

WORLD

IN THE NEWS

“No, we didn’t fight. But we have to live (through) a whole lot of such misinterpretations.”

Agnetha Faltskog talks about the Abba years.



# Michelle becomes belle of the world

After last week’s inauguration, America’s new First Lady is the fashion icon and role model for us all, argues **Hannah Betts**.

UNITED STATES

I CANNOT BE the only individual to have been haunted of late by the Beatles’ romantic dirge *Michelle*. The mass passion for Michelle Obama is such that I have only to spot her image on a newspaper stand, and there it is again, tripping through my brain.

Michelle, who has achieved that rare status of being recognisable by just her first name, is now our collective belle.

She is the poster woman for all that is feel-good in these feel-bad times, the subject of a communal crush that spans the Atlantic. Barack may bring hope; his wife yields sighs.

As a role model, Michelle is unique in being sufficiently imposing to be inspirational, while not being so far removed from the great mass of womankind as to prove alienating.

It is a fine line, this heroine business, and she treads it most deftly. Her robust lack of pretension exposes Carla

Bruni-Sarkozy, our previous presidential fixation, as being that bit too exotic; her stoicism makes Diana, Princess of Wales look like the neurotic she was. It’s partly the frocks. But there’s nothing to be ashamed of about that.

The world is in the biggest hole it has staggered into for decades, so let’s not be embarrassed about distracting ourselves with a little modish eye candy. The crucial thing here is that word “enjoy”. Michelle genuinely appears to get a kick out of her fashion dalliances: as she declared on morning television, with all the reverence of a 6-year-old girl, “It’s fun to look pretty.”

But while the fashion world adores Michelle right back, she still exudes a refreshing appreciation that there is considerably more to her life.

At the same time, the fact that the world’s favourite new fashion icon is a black mother of two in her mid-40s, with enviably toned but reassuringly real proportions, is not without a degree of political importance.

Having Michelle emblazoned on the cover of every glossy magazine is a

resplendent riposte to the accusations of sizeism, ageism and racism traditionally levelled at the media.

Equally importantly, her relationship gives every impression of being enviably happy — without the hair-tossing melodrama of the union between Bruni and Sarkozy, or the stomach-churning cheesiness of Tony and Cherie. Unlike the Clintons, the compromises of attaining high office haven’t dented the Obamas’ mutual affection. Their interaction is genuine, unforced; their dancing at various balls was positively hot. — *Telegraph*



**PASSION:** The Obamas are obviously in a loving marriage. AP

# ‘Batman’ killer terrorises creche

BELGIUM

A MAN with his face painted like the Joker character in *Batman* went on a stabbing spree in a children’s creche in Belgium yesterday, killing two toddlers and a woman and slashing 10 infants and two other adults before riding off on a bicycle.

“He started stabbing every baby in sight as well the carers who tried to protect them,” said Theo Janssens, the head of the local social services department. “There was blood everywhere.”

Ten infants and two female carers with severe stab wounds were flown by helicopter to hospital. They were all in a serious condition.

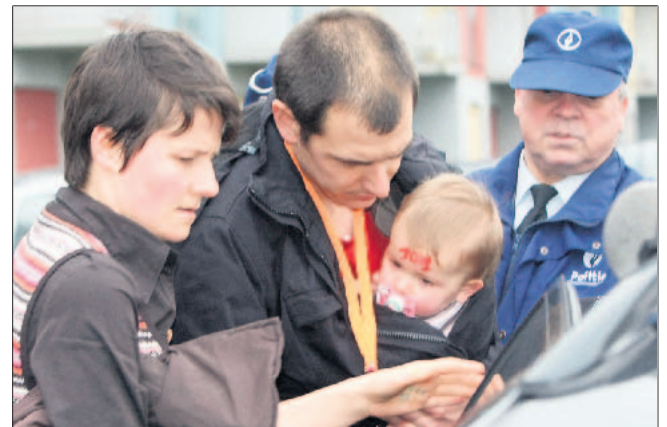
The ginger-haired man had blackened his eyebrows and was disguised with white face-paint. He was wearing a bulletproof jacket.

Police say the man arrived at the unguarded creche in Dendermonde, north-west of Brussels, on the pretext of seeing the receptionist. He started stabbing the children and carers before leaving on a

bicycle. Police officers caught him 5km away.

Dendermonde police chief Paul Putteman would not confirm reports that the alleged killer had escaped from a psychiatric ward in a nearby hospital.

Psychologists and social workers were treating carers, infants and their families for shock. — *The Independent*



**SAFE:** A baby is assessed at a crisis centre next to the creche. AP

Goodbye Bush



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