

The UAE's nuclear path: Q&A with Ambassador Hamad Alkaabi

By Shant Krikorian

The United Arab Emirates is expected to bring its first nuclear power reactor into operation in 2018. The country started building the first unit of the Barakah Nuclear Power Plant in 2012 and currently has four units under construction. We sat down with Ambassador Hamad Alkaabi, Permanent Representative of the UAE to the IAEA, to talk about his country's nuclear power programme.

Q: Why did the UAE choose to embark on a nuclear power programme?

A: The UAE's decision to pursue a nuclear power programme was based on the need to meet the country's increasing energy demand. We chose nuclear power for its commercial and environmental competitiveness. The early phase of the programme included a detailed road map addressing all infrastructure requirements and associated costs. The decision to go ahead with the programme was based on full understanding of its financial implications. The development of a nuclear power programme requires solid investment and risk mitigation strategies. What makes our programme successful is our Government's robust commitment, a viable business model, high public acceptance and strong international cooperation and support, including with and from the IAEA.

Q: How has the IAEA helped with this process?

A: The IAEA has provided guidance on the development of our national nuclear infrastructure. Our planning was based on the IAEA's Milestones approach, whereby eight IAEA review missions were conducted covering various areas and stages of the programme. Moreover, the reports from



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these review missions were made public, which contributed to increased confidence in the programme among stakeholders and the public at large.

Q: How will cooperation with the IAEA evolve once the Barakah Plant is connected to the grid?

A: The focus of our cooperation will naturally shift to more advanced areas of commissioning and safety of operation, but

Barakah nuclear power plant, UAE

(Photo: IAEA)



we will continue to be interested in technical support and peer review missions.

The UAE's commitment to the highest standards of operational transparency, safety, security and non-proliferation, as well as our cooperation with the IAEA has enabled our programme to serve as a model for many countries embarking on nuclear power. We look forward to sharing our experience with other IAEA Member States.

Q: How can a country develop a strong nuclear regulator when it is developing a nuclear power programme?

A: A competent nuclear safety regulator is the cornerstone of any successful nuclear programme. First, we established the right framework through a comprehensive nuclear law that gives the regulator the power, independence and resources it needs to carry out its mandate. Second, we have established the regulatory capabilities by focusing on maintaining the needed skills. This is done on the one hand by acquiring external experts with global experience, while training local experts and developing their skills on the other. We also coordinate with the industry so that building regulatory capabilities becomes a gradual process directly linked to the progress of the project and its schedule. Not to mention the valuable support received from the reactor's country of origin and other internationally recognized technical support organizations.

Q: A foreign workforce has played an important role in the UAE's nuclear push. How will the country secure a skilled and sustainable workforce in this sector for the long term?

A: Building a sustainable national capacity is a challenge for any country using nuclear. In newcomer States, nuclear projects necessarily dictate a reliance on a foreign workforce and expertise, particularly at the beginning of a project. To address the challenge of ensuring the availability of sufficient manpower throughout all phases of the nuclear programme, the UAE developed a robust human resources strategy that identifies the scale and type of expertise needed. It is an integrated approach that includes scholarships

WOMEN IN NUCLEAR

Shaima Al-Mansoori

Director, Education and Training, UAE's Federal Authority of Nuclear Regulation (FANR)



Ms. Al-Mansoori is responsible for capacity building, knowledge management and operations training at FANR. Under her leadership, the Education and Training Department has progressed in developing the capacities of the Emirati staff and experts in the areas of competency development, succession, research and development, knowledge management, technical certifications and career development. Ms. Al-Mansoori joined

FANR in 2009 and played an important role in the establishment of the department alongside experts in the field of capacity building.

“Empowering women in nuclear serves a vital part of our work at FANR. We have developed specific programmes to ensure our women are well equipped with the skills and knowledge required to perform at their peak. Currently, Emirati women comprise more than 38 percent of FANR’s total workforce of 213 employees, with around 42 women taking up leading roles in nuclear safety and security, safeguards and others.”

and on-the-job training and mentoring. Youth empowerment and capacity building are key priorities in our policy.

Q: What is the UAE's rationale for hosting the IAEA's International Ministerial Conference on Nuclear Power in the 21st Century?

A: In 2012, the UAE became the first newcomer State in almost three decades to start the construction of a nuclear power reactor. This makes it a uniquely relevant case to many Member States. The support we received for hosting this Conference is recognition of the UAE's successful efforts and responsible approach in developing a peaceful nuclear programme. Moreover, the Conference is an important forum to discuss the current and future role of nuclear power in sustainable development and climate change mitigation. The UAE is happy to host such a timely discussion, given our strong commitment to clean energy, where nuclear, solar and other clean sources will play an important role in our nation's future energy mix.