

Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs, Robert O. Blake's Interview with Geeta Mohan, Times Now

After Britain, US, too, warms up to Narendra Modi



NEW DELHI: After the thaw in his ties with the UK, Gujarat CM [Narendra Modi](#) got another opportunity to gloat about the US on Tuesday, saying that he was free to apply for a US visa. As US Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs [Robert Blake](#) made the remark, he also emphasized how important Gujarat was for US investments lending substance to the suggestion that this indeed was an endorsement for Modi from the most powerful country in the world.

"He's free to apply for another visa whenever he chooses, and you know, the system will take its course," said Blake. He was replying to a question about whether the US too had any plan of "warming up" to Gujarat and Modi.

US deputy secretary of state [William Burns](#) had said last week that US authorities would handle the Gujarat CM's "potential visa application" as per its immigration laws. Blake, however, seemed to be suggesting that the US was not averse to Modi applying for a visa.

He spoke about how good relations were between the US and Gujarat before he mentioned that Modi was free to apply for visa.

"It's obviously a very, very important market for our American companies. And we'll continue to have those kinds of relations. We do every thing we can to promote trade, and not just with Gujarat but with all the states in India...", he said.

Blake added though that he didn't want to speculate on possible outcomes, despite being asked repeatedly if the US intended to work with Modi who could be the opposition prime ministerial candidate. "I do not want to speculate on, about the future outcomes - even of your state elections or of your prime ministerial elections - those are internal matters - and of course we will work with whoever is elected and put into office," he said.

Modi was denied a [US visa](#) in 2005, when he wanted to visit Florida. Blake's statement sparked another round of exultation by BJP leaders who said they stood vindicated. "It is a slap on the face of people who sought to make a big issue out of how he was denied visa by the US. With Gujarat progressing like the way it has, it is only natural that more international recognition is coming his way," said party Rajya Sabha MP Balbir [Punj](#).

Left parties, however, slammed the US for its U-turn on Modi. CPI leader A B Bardhan said, "Earlier they denied him visa, but now they are falling head over heels to woo him because they know he will serve the US interests better."

He said the US wants the defeat of the Communists and the Congress even though Manmohan Singh-led UPA government's decision to allow FDI in retail serves its interests. "Manmohan is subject to pressure from within and outside. But, Modi is firm while dealing with local people and parties, but will be pliable in dealing with the US. The US knows Modi will serve the US interests better," said Bardhan.

CPM central committee member Mohammed Salim said after the UK, the US is following suit in wooing Modi. "Suddenly, western powers are trying to see virtue in Modi-land," said Salim. He believed the US is trying to take advantage of the political uncertainty and instability in the country. "They are trying to warm up to Modi as part of their future political investment," said Salim.

Right now, there seems no clear winner in the 2014 general elections. "So, Japan, the UK and now the US are attempting to swing the mood in the country. They are trying to endorse Modi as an acceptable face and influence the Indian people," said Salim, adding, "The victims of genocide and secular people of India will not forgive, forget or accept perpetrators of genocide."

"Modispeak, his so-called Sadbhavna Yatra and exploiting Vivekananda have not worked with the common people. But, it seems to have worked with the British. Many foreign governments are trying to warm up to him as part of their future political investment," he claimed.

Interview

Q: In the recent past we saw United Kingdom warming up to Gujarat and Narendra Modi – will we see that happening with the United States of America as well?

A: We have very good relations with Gujarat. It's obviously a very very important market for our American companies. And we'll continue to have those kinds of relations. We do everything we can to promote trade, and not just with Gujarat but with all the states in India and in terms of Mr. Modi, I don't want to speculate. He's free to apply for another visa whenever he chooses, and you know, the system will take its course.

Q: But is he not considered a force to be reckoned with – an important man, he could be the prime ministerial candidate for the Bharatiya Janata Party? Does that mean if not allowing him entry into the United States of America but at least reaching out to Narendra Modi here from Delhi and in Gujarat itself?

A: Again, I do not want to speculate on, about the future outcomes – even of your state elections or of your prime ministerial elections – those are internal matters – and of course we will work with whoever is elected and put into office.

Q: So you will work with Narendra Modi--?

A: Again, I do not want to make a speculation about who might be elected.

Q: But you intend to work with Narendra Modi in the future?

A: Well, again, I do not want to make any predictions. So I don't want to be drawn into that.