

Dr. A.Q. Khan: The Founder of Pakistan's Nuclear Programme



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Dr. Abdul Qadeer Khan, commonly known as Dr. A.Q. Khan, is regarded as one of Pakistan's most famous scientists and is often called the "Father of Pakistan's Nuclear Program." His contributions to the development of nuclear technology earned him the status of a national hero and brought him international fame. For decades, Dr. Khan's role in enhancing Pakistan's defense capabilities played a significant part in the geopolitics of South Asia.

Dr. A.Q. Khan was born on April 1, 1936, in Bhopal, India. After the partition of India in 1947, his family migrated to Pakistan, where he continued his education. Initially, Dr. Khan earned a degree in Metallurgical Engineering from Karachi University. He then pursued higher education in Europe, where he received a Ph.D. in Metallurgical Engineering from the Catholic University of Leuven in Belgium. His expertise in metallurgy became the foundation of his later work.

In 1971, following Pakistan's loss of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) after a war with India, the country's leadership was determined to strengthen its defense. Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto declared that Pakistan would develop nuclear weapons to ensure its national security. At this pivotal moment, Dr. A.Q. Khan offered his services to Pakistan's nuclear program in the mid-1970s, which was still in its early stages. He had valuable experience in uranium enrichment technology from Europe, which proved crucial for Pakistan. Dr. Khan played a key role in

advancing the uranium enrichment process, enabling Pakistan to eventually produce weapons-grade material. His efforts led to the establishment of the Khan Research Laboratories (KRL) in Kahuta, dedicated to uranium enrichment.

On May 28, 1998, under the leadership of then-Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, Pakistan successfully conducted its nuclear tests, making it the first Muslim-majority country to become a nuclear power. Dr. Khan's work was central to this achievement, and he was hailed as a national hero by many Pakistanis. These tests were conducted in response to India's nuclear tests earlier that same year, achieving a balance of power between the two countries in the region.

Despite being celebrated as a hero in Pakistan, Dr. Khan became a controversial figure internationally. In 2004, under international pressure, Dr. Khan publicly admitted to his involvement in the illegal transfer of nuclear technology to countries such as Iran, Libya, and North Korea. This admission shocked the world and had significant diplomatic repercussions for Pakistan. Although Dr. Khan later retracted his confession, claiming it was made under duress, his reputation had been tarnished. The Pakistani government placed him under house arrest, although he was never formally tried for his alleged actions. His supporters in Pakistan argue that Dr. Khan's contributions to national security far outweigh the controversies, and internationally, he was viewed as a prominent figure. Dr. A.Q. Khan's legacy is deeply intertwined with Pakistan's

security narrative. His work helped secure Pakistan's sovereignty and deter potential threats, particularly from India. Despite the controversies surrounding his involvement in nuclear proliferation, his contribution to making Pakistan a nuclear power cannot be denied.

Dr. Abdul Qadeer Khan passed away on October 10, 2021, in Islamabad after a prolonged illness.

His impact on Pakistan's defense and scientific landscape is indelible. In Pakistan, Dr. A.Q. Khan will always be remembered as the man who made his country one of the few nuclear powers in the world, despite facing challenges related to nuclear proliferation.

Dr. Abdul Qadeer Khan was a figure whose life and work profoundly affected Pakistan's defense strategy and its global standing. His efforts in developing Pakistan's nuclear program earned him the status of a national hero, while also bringing Pakistan significant international attention. His story is one of scientific brilliance and the far-reaching consequences of nuclear technology in an increasingly interconnected world.

During his lifetime, Dr. Abdul Qadeer Khan was honored with numerous prestigious awards and recognitions for his contributions to science and Pakistan's defense. Some of his notable honors include:

Nishan-e-Imtiaz (twice) – 1996 and 1999: Pakistan's highest civilian award, given in recognition of his significant services to the country.

Hilal-e-Imtiaz – 1989: Another esteemed civilian award for his contributions to nuclear science.

In addition to these renowned honors, Dr. Khan received countless commendations and certificates from various institutions and organizations in Pakistan, appreciating his vital role in the development of the nation's nuclear capabilities.