

From Mexico Also, the Message to Bush Is Immigration

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MÉRIDA, [Mexico](#), March 13 — As President Bush tried to mend frayed relations with Mexico, the Mexican president gave him a cool reception on Tuesday, calling on Mr. Bush to live up to his longtime promise to make Mexico a priority and criticizing American plans to build a 700-mile fence along the border.

President [Felipe Calderón](#) warned that the only way to stem illegal migration and ensure regional security was to raise the standard of living here. “I am sure there is nothing better for the security and prosperity of our region than the prosperity of Mexico,” he said.

Mr. Bush took the slight chastising in stride and promised, as he has in the past, to push for an [immigration](#) bill that would allow more guest workers and provide a path to citizenship for many Mexicans living in the United States illegally.

“Mr. President, my pledge to you and your government — but, more importantly, the people of Mexico — is I will work as hard as I possibly can to pass comprehensive immigration reform,” Mr. Bush said, in a sunny courtyard at a resort near here.

The blunt words from Mr. Calderón at the opening of the talks were in keeping with the messages Mr. Bush has been receiving from Latin American leaders throughout his five-country tour. On Monday, President Óscar Berger of Guatemala complained about the forced deportations of his countrymen who enter the United States illegally.

At nearly every turn, the American president has been faced with anger over what is perceived as the United States’ neglect of the region and frustration with its tougher border-security policies in the wake of the 2001 terrorist attacks.

Late Tuesday afternoon, about 2,000 protesters tried to storm the United States Embassy in Mexico City, shouting, “Get out, Bush the

assassin!” Riot police officers tried to control the crowd, but the protesters knocked down a steel barrier, threw gasoline bombs and set off big bottle rockets. At least three people were hurt, as explosions boomed down Paseo de la Reforma. Some of the protesters burned American flags, while others burned an effigy of Mr. Bush.

The riot police dispersed the crowd about 6:30, arresting several people and sending the rest running down the city’s main avenue.

In Mérida at 8 p.m., a group of about 30 protesters attacked city hall, breaking several windows and spray-painting graffiti on the walls before they were chased away by dozens of police officers in riot gear. At least 10 people were arrested.

Hanging over the talks was the specter of [Hugo Chávez](#), the Venezuelan populist leader who has been using his country’s oil wealth to undermine American influence in the region.

Mr. Calderón is one of the few conservative free trade advocates to win election in Latin America recently, along with Óscar Arias of Costa Rica. United States officials see the Mexican president as a crucial ally in the ideological battle the United States is waging with leftists like Mr. Chávez, Evo Morales of Bolivia, Daniel Ortega of Nicaragua and [Fidel Castro](#) of Cuba.

“For President Bush, he does see Mexico as an essential element in American foreign policy,” said one senior White House official. “And he sees it as a partnership.”

The talks took place at the Hacienda Temozón, a restored sisal farm that is now a luxury hotel. The leaders met for three hours, flanked by their ambassadors and secretaries of state, then broke bread together. Later they toured the Mayan ruins at Uxmal in the tropical heat.

As he toasted Mr. Calderón before the luncheon, Mr. Bush said the best way to ensure that Mexican migrants in the United States were treated well was to pass immigration-reform legislation. He remarked that Mr. Calderon had expressed “deep concerns about

whether or not America can pass such a law,” but added that he would spare no effort to convince Congress.

Mr. Bush has had a hard time lining up votes in his own [Republican Party](#) for a guest worker program and a path to citizenship for illegal immigrants. He has said that he hopes for some movement on such a bill by August, but it will be an uphill fight.

On the agenda on Tuesday were several interlocking issues, American officials said. On security, the presidents talked about more sharing of information among law enforcement agencies, as well as about the possibility of the United States providing high-tech scanning equipment for Mexico’s ports.

On immigration, the Mexican leader raised objections, as he has in the past, to the construction of a 700-mile wall along parts of the border, saying that building roads in Mexico would be more useful.

The two men also talked about corn and beans, officials said. The Mexican government wants to roll back a deadline under the North American Free Trade Agreement to lift all restrictions on the importation of United States corn and beans next year. The measure is extremely unpopular with Mexican farmers.

The lengthy talks, however, did not bear fruit, though some progress was made, if only in creating a bond between the leaders, the senior White House official said. “People tend to lose sight that even at the presidential level, there is a dynamic of personal diplomacy,” he said.

Dan Bartlett, a counselor to Mr. Bush, said the critical tone of Mr. Calderón’s remarks on immigration were to be expected. “It’s a very emotional debate,” he said. “It’s an emotional debate in our own country, and I’m sure it’s a very emotional debate in this country, because the lives — so many lives are affected.”