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Asif's candour makes its way

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HOW much positive and fruitful has been President Asif Ali Zardari's visit to the US, the same United States which witnessed a number of significant events taking place simultaneously for making the world nuke-free and for working towards a stronger and more viable Pakistan whose role in global peace just can't be overlooked by saner elements among the global leaders?

This question needs to be answered somewhat pragmatically and calculatingly rather in terms of global peace.

In a way this question has already been answered by President Zardari while addressing Friends of Democratic Pakistan (FoDP) meeting in New York. Pakistan is key to world peace, says the President. Yes, it is an undeniable fact which remains the focal point of Zardari's visit to the US and to the United Nations, the President of Pakistan making use of every minutest opportunity to highlight Pakistan's standpoint unequivocally without an iota of despair or diffidence.

The question certainly is not that of winning any laurels or making any tall claims of achievements or accomplishments but it is essentially a question of Pakistan's leap into a bright and more secure future. And it is also a question of coming out of isolation that certain inimical elements had tried to impose on Pakistan through negative propaganda by painting Pakistan as a failing state or the one infested with rampant corruption.

None of these negative projections against Pakistan could make inroads into Pakistan's positive image built with perseverance, self-confidence and consistent efforts undertaken by President Zardari and his team who are working incessantly for not only rebuilding the country's image as a modern, moderate and civilized democracy but also as a progressive nation capable of taking up challenges of all sorts.

These efforts have been well received both in the United States as well as in the United Nations. Pakistan has made strides in achieving acceptance of its principled standpoint.

Take, for instance, Kerry-Lugar bill. Even though carrying some conditionalities as is typical with all Pakistan-specific Bills in US Congress, it has not come as a Godsend or even as an easy gift from the United States. Instead, this accomplishment is backed by months of parleys held between Pakistan's and United States' key functionaries. A good few keen observers, however, know very well that once in the past, between late 1970s and early 1980s, Pakistan was able to get certification from US President satisfying one of the Congressional preconditions about our nuclear programme. That certification was otherwise difficult to come but it did come and the way for aid was cleared at that time.

Even now Pakistan is placed in a somewhat advantageous position, at least strategically, that certification of any such nature just can't be denied to us abruptly. And the good thing about Kerry-Lugar Bill is that it not only triples US democratic, economic and social development assistance to Pakistan to \$ 1.5 billion a year for five years hence, rather it has also to be primarily focused on democratic institutions, economic development and education.

More importantly, the question is more of democratic parity and recognition and less of monetary assistance that is just a fraction of what Pakistan actually and direly needs, as also pressed upon by President Zardari who did not hesitate to state in London that Pakistan needed 100 billion dollars. The democratic parity which means treatment of Pakistani nation at par with other successful and respected nations of the world, has certainly come our way, courtesy the sustained efforts of Islamabad leadership.

But all that does not mean that nothing concrete in terms of material development is expected. Good news is that the ice has been broken with greater

trust-building that is the natural product of high profile Friends of Democratic Pakistan (FoDP) meeting that was not only a display of confidence in Pakistan and its leadership but also an occasion to do away with the sluggishness on the part of global leaders in relation with Pakistan. The presence of US President Barack Obama and British Prime Minister Gordon Brown as Co-chairmen of FoDP meeting in the US, along with President Asif Ali Zardari, carries its own significance on the global canvas.

To give it a good jumpstart, though with initial modesty, PM Brown announced 50 million Pound Sterling as economic aid for development of Pakistan's tribal areas. Apart from that, a multi-donor trust fund is also coming with the collaboration of World Bank to provide sustained financial support to Pakistan for latter's economic development and prosperity. President Zardari thanked the world leaders and besides laying stress on his old standpoint that Pakistan is key to world peace, he likened Pakistan's success in eradication of terrorism to victory for democracies all over the world.

During the same period, a good development has taken place following Zardari's meeting with US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton and that is the appointment by the US of an international, special energy coordinator who would help Pakistan in achieving energy security by assisting it in implementing energy projects. The coordinator is scheduled to visit Pakistan next month for expediting energy projects with US assistance.

At the United Nations too, the President drew attention of the world representatives to understand that it is the world and its leaders who need to do more for terrorism-hit Pakistan and its people. Addressing the UN General Assembly, Zardari laid emphasis on disarmament with equal security for all and resumption of talks with India and above all, the resolution of Kashmir, Palestine issues.