* **Important memories**

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Ghulam Ishaq Khan was one of the most patriotic, competent, honest and efficient Pakistanis I know. He was born on January 20, 1915 in Bannu and died on October 27, 2006 in Peshawar.

Some TV stations relayed short clips to commemorate the life of this great man. He was head (Coordinator) of our nuclear weapons programme from 1977 to 1993. I probably knew him better than anyone else excepting, of course, his immediate family. I respected him like my father (we were both Pathans) and I always had the feeling that he treated me as his son.

Khan Sahib received his schooling in Bannu and then obtained a BSc from Peshawar University. In 1940 He joined the provincial civil service. From there he went to the central government and held such important posts as chairman PIDC, Governor State Bank of Pakistan, chairman WAPDA, etc. Mr Bhutto, recognizing his talents, made him Secretary General Defence. Whatever responsibility was given to him, he excelled in it. During Gen Zia’s regime, he was made the senior most civil servant as secretary general-in-chief, almost a de facto prime minister.

I met him the first time in July 1976. We had come to Pakistan on holiday in the last week of December as we did every year. Karachi, at that time of the year, had lovely weather and for us it was a nice break from dreary and cold Dutch winters. I had met Mr Bhutto on our visit the previous year and had suggested we start a programme to give India a matching response to its nuclear capability.

Lack of expertise, non-existent facilities and/ or infrastructure had made any progress impossible so far and I informed Mr Bhutto accordingly. Out of the blue he asked me to remain in Pakistan and lead the programme. It was a difficult decision; on the one hand I wanted to help Pakistan, but on the other hand I had an excellent job in Holland, was the Dutch delegate to the Common Market Science and Technology Committee in Brussels, could travel wherever my fancy took me, had an offer of a Professorship and my wife’s elderly parents lived fairly close by.

My wife and I mutually decided to stay on. While I was made Advisor to PAEC, she was left to go back, organize our affairs in Holland and inform her parents of our decision as Mr. Bhutto thought it best I didn’t go back. He felt sure, he said, that I could do the job without my literature, etc from Holland. For six months nothing happened – no progress was made in the work and I did not receive any salary (Rs3,000 per month). Utterly fed up, I told Mr Bhutto I wanted to leave and we flew to Karachi.

The next day I received a call from Gen Imtiaz (MS to the PM) informing me that a ticket would be sent to the house and I was to attend a meeting in Islamabad. Meanwhile, due to some urgent work, Mr Bhutto and Gen Imtiaz had flown to Lahore and I was told to join them there. A meeting was scheduled for that evening in Governor House. There I found Mr Bhutto, Gen Imtiaz and Mr. Agha Shahi. I informed them that lack of experienced man power, a highly bureaucratic system, etc made it impossible for me to achieve anything.

Mr Bhutto said he would solve the problem in two or three days. He was very annoyed at having been previously told that a nuclear explosion could be achieved by the end of 1976 and now finding out that nothing had been done. I returned to Islamabad and was called for a meeting two days later. Present were Ghulam Ishaq Khan, A G N Kazi, Agha Shahi and Gen Imtiaz Ali. Upon explaining the state of affairs to them, they suggested making me chairman of PAEC. This I refused, as it would make the whole world aware of our plans. Other names were suggested but I told them I felt it would be better to separate the uranium enrichment project entirely from PAEC and given under my charge.

The next day I was told that my suggestion had been approved. The new organization would be fully autonomous and I would head it and be given full powers and a free hand. At an official meeting three days later, at which Gen Zia and Munir Ahmad Khan were also present, it was officially intimidated that a new organization – Engineering Research Laboratories (ERL) – would be set up under my leadership but falling directly under the coordination board and the PM. The Coordination Board would consist of A G N Kazi, Ghulam Ishaq Khan and Agha Shahi and it would coordinate and supervise the activities of both ERL and PAEC. Upon requesting to be given a competent team of civil engineers to start construction of the Plant on a war footing, a team was posted to ERL. This team did wonders and managed to shock the Western world by the speed with which construction was completed.

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