

Kingdom increasing pace of renewable energy development

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Jordan is expected to achieve part of the National Energy Strategy ahead of schedule, moving it one step closer to becoming a regional leader in renewable energies, a senior energy official said on Wednesday.

Energy Minister Khaldoun Qteishat said that with the advancement of wind power technology and several wind power projects on the way, the government expects to produce 600 megawatts of wind energy by 2015, five years ahead of initial estimates.

Solar energy, meanwhile, is expected to take advantage of the country's annual 300 days of sunshine and produce 300MW by 2020, under the revised strategy.

Qteishat said the ministry has also amended the national strategy to increase the amount of domestically produced energy, which stood at 4% as of 2007, to 25% in 2015 and 40% by 2020.

"Jordan has no indigenous energy sources aside from natural gas and oil shale," Qteishat said, pointing out that energy imports cost the Kingdom 23% of its GDP last year.

With energy demand in Jordan expected to increase 5.5% annually over the next decade, he said the government will work to develop several alternative energies to meet those demands.

Noting that oil shale and nuclear energy are central to Jordan's plans for long-term energy independence, the minister said: "The optimum solution in the short term view is the enhancement of renewable energy projects."

A series of initiatives will be financed through a renewable energy and energy efficiency fund, to be established under the Energy and Mineral Resources draft law, which the minister expects to be approved in the next session of parliament.

In addition to increasing the amount of renewable energy resources to meet 10% of the Kingdom's energy demands, the ministry seeks to increase household and industrial solar water heater penetration from 15% to 50% across the country.

In addition to a planned 40MW wind power plant in Kamsheh, near Jerash, to be operational by next year, officials are planning an 80-90MW wind power plant in Fujeji by 2011, and studies are underway to develop a solar thermal plant around Wadi Rum that could produce 150-300MW by 2015.

The government is also assessing locations in Al Harir, near Tafileh, Al Hussein University area in Mann and Wadi Araba where the ministry hopes to construct wind power plants capable of generating between 300-400MW of wind power.