

Undaunted by Japan, Jordan continues nuclear drive

AMMAN - Despite sparking an industry-wide review of safety features, the ongoing Fukushima reactor crisis has failed to slow down the Jordanian drive for nuclear power.

The programme is set to reach various milestones “according to schedule”, a senior energy official said.

It is going ahead according to schedule, with the country nearing the completion of its technology selection process for its first nuclear power plant, said Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources Khaled Toukan.

“We are still set for our dates as previously envisioned and we are watching the Japan situation closely as it unfolds,” Toukan told The Jordan Times in a recent phone interview.

Jordan is expected to select one of three short-listed vendors - Canadian, Russian and French-Japanese technologies - by June 30 in order to enter discussions for the construction of the country’s first nuclear power plant by 2019.

Meanwhile, Toukan pointed out that the commission is fielding “serious interest” from potential international operators and investors who would hold a strategic share in the country’s first reactor.

According to Toukan, the Jordan Atomic Energy Commission is following developments at Fukushima “closely” and is set to take part in an International Atomic Energy Agency conference in May to review lessons learned from the incident.

As part of its technology selection process, Amman is requesting potential vendors to consider the Fukushima incident and detail how their reactor would withstand similar conditions, namely a 8.9 magnitude earthquake on the Richter scale.

Jordan’s nuclear power programme has come under intense scrutiny in the weeks following the Fukushima incident, with calls from environmentalists to parliamentarians from Amman to abandon its drive for nuclear power in favour of renewable energy sources.

Authorities have maintained that nuclear energy remains the key to solving the Kingdom’s energy woes, pointing to its stable electricity prices and the country’s abundant uranium reserves, estimated at some 120,000 tonnes.