

Jordanians fret over 'dangerous' nuclear plan

November 5 2013, by Kamal Taha



Jordanian Greenpeace activists protest outside the premier's office in Amman on October 30, 2011 against the country's official resolution to establish a nuclear reactor for peaceful purposes

Jordan's plan to build its first nuclear plant with Russian help has stirred fresh fears and suspicions as experts called for the "dangerous" and "illogical" project to be abandoned.

The government announced late last month that two Russian firms will build and operate a \$10-billion (7-billion-euro) nuclear plant, including

two 1,000-megawatt reactors.

The plant, to be completed in 2023, will be built in Amra, a desert area north of the capital, the government said.

Energy-poor Jordan says it wants to develop [nuclear power](#) to meet its growing needs and to fire desalination plants to overcome its crippling water shortage.

But activists and environmentalists warn that the project is too risky.

"We are very afraid of this project because it's dangerous to the entire country, people, the environment, and economy. We do not see a need for it," Ali Kassay, a member the Jordanian Coalition for Nuclear Free Jordan, told AFP.

"There are cheaper, better and safer alternatives," he said.

"It's illogical to build a nuclear plant in a country known historically for earthquakes, as well as lack of capabilities, funds, human resources and water."

On October 28, the government said Russia's Rosatom Overseas will operate the planned [nuclear plant](#) as a strategic partner, while Atomstroyexport will provide the atomic technology.

"Before making such announcements, detailed feasibility studies and consultations with local communities should have been carried out," said environmentalist Rauf Dabbas, who also advises the environment ministry.

"Until this day, this has not been taken into consideration," he said.

"There are no local institutions that have the experience to closely monitor such nuclear activities and plans."

Dabbas said the government "is not serious about enhancing the role of the ministries of health and the environment in this project.

"There are also security concerns. The plant's site is located near main roads linking Jordan to Iraq and Saudi Arabia," he added.

"Jordan's nuclear plans will take at least 10 years to provide us with [energy](#), but we need energy now."

With desert covering 92 percent of its territory, the tiny kingdom has little or no natural resources and is one of the world's 10 driest countries.

The government pins high hopes on atomic technology, which remains deeply sensitive in a region where Israel has an undeclared monopoly on nuclear weapons.

"Nuclear technology will significantly reduce the cost of electricity production," Khaled Tukan, head of the Jordan Atomic Energy Commission, told state-run Petra news agency.

The country imports 97 percent of its energy needs, and spends around \$2 billion a year to generate power.

"The project, which will provide Jordanians with 10,000 jobs, will be carried out in line with the best measures to ensure the safety of people and the environment," he said.

"Our experts are currently receiving training in several countries across the world."

Amman in August gave the go-ahead to the Korean Atomic Energy Research Institute and Daewoo Engineering and Construction Co. to build a five-megawatt nuclear research reactor at the northern Jordan University for Sciences and Technology.

"Jordan's nuclear decision is a miscalculation," said Safaa Jayoussi, a Greenpeace climate and energy campaigner.

"We saw what happened in Japan's Fukushima [nuclear power plant](#). We cannot allow this to happen in Jordan. Nuclear energy will not provide sustainable energy. Jordan should drop its plans before it's too late."

The Fukushima plant was badly damaged by a tsunami in March 2011 and critics say it remains fragile and at the mercy of extreme weather or other natural hazards.

"Jordan lacks the funds, means and laws to govern and ensure nuclear safety as reckless government policies continue to provoke Jordanians who reject the nuclear plan," local environmental organisations said in a joint statement.

The government says Jordan has a reserve of 35,000 tonnes of uranium.

"We have a serious energy problem, but the [government](#) is not doing what it is needed to convince Jordanians of the nuclear programme and its feasibility," prominent MP Khalil Attieh told AFP.

"Jordanians, including MPs, have many concerns and fears, which so far are not being addressed."

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