

Red tapism of Indian bureaucracy poses hurdle to red carpet: US

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Washington: Prime Minister Narendra Modi has made "remarkable" progress in his first 15 months in office by rolling out a red carpet for foreign companies, but the infamous red tapism of Indian bureaucracy continues to pose hurdles to investments, the White House has said.

"You can say that," Peter R Lavoy, Special Assistant to US President and Senior Director for South Asian Affairs at the National Security Council said when asked if his assessment of the Modi government means that both red carpet welcome and red tapism are running parallel to each other. "I have never seen any Indian government made such quick progress on so many issues, in such a short time. So it is truly remarkable," Lavoy told PTI.

"That said your bureaucracy has a certain worldwide reputation. I think, it has its own standards that are really unparalleled worldwide. Even though India continues to make this progress, we are confident that as the entirety the whole of government recognises their opportunities to move much more quickly to achieve the potential and the vision of the Prime Minister," he said replying to questions on new government's policies.

India-US relationship now - after May 2014 when Modi assumed the post of the Prime Minister - is in an excellent position, he said.

"This is by far the strongest the relationship has ever been. Not only that, it's our leaders President (Barack) Obama and everyone else, Prime Minister Modi and his cabinet look at the future - both sides here see a very very bright future where we see a deep opening and expansion of bilateral cooperation and working together to solve regional problems and international problems. We think the relationship is excellent," he said.

Lavoy, who joined the National Security Council early this year, is the White House's point person for entire of South Asia, including Afghanistan and Pakistan. The wide ranging interview, on various issues of India-US ties, policies of the NDA Government and India's role in the region and the world was held in the historic War Room of the Eisenhower Executive Office Building of the White House.

During the interview, Lavoy praised Modi Government's outreach to its neighbours to resolve outstanding bilateral and border issues and in particular mentioned the recent resolution of the border dispute with Bangladesh.

"We still have a situation where we have unresolved border disputes between India and few of its neighbours. Fortunately India has resolved its dispute with Bangladesh that was a very positive and a very sudden development. But it still has tensions with China. It still has tensions with Pakistan. So if you look at the overall regional situation. I think there are a lot of positive trends, but there are still some challenges that need to be worked out," he said.

Lavoy said a significant majority of the 70 deliverables announced during Obama's historic trip to New Delhi has been achieved.

"I think, the great majority (of the 70 deliverables announced in January) have been concluded. Some of these issues that were addressed and came out in the joint communique are ongoing issues. In many of these cases, we see significant progress, but more work needs to be done," he said in response to a question.

"In many of the areas there has been successful achievements of the actions or the tasks that were designated by the heads of states. And that is creating more opportunities for further deeper cooperation. So that as a critical historic

event of the President to India and his meetings with the Prime Minister and the action plan that they agreed upon is historic," he said.

"The successful conclusions of all these actions further deepen and expand our relationship. But that's not enough. We and the Indian Government have great ambition for partnership to go even further. So as we complete these actions, we are constantly looking at new things to do together," Lavoy said.

Refraining from making announcement on a possible Modi-Obama meeting in September when the Prime Minister travels to the United States to attend the annual session of the UN General Assembly, Lavoy said the US is very excited about the Prime Minister's forthcoming trip to New York and California.

"We love when Prime Minister Modi comes to the United States. I know that both the Indian Diaspora and the rest of the community out there is looking forward to this visit. I can't tell you, what meetings Prime Minister Modi would have with US Government officials.

They have not yet been formally announced. But I am sure Prime Minister Modi would be received in a very appropriate way when it comes to New York," he said. According to Lavoy, President Obama has set an ambitious agenda for deepening and expanding his partnership with India.

"If you look at what our partnership with India was at the outset of his administration and where it is now, six and half years later, the progress is really remarkable in every sector," he said.

"I expect, what the President would say, that he wants to see this progress continue, wants to see this as a very quick pace, rapid trajectory of deepening and expanding cooperation to continue so that we and India can work together to improve our bilateral coordination and collaboration, to help deal with regional problems in South Asia and advance global issues," the top White House official said.

Climate change is one area of such co-operation, he said.

"Each leader has agreed to work together to seek a very strong conclusion to the Paris conference to take place later this year. This is one example of the many examples that they have come together, where our cooperation can produce tangible results for dealing with important world issues," he noted.

- PTI