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## My American Experience

Thursday, 3rd of May 2007

Surihe Gaomas

It was just two days ago that I was in the United States of America – the one country I never thought I would ever visit in my lifetime. But, there I was living the American experience smack bang in the capital, Washington DC for three weeks as part of the International Visitors Programme for Journalists organised by the US State Department.

It was an eye-opener for me to be in a much talked about world superpower, where the system of democracy and way of life are very liberating. I got the feeling of being in another world where people from all over the world come to become citizens, mainly because of its liberating policies and sound democratic system.

It was amazing to see how people from all over the world can live in harmony in one country! I never thought of the States that way as people pretty much have the freedom to do whatever they like as long as they do not infringe on each other's rights.

This picture can be felt the moment you step into the hustle and bustle of the busy highways and subways in Washington, where there is this aura of freedom. What made it so distinctly different for me were the big dishes served in restaurants, leaving one much fuller than ever before. Tipping those who serve you is compulsory in the States and one can surely not complain about the great customer service too.

Besides learning about the lifestyle and democratic system of American people through various home visits and meetings that we as a group had, I will never forget the valuable experience when we – close to 200 international journalists – interviewed US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. This was surely a rare and great moment for us.

After a busy schedule of official meetings at various media houses, government institutions and civil society groups during the day, the quiet sight of the multitude of city lights greets you at night.

Having spent one week in Washington after a hectic programme, the much quieter and natural sights of Colorado Springs and Denver in the western part of the country offered a great sigh of relief. This in essence was the red mountains in the countryside, where the common name of cowboys is on everyone's lips.

In fact, it was there that I experienced the most memorable side of visiting an American family, who were very much interested in knowing more about my country – a place they had never heard about in their lives. This shows that American citizens are very much interested in what's happening in the rest of the world, dispelling the pre-conceived ideas that they only mind their own business.



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Besides the wonderful opportunity of getting to know more about the States, its people and federal system, the fact that I was in a multi-regional group of 20 other international journalists was even more memorable in the sense that I made valuable lifelong contacts.

To me the American experience was like being in a "mini-united nations" where diversity is the key to unity, freedom and democracy.

Eewa!

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