six to 10 weapons each year, but the new plan would allow India enough fissile material for as many as 50 weapons a year. Experts said this would far exceed what is believed to be its current capacity.

"The nuclear options that India insisted on protecting in this deal cast serious doubt on its declared policy of seeking only a credible minimum deterrent," said Robert J. Einhorn, a former assistant secretary of state for nonproliferation, now at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington.

Bush and Singh described the deal, which has been in the works since July, as an important breakthrough in U.S.-India relations, less than a decade after the two nations were estranged and bitterly divided over India's nuclear ambitions.

"What this agreement says is -- things change, times change, that leadership can make a

difference," Bush said at the news conference. "I am trying to think differently, not to stay stuck in the past, and recognize that by thinking differently, particularly on nuclear power, we can achieve some important objectives."

Singh said, "We have made history today, and I thank you."

The deal must clear two large hurdles before it can take effect. Bush must overcome concerns by lawmakers in both parties that the United States is rewarding one of only three countries that refused to sign the 1968 nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Rep. Ed Royce (R-Calif.), who chairs the International Relations subcommittee on international terrorism and nonproliferation, said he welcomed better ties with India, but not at any cost. In a statement, he said the agreement had "implications beyond U.S.-India relations" and that the "goal of curbing nuclear proliferation should be paramount." He warned that Congress would not be rushed into backing the deal.

Rep. Edward J. Markey (D-Mass.), who co-chairs the Bipartisan Task Force on Nonproliferation, called the deal "a historic failure of this president to tackle the real nuclear threats that we face."

Bush and Singh must also persuade the international Nuclear Suppliers Group, an informal alliance that oversees nuclear transactions, to lift curbs on India. U.S. officials worry that Sweden and several other members might object.

R. Nicholas Burns, the undersecretary of state for political affairs, said in a telephone interview from New Delhi that India, unlike Iran and North Korea, earned special treatment from the United States with its commitment to democracy and international inspections. Burns was intensely involved in working out the details of the pact.

Last week, during a private meeting with a group of congressional leaders, Burns suggested it was unlikely the sides would be able to quickly bridge significant gaps on the separation plan. But a last-minute decision by Bush to accept India's demands sealed the deal.

Burns said one of the most crucial aspects of the pact is that India would subject future civilian plants to inspections. "This is a significant gain for nonproliferation purposes and it certainly is far better than the zero influence we had before the deal," he said. India, however, won the right to classify reactors as for either military or civilian use, which could limit inspections.

Mohammed ElBaradei, head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, which would be in charge of the inspections, praised the deal. "It would also bring India closer as an important partner in the nonproliferation regime," he said in a statement issued from his office in Vienna.

Some nonproliferation experts, however, suggested that the deal could trigger an arms race in South Asia, one of the world's most volatile regions. India and its neighbor Pakistan, also a nuclear power, are longtime rivals.

For India, which faces dwindling supplies of indigenous uranium, the deal would allow it to

import uranium to fuel its civilian program and free up its local supplies to fuel the weapons program.

"All the United States gets from a nonproliferation standpoint are a few more civilian energy production reactors under safeguards," said Daryl Kimball, executive director of the Arms Control Association in Washington. "But it's meaningless, given that India's weapons production capacity will soar in the coming years."

Of India's 22 nuclear plants, 14 classified for civilian use would be subject to new and permanent international inspections under the deal. The country's eight other reactors, as well as future ones designated for military use, would be off-limits.

There had been debate within the administration about whether the deal would undercut U.S. efforts to confront Iran and North Korea over their nuclear programs. There were also concerns about how the agreement would be accepted in Pakistan, an ally in the U.S. campaign against al-Qaeda. On Thursday, an apparent suicide bombing in Karachi killed a U.S. diplomat and several Pakistanis, underscoring the persistence of regional terrorism.

But supporters said the pact was an important part of a White House strategy to accelerate New Delhi's rise as a global power and as a regional counterweight to China.

Bush, who arrived in India late Wednesday, was greeted Thursday by various branches of the Indian military, including cavalry on horseback, at a sandstone government palace. After Bush reviewed the troops, he told reporters, "I have been received in many capitals around the world, but I have never seen a reception as well-organized or as grand."

Bush and first lady **Laura Bush** paid tribute to India's independence leader, Mohandas K. Gandhi, tossing flower petals at the site where he was cremated in 1948. The president, who is known for short trips with scant sightseeing time, was teased at lunch by Singh for claiming that his scheduler would not let him visit the Taj Mahal.

In a lunchtime toast, Singh told **Laura Bush**: "I'm truly sorry that the president is not taking you to Taj Mahal this time. I hope he will be more chivalrous the next time you are here." Bush laughed and promised he would visit the 350-year-old wonder next time. Bush also met with religious leaders.

Bush and Singh also made progress on cementing closer economic ties, including an informal commitment to try to double bilateral trade every three years. But the nuclear deal dominated the day. Indian television provided hours of coverage, with commentators talking about a new era of U.S.-India relations.

Security in New Delhi was heavy as socialist and communist politicians led thousands of people in protesting Bush's visit and held a rally outside Parliament that disrupted all activity within.

"If the government succumbs to the U.S. pressure on the nuclear deal, they have to face consequences," said Sitaram Yechury, a member of Parliament from the Communist Party of

India (Marxist), according to the Press Trust of India news agency. He said the left would "protest and oppose any erosion of Indian interest."

Armed policemen stood on alert and helicopters hovered overhead during the anti-Bush protests.

"He wants to control the world, and our government is willing to support this. We are here to oppose this American neo-colonialism," said Shabeg Singh, 64, a resident of Punjab province who carried a red communist flag. Similar large protests were held in other cities, including Calcutta and Bombay, also known as Mumbai.

Linzer reported from New York. Special correspondent Muneeza Naqvi in New Delhi contributed to this report.

The Statesman (India)

March 3, 2006

HEADLINE: OF BOYS & GIRLS

NEW DELHI, March 2. Excitement and inquisitiveness was palpable as the US First Lady, Mrs. **Laura Bush**, made a lasting impression on the young minds of Prayas, Institute of Juveniles today.

Mrs Bush struck a special chord with the children who seemed eager to know about the West. She was given a warm welcome by the kids who greeted her with a bouquet. The campus wore a colourful look. The guests were given a peek into Indias rich cultural heritage with the children dancing to the tune of Rajasthani folk songs. **Mrs. Bush** was accompanied by Mrs Jeannie Mulford, wife of the US Ambassador, along with a group of senior US Embassy officials.

There was room for serious talk too as **Mrs. Bush** answered questions pertaining to issues like trafficking of women and children, child abuse and domestic violence which were thrown at her by the children of the institute. The US First Lady agreed that children were indeed discriminated against and there were problems of trafficking, child neglect and abuse. Is there discrimination between girls and boys in the USA like in India, asked 17-year-old Tabassum. A little bit was the answer given by **Mrs. Bush**. But, things were better since girls in the USA were given voting rights 95 years back and there are many more women in colleges in America and getting education there, she said, adding: There are children in the USA (too) who can't afford education.

The Hindu

March 3, 2006

HEADLINE: Laura visits Sesame galli

BYLINE: Staff Reporter

U.S. First Lady visits the sets of a popular children's show



U.S. first lady Laura Bush with children at the Prayas Institute in New Delhi on Thursday. — Photo: AFP

NEW DELHI: While United States President George W. Bush was 'making history' with the nuclear deal, First Lady **Laura Bush** was busy creating some of her own on the small-screen.

It was lights, camera and action of a different kind for her when she went visiting the sets of Galli Galli Sim Sim — the Indian version of the popular television programme Sesame Street — at Eagle Studio in neighbouring Noida on Thursday.

Her script had been sent to the White House a month ago. It was a big day for four Indian muppets — Boombah, Chamki, Aanchoo and Googly — as Ms. Bush walked down the 'galli' and interacted with them.

After meeting the 'stars' and the brains behind the show — Miditech, Turner Sesame Workshop and Eagle Studio — it was time for her to get into the act and count.

Sitting on a bench with actress-turned-activist Nafisa Ali and with tomboy Chamki instructing her to count till five, Ms. Bush got a chance to reach out to children in quite another way. The show, which is to be aired on "Cartoon Network" and "Pogo" later this year, is partly funded by USAIDS.

"The segment turned out quite sweet. Chamki starts the programme by saying, 'I want to introduce you to two of my friends', and then she introduces the First Lady and Nafisa Ali. We finished in two takes. It was very nerve-wracking at first with all the security, but it finally became very informal. It was like a friend had dropped in," said executive producer of Galli Galli Sim Sim Niret Alva.

Ms. Bush is believed to have visited the Egyptian as well as the American versions of Sesame Street. An educator, Ms. Bush took interest in how the show would translate for Indian audiences.

"It was a real honour. She came across as a very genuine and warm person. I told her that I was excited to do the skit opposite her. It was a golden opportunity to tell her about my work with HIV/AIDS," said Ms. Ali.

The First Lady also visited Prayas Institute of Juvenile Justice at Tughlakabad and the Missionaries of Charity in Jangpura.

The Hindu
March 3, 2006

HEADLINE: To Bush aunty, with love
Kids experience US First Lady's warmth, first hand

HER HUSBAND may be the most powerful man on earth. He may have signed a landmark nuclear deal with India. But at Prayas, the institute for juvenile justice, it was **Laura Bush** who took the spotlight. The US First Lady was given a traditional welcome by the children at Prayas on Thursday. Eleven-year-old Pinki loved the way 'Bush aunty' spoke. It was a dream come true for many children at Prayas who gave her different titles like 'Didi Sir' and 'Rani Madam'.

Dressed in colourful Rajasthani clothes, children from the Nath community performed for their star guest. The celebrations started with a kachchi ghodi dance that was followed by traditional folk songs and then a grand finale — a folk dance on a chaupal specially created for this occasion.

The best part was the round-table conference with children. "I asked her if children in the US get to go to school," said Elaichi, while Meenakshi wanted to know human trafficking was a concern in America too. "Problems like children dropping out of school, child abuse and trafficking is faced by the US government too. The government tackles this grave concern by focusing on rescuing and more importantly rehabilitating the children," the US First Lady said. Her answers were translated in Hindi for the children.

Laura Bush was accompanied by Jeannie Mulford, wife of American Ambassador to India David Mulford. A group of senior officials from the US Embassy were also present at the meeting. The children later presented the First Lady with handmade mementos after a 20-minute interaction with her. She answered a host of questions ranging from independence of children at an early age in the US to whether there were shelter homes like Prayas for kids.

"Sure, there are children in the US who cannot afford education." But she also mentioned that there were public schools for them and as per law education was compulsory for all in America.

Bush was briefed about the various contemporary market driven vocational education courses run by the Prayas.

The US First Lady exchanged jokes and accepted paper toys as gifts made by disabled children at Mother Teresa's Home for Disabled Children in New Delhi on Thursday. Laura was warmly welcomed by the sisters of the Jeevan Jyoti Home.

Deutsche Presse-Agentur

March 3, 2006

HEADLINE: 1ST LEAD: Bush says India's non-proliferation record excellent

New Delhi (dpa) - US President George W. Bush Friday said India's "excellent" non-proliferation record would help him convince people in his country to support a civilian nuclear energy deal concluded with India.

"India has been an excellent partner in non-proliferation over the past decades and, therefore, I can tell the American people that this is an important agreement to help deal with the proliferation issue," Bush said.

He was speaking at a meeting with 16 young entrepreneurs at the Indian School of Business, located in the southern city of Hyderabad.

India and the US Thursday reached an agreement on a controversial nuclear cooperation deal, which still has to be approved by the US Congress.

Under the agreement, all Indian civilian nuclear plants will be put under permanent international safeguards and the US will ensure an uninterrupted supply of nuclear fuel to India.

But the US president's visit to Hyderabad was marred by protests by communist and Muslim organizations. Five people were injured when police baton-charged stone-pelting youths in the Muslim-dominated Old City.

Thousands of protesters, largely affiliated to communist parties, had also gathered at a park about six kilometres from the airport to protest against Bush's visit.

They carried red flags and banners with slogans such as "Down with Bush" and "Down with US imperialism." Some wore Bush masks and carried toy rifles.

While in Hyderabad, the president and his team of high officials also got a glimpse of rural India as they interacted with women self-help groups, farmers and scientists at the Acharya N.G. Ranga Agricultural University.

Bush spent some time inspecting Murra, a seven-year-old female buffalo, who waited patiently for hours for the presidential visit.

He also interacted with women who had put up stalls selling their handicrafts, talked to farmers about the produce they had on display and posed for photographs with several of them.

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice looked pleased with the sari she was gifted. Both she and US envoy to India David Mulford carried straw hats made by the women.

First Lady **Laura Bush** visited a stall put up by the nonprofit Freedom Foundation that works with HIV/AIDS patients.

Later, Bush flew back from Hyderabad to Delhi where he was slated to deliver his main address, which was expected to outline the contours of the transformed India-US ties.

Bush planned to fly to Pakistan late Friday. He is scheduled to hold talks with President Pervez Musharraf Saturday before flying back to the US.

Agence France Presse -- English

March 3, 2006

HEADLINE: Indian MPs object to US sniffer dogs at Gandhi memorial

Indian legislators protested Friday over US security personnel taking sniffer dogs to check the safety of a memorial to freedom icon Mahatma Gandhi ahead of a visit there by President George W. Bush.

Opposition MPs waved copies of newspapers in the lower house of parliament that reported the incident Thursday and demanded an apology from the Indian government, the Press Trust of India news agency reported.

"The UPA (Congress-led United Progressive Alliance) government has lowered national prestige and should apologise to the nation," shouted Rajiv Ranjan Singh, an opposition MP.

Gandhi is seen as the father of India's movement to free itself from British colonial rule.

The legislators said the memorial complex is a sacred site and that dogs should not have been allowed there, media reports said.

When previous VIPs have visited the site, security forces have checked the area with deep-penetrating mine sweepers, the Press Trust of India said, adding this was the first time dogs had been allowed so close to the memorial.

Staff at the memorial were upset when US security personnel took sniffer dogs on the pathway around the memorial twice early Thursday, the agency reported.

Walking barefoot as a mark of respect, Bush and US First Lady **Laura Bush** visited the landscaped memorial that houses a black marble platform erected at the site where Gandhi's funeral took place in January 1948 following his assassination by a Hindu zealot.

The president and the first lady laid a wreath at the memorial and threw petals before holding talks with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in which the two men concluded a landmark deal to supply India with civilian nuclear technology.

Bush, who was due to leave for Pakistan late Friday, wrote in the visitor's book at the memorial that Gandhi was "an inspiration to the world."

The Statesman (India)

March 3, 2006

HEADLINE: INDIA, USA MUST FIGHT TERROR EVERYWHERE PM

Statesman News Service New Delhi, March 2. Contending that New Delhi sought a neighbourhood of peace and prosperity, Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh said today that India and the USA must fight terrorism wherever it exists as it threatens democracy everywhere by sharing intelligence. We seek a world free of poverty, ignorance, disease and the threat of terrorism. The USA and India must work together in all possible fora to these ends, he said, welcoming President George W Bush and First Lady **Laura Bush** at a luncheon hosted by him in their honour.

We must fight terrorism wherever its exists, because terrorism anywhere threatens democracy everywhere, the Prime Minister said. He said India wanted a neighbourhood of peace and prosperity, and added that while the sub-continent had been home to great religions, it was a powerhouse of human creativity. With wisdom and farsightedness, we South Asians can transform not just this region but the whole world, he said, adding that in the journey of development and modernisation and social change and empowerment, India saw the USA as a partner, a friend and a well-wisher. Among those present at the luncheon were UPA chairperson Mrs Sonia Gandhi, former Prime Ministers Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee and Mr IK Gujral, the leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha, Mr LK Advani, Cabinet ministers, some chief ministers, BJP president Mr Rajnath Singh, Congress MP Mr Rahul Gandhi, sarod maestro Ustad Amjad Ali Khan, Censor Board chairperson Ms Sharmila Tagore, top officials, industrialists and US delegates. Describing President Bush as a true friend of India, Dr Singh said he had always been touched by the US leaders warm praise for India and Indian people. We sincerely acknowledge your (Bushs) deep personal commitment to a closer economic and strategic partnership between our two countries, he said, recalling that at their very first meeting the American President had paid tributes to the countrys efforts to achieve economic and social salvation in the framework of an open society and open economy. I am deeply touched by your admiration for Indian democracy and our commitment to pluralism and modernism, the Prime Minister said. Appreciating the firm stand taken by Mr Bush against upsurge of protectionist forces in the USA, he said that in taking this stand the American leader had not only cemented closer relations between the two countries, but also helped the USA retain its edge in the global market.

The Guardian (London)

March 3, 2006

HEADLINE: Laura lines up with Bhombah and Chamki on Sesame Street

BYLINE: Randeep Ramesh New Delhi

After the pomp and circumstance of the official morning reception, recalling the imperial splendour of the British Raj, America's first lady, Laura Bush, went to see how the US is today influencing India: visiting the set of Sesame Street.

A former librarian with a long-standing interest in education, Mrs Bush discreetly broke away from her husband's security detail to talk to a seven foot purple puppet and a shaggy lion called Bhombah.

The programme, called Galli Galli Sim Sim, is India's take on Sesame Street, and Mrs Bush will appear in a future episode - which will reach 40m households.

Set in a middle-class neighbourhood of India, Mrs Bush played herself meeting a social activist Nafisa Ali in a cybercafe. The pair then chatted with a inquisitive puppet called Chamki, who sat on a swing. Mrs Bush spoke in English and her words were translated in Hindi by Mrs Ali.

Later Mrs Bush visited a charity dealing with abandoned boys and girls and handled questions with aplomb on sexual abuse and gender discrimination from street children.

Her husband's trip to India has tended to be analysed in portentous tones. The security arrangements, however, have thrown up some lighter, even bizarre, stories.

The Times of India ran a piece yesterday headlined "Guarding Bush is monkey business", which claimed that a chimpanzee dressed in army fatigues is part of the security detail. His role, apparently, is to detect landmines.

Other newspapers have reported that the guard dogs used by the President Bush have all been given deluxe suites to stay in at the president's hotel. The canine unit is staffed by German shepherds and Labradors that only respond to their military ranks.

The first lady meets Bhombah

Rediff India

March 3, 2006

HEADLINE: Where Laura Bush was an ordinary visitor

American First Lady Laura Bush visited Jeevan Jyoti -- an insitute run by Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charities -- in Delhi after her trip to the sets of the Indian version of Sesame Street and the home for juvenile justice, Prayas on Thursday.

The sisters were told of the visit a week before. But they were not divulging any information before the visit.

"Please ask the US embassy about anything you want to know," Sister Teresa Paul had said Thursday.

On Friday morning, the sister told rediff.com that the First Lady arrived at 4 pm and spent around 45 minutes in the home for physically and mentally handicapped children that was established 20 years ago.

"The children garlanded her and sang two songs -- one in Hindi and one in English. She spoke to them and said that she will come again but we know it will be difficult for her to visit us again," Sister Paul added.

The sisters did not make any special preparations for the visit: "We don't make any extra arrangements for any of our guests."

Laura Bush complimented the sisters on their work for the children and made an entry in the visitor's book.

The sisters did not give the First Lady any memento. "We don't give anything to our guests. Those who give us a donation, we give them a receipt," said Sister Paul.

She also said that Laura Bush did not make a donation.

The Times of India

March 3, 2006

HEADLINE: Laura Bush floors both muppets and kids

BYLINE: Lalit Kumar

NOIDA: Jenna and Barbara Bush may have “grown up with” Oscar the Grouch and Twiddlebugs of ‘Sesame Street’ fame, but Thursday was Chamki and Boombah’s turn for a photo-op with mamma Laura. And the celebrity guest left the cast and crew of ‘Galli Galli Sim Sim’, the Indian version of ‘Sesame Street’, completely floored.

The American First Lady did more. With the ease of a professional, she faced the arclights for a three-minute slot, along with model-turned-social activist, Nafisa Ali, and of course the ubiquitous muppets.

Produced by Miditech Pvt Ltd, ‘Galli Galli’ seeks to teach children, aged from two to eight years, through fun activities. It will be aired later this year. The visit began as per schedule at 10 am, with Laura along with her security contingent of 15-odd US secret service personnel, arriving via the Delhi-Noida Expressway.

While some of her staff positioned themselves on the roof, others fanned out inside the compound.

In the outer ring, Noida policemen, both in uniform and without it, made it difficult for office-goers in the rest of the Film City to get to work, until the state guest left around 10.45 am. Apprehending a traffic chaos, all studios and offices in the area had asked their staff to come in an hour early on Thursday. The cavalcade returned by the Kalindi Kunj route

Inside Eagle Studio, Miditech president Niret Alva showed Laura around the elaborate sets, including Jugaadu Ka Karkhana and Basha Ki Dukan. She was introduced to the crew and cast, including the kids, Shubham and Satyam.

Said Niret, “Bush’s daughters had grown up with the 35-year-old serial, Sesame Street, produced at New York by Sesame Workshop. She visited the show at Egypt too.”

But, the highlight of the visit was obviously watching Laura go “Ek do teenchaar paanch” as she, with Nafisa Ali, taught a five-year-old to count, with Chamki in the lead.

Chamki is Galli Galli’s “feminine tomboy, a role model for girls,” explained Niret. He said Laura’s “scenes will be broadcast at a later date”.

Describing Laura as “warm and gracious”, Ali said: “I told her that acting is not the work I basically do. And she immediately replied. ‘I know a lot about you.’ She had obviously taken care to look at my bio-data.”

But, perhaps the simplest compliment to the first lady was paid by Anurag, a member of the 'Galli Galli' crew, "The way she interacted with us there was no way anyone could make out that she is the US president's wife. She could be any other foreign visitor."

New Kerala

March 3, 2006

HEADLINE: Laura Bush meets HIV/AIDS-hit kids in Hyderabad

Hyderabad: U.S. First Lady Laura Bush spent Friday with HIV/AIDS affected children during her visit to a regional agricultural university in Hyderabad.

India has 5.13 million people living with HIV/AIDS, the second largest number after South Africa, but voluntary agencies and UNAIDS, the U.N.'s anti-AIDS agency, say the figure is too low and many cases go unreported.

Laura later on spent time with students from the agricultural university after HIV/AIDS affected children from an NGO "Freedom Foundation" performed for her.

The U.S. First Lady on Thursday exchanged jokes and accepted gifts of paper toys made by children at Mother Teresa's Home for Disabled Children in New Delhi.

Laura, who is accompanying President George W. Bush on a three-day official visit to India, was warmly welcomed by the sisters of the "Jeevan Jyoti" home". She also visited satellite city Noida to meet the characters of "Sesame Street", a puppet show to be aired later in the country.

President Bush on Friday met village women and entrepreneurs in a premier Indian technology city on Friday as its large Muslim population shut down markets in the old quarters in protests over his visit.

State officials welcomed Bush and his wife, Laura, when they stepped down from Air Force One and children garlanded the couple with flowers.

At the university, Bush toured the seed research area where women in sarees bent and tended to green patches where peanuts and soybeans had been planted.

A smiling Bush signed autographs for the children and kissed each one before the couple boarded a U.S. military helicopter to fly to a regional agricultural university.

The university began collaborating with Cornell University of the United States in 2004 to develop Indian agriculture.

Police said a strike called by seven Muslim groups in a city where 40 percent of residents are Muslim had forced cancellation of some appearances by Bush's wife.

Security for Bush in the region was stepped up.

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HEADLINE: Straight Answers

BYLINE: Jyothi Prabhakar

Nafisa Ali Activist on meeting and 'acting' with US First Lady **Laura Bush**.

Did you know beforehand that you were to meet **Laura Bush** and 'act' in the Indianised version of Sesame Street?

Yes. I got a call from the USAIDS a month ago and they wanted to know my name, birthdate, father's name, and where I was born, etc.

And then they told me that since **Laura Bush** had already visited the Sesame Street locations in the US and Egypt, she was keen on doing so in India too

What was your impression of the first lady of the US?

She came across as a warm, sensitive person. She communicated with all of us very naturally. I have met many dignitaries in the past, but none so down to earth and wonderfully communicative. Her little gestures spoke a lot about her.

For instance, when we were done and ready to leave, she asked us if the technicians would like a photo op with her... and posed happily, throwing the security guys into a tizzy.

Is she a good actor? What did she do on the sets?

We both had to sit under an artificial banyan tree while Chamki, the puppet character introduced us. We had already been told about the concept and were given the script in advance. In just two takes, we were done. And I thought to myself that she's such a natural actress...

How aware was **Laura Bush** about India and its problems?

She was aware of our HIV/AIDS causes and campaigns, culture, gender biases and had many questions regarding these issues. She was very thorough in her homework.

Were you invited for Bush's speech at Purana Quila?

Yes. It was such a momentous occasion for me. Here I was, sitting on the front row and listening to the most powerful person in the world speak.

Did you get to speak with Bush?

No. Just a warm handshake