



*JPNN/New Delhi / June 16, 2015/ Lalit Modi, former IPL chief, tonight made explosive claims that Rajasthan Chief Minister Vasundhara Raje had supported in writing his immigration plea in Britain and that he has a "family" relationship with External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj whose husband and daughter had provided legal services "free of cost". Holidaying in the tiny Balkan nation of Montenegro, Modi told Rajdeep Sardesai of India Today TV channel in an interview that Raje had accompanied his wife to Portugal for her cancer treatment two years ago. Raje became chief minister of Rajasthan for the second time in December 2013. The comments of the tainted former IPL Commissioner assume significance because it came hours after it was reported that Raje had given a "Witness Statement" in August 2011 to British authorities supporting his case for immigration in Britain which he has made his base after fleeing from India where he faces serious charges of money laundering and FEMA violations. Raje's purported "witness statement" was made public earlier in the day on behalf of the Modi camp but later tonight the Chief Minister said she was not aware of this document. "Of course I know the family. I have always known them...(But) I do not know what documents they are talking about," she told reporters in Jaipur. In the interview Modi said, "My relationship with Vasundhara Raje goes back 30 years. That relationship is known to everybody. She is a close friend of the family and my wife for a long time...She openly agreed to be (to be a witness), but unfortunately by the time the case went to trial, she was already chief Minister, so she did not come to become a witness. The statements she gave is all on records in the courts." "Raje and Sushma supported me when my wife was sick," he said.*

*"It was a family, a legal whatever you may call it. We were very close. But the point is not that...I am very close to a lot of politicians, not only Mrs Swaraj...", Modi said when asked about his relationship with Sushma Swaraj. "My wife was being taken to Portugal by whom, by Mrs Vasundhara Raje. Nobody knows that, I am putting that on record now," Modi said, adding she accompanied his wife Minal in 2012 and 2013. The surfacing of the "witness statement" gave a new twist to the controversy surrounding External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj's help to Modi to seek British travel documents. "I did ask her (Swaraj) help," Modi said, adding that he would have made a similar plea to any other External Affairs Minister in office.*

*"I know Swaraj Kaushal(Sushma's husband) for 20 years. He has been my advocate for 20 years...His daughter Bansuri had been my advocate for four years," he said, adding that their services had been provided "free of cost". The Witness Statement came into circulation just hours after Finance Minister Arun Jaitley backed Swaraj saying whatever she had done was in good faith and bona fide. The document had a confidentiality clause in which Raje purportedly supported Modi's case but did not want it to be revealed to Indian authorities. Swaraj found*

*herself at the centre of a political firestorm after the UK-based Sunday Times reported a "leaked conversation" between influential Labour MP Keith Vaz and head of UK Visas and Immigration Sarah Rapson that cited Swaraj to facilitate travel documents for Lalit Modi. Agency*