

Strong Obama-Modi relationship helped seal Paris deal: US official

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Washington: A "strong and productive relationship" between President Barack Obama and Prime Minister Narendra Modi helped seal a historic deal at the Paris climate change conference, according to a senior US official.

US Special Envoy for Climate Change Todd Stern did not think that but for Obama's call to Modi just a day before the deal, the agreement would not have come about. "I could not at all say that but for that call the agreement wouldn't have come together," Stern told foreign media Tuesday.

It was more like "a check-in call to see how we were doing and to urge us all on together toward a successful conclusion," he said.

"And I think it was done in that spirit, not in the spirit that there was some specific thing that had to be done before the agreement could get completed."

"What I can say is that President Obama and Prime Minister Modi have a very, I think, strong and productive relationship, not just on climate change but broadly."

"It was a quite extraordinary fact that within the space of four months there were two head of state visits," he said noting that Modi visited the US in September 2014 and then invited Obama to India just four months later in January.

And then there were communications during the year, Stern said. They also met on the margins of the UN General Assembly in New York and they met on the first day of the Paris meeting.

Stern who attended that meeting said, "It was, I think, a very warm and positive and cordial and detailed, substantive exchange."

"In fact, they talked so long that they were a little bit late to the announcement of this big Mission Innovation idea on R&D that the US, India, China, many other countries ultimately were part of," he said.

The US "is strongly supportive of the notion of differentiation," Stern said. "We think it's absolutely right that you can't expect developing countries to act in ways that are inconsistent with their own imperatives of development, growth, poverty eradication, and so forth."

"We also think, though, that the nature of differentiation has to be forward-looking and has to be done in a way that is consistent with and sort of fundamentally grounded in countries' circumstances and capacities," he said.

It should not simply be based on "in what category they were in the original 1992 framework convention, and particularly for an agreement that we hope is going to last for many decades," Stern said.

The core idea of mitigation structure is that a country is going to decide for itself what it's able to do, he said.

In response to another question, Stern said, "there are common standards that apply to everybody, but you don't expect the United States and the EU to be doing the same thing as a least developed country or necessarily even India."

"That'll depend on their own assessment of what they can do, but with strong expectations that countries certainly,

again, have common standards and carry those out to the greatest extent possible," he said.

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