**Eating grass**

**[Dr Farid A Malik](https://nation.com.pk/Columnist/dr-farid-a-malik)**

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It was Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto (ZAB) who assured a demoralised nation; “We will build the bomb even if we have to eat grass”. One of his comrades, Dr Anwar Sajjad, presented a simpler version; “Rukhi Sukki Khain Gay Atom Bomb Babain Gay”, (We will survive on the bare minimum but will build the bomb). The nation responded to the call of their popular leader. It was Munir Ahmed Khan of the International Atomic Energy Commission (IAEC) in Vienna who had sold the idea of building the bomb to ZAB when he was Foreign Minister (FM). Together, they tried to convince Ayub Khan to keep pace with India in this vital area but the President did not agree. After the Indian-sponsored break-up of Quaid’s Pakistan, ZAB as President of what was left, decided to go ahead. A secret meeting of scientists of the Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission (PAEC) was arranged in Multan at the residence of Nawab Sadiq Hussain Qureshi. With Professor Abdul Salam on his side, he asked a straight question; “Who can design a nuclear device?” All hands went up as usual. Salam intervened and suggested the name of his former student Professor Riazuddin of Quaid-e-Azam University who was an outstanding Theoretical Physicist. ZAB then invited Engr Munir Ahmed Khan to head PAEC, a position he held for 18 long years. The programme was launched in 1972. Engr Munir retired in 1991 and was succeeded by Dr Ishfaq Ahmad Khan, who retired in 2001. As the task at hand was challenging and involved clandestine procurements, it was agreed to give the project an audit waiver. In other words, public money was to be spent without the oversight of AGPR (Accountant General Pakistan’s Revenue). Till today the facility continues. In 1976, when Dr Qadeer Khan started his Kahuta Research Laboratories (KRL) for the enrichment of uranium, the waiver was extended and the same continued with Dr Samar Mubarik Mand’s NESCOM (National Engineering and Science Commission) in the year 2000.

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The huge technological framework that has been developed should now be used for the development of commercial products. Commercialisation and the application of technology is required. As a nation, whenever we have been involved in product-driven research, we have succeeded. First, it was the launch of the first space rocket, Rahbar I in the decade of the sixties, followed by the production of silicon in the seventies, then the enrichment of uranium in the eighties, the nuclear bomb and the Al-Khalid tank in the nineties, followed by our own fighter jet, the JF-17 Thunder. When I took over as Chairman Pakistan Science Foundation (PSF) in the year 2002, I visited most of these facilities located around Islamabad. Through the newly launched Industrial Liaison Group (ILG), PSF interacted with these technology centres. Though the facilities were there, the commercial approach was missing.

The purpose of this article is to highlight the plight of the common man who has supported all these instances of development. There has been too much ‘Rukhi Sukki’; even grass has become scarce for the nation. Now that our security has been ensured with the development of the nuclear deterrent, it is time to restart the stalled human development effort. Education, health, employment and clean drinking water need greater focus. All development programmes must come under audit for better utilisation. ZAB talked about “Roti, Kapra Makan” when he launched the nuclear programme under Engr Munir Ahmed Khan and Dr Qadeer Khan; now that it has been accomplished let us revisit his remaining promises made to the nation. ZAB wanted to create a socialist state while Imran Khan had the vision of a welfare state on the lines of ‘Riasat-e-Madina’. Both require realignment and re-prioritisation of resources.

[Fans angry over Pakistan but heap praise for centurion Van der Dussen](https://nation.com.pk/21-Oct-2021/fans-angry-over-pakistan-but-heap-praise-for-centurion-van-der-dussen)

Waivers and task forces work well only in the short term, if extended, they create complications. Permanent frameworks are required for long-term sustainability. The free hand in money management perhaps played a role in the international scrutiny of our alleged nuclear exports. For purposes of better control, the Strategic Programmes Division (SPD) was created but the financial audit waiver has been extended. SPD is usually headed by a three-star general in uniform. Now that a permanent structure has been created, the financial waiver may not be necessary any more. The next phase should be the commercialisation and application of our indigenous technologies leading to much-needed socioeconomic development. While exports have to increase, the import bill should also come down through a well-planned self reliance programme. The people of Pakistan must come first.

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