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Posted on: Saturday, 11 March 2006, 14:50 CST

Morales Gives Rice Coca Leaf-inlay Guitar



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VALPARAISO, Chile (Reuters) - Condoleezza Rice knew coca would top agenda in her meeting with Bolivia's new president, but she likely wasn't expecting to get the real thing.

At the end of their 25-minute meeting, President Evo Morales presented U.S. secretary of state with an Andean guitar that bore a coca-leaf inlay.

"The gift was well received. We will just have to check with our customs to see what rules apply. We certainly hope we can bring it back (to Washington)," said a senior State Department official who attended the meeting.

Morales, Bolivia's first indigenous president, came to prominence as a leader of

coca farmers who want more freedom to grow coca, which is the main ingredient in cocaine but is also used legally for traditional medicines and in teas.

The fight against cocaine is the main source of bilateral friction between the United States and Bolivia, the world's third-biggest cocaine producer.

Rice told Morales, "I'm a musician you know," and strummed the instrument, a typical Bolivian lacquered handicraft with five pairs of strings.

It was unclear whether she immediately realized what adorned it.

(additional reporting by Fiona Ortiz in Santiago)

Source: REUTERS

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