

Qatar: Capacity rises with water demand

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DOHA: Qatar's water desalination capacity is set to rise to 1.4m cubic metres a day by next year. The country's power generating capacity would also touch 9 gigawatts during this period.

Per capita consumption of water in Qatar is among the highest in the world. More than half of the country's water goes to the agricultural sector, but demand from the country's growing urban population is increasing.

Qatar is investing heavily in desalination plants. It has one of the oldest desalination programmes in the Middle East and so has garnered much experience in the sector, according to Business Monitor International's (BMI) "Qatar Water Report Q3 2010". The report said the country's water demand in the summer months of 2009 rose seven percent compared to the previous year.

Similar studies conducted by various other agencies show domestic and commercial water requirements in Qatar have increased dramatically over the past one decade due to the country's fast population growth. The construction boom, coupled with rapid expansion of agricultural activities, has resulted in a substantial increase in water demand, leading to extensive mining of deep aquifers and construction of more and more desalination plants in the country.

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) forecasts Qatar's water demand for the year 2025 at 485m cubic metres. The ESCWA has also forecast that Qatar would witness a quantum jump in water demand from the agricultural and domestic sectors by that year. The ESCWA made the forecast some 10 years ago.

The BMI research note said much of the expansion in Qatar's desalination programme is being achieved through independent water and power projects (IWPPs). The largest of these is the Ras Girtas project currently under construction in the Ras Laffan industrial complex. A further IWPP is under consideration, and the country is also widening its technological horizons, with a pilot reverse osmosis desalination plant due to be built and solar-powered desalination plans under consideration.

The \$3.9bn Ras Girtas project managed to achieve its funding goals in mid-2008, despite the already rocky state of international capital markets, indicating investor confidence. The global economic downturn has hindered the pace of development since then to some extent, but signs of improvement in the regional investment climate will benefit the sector. Of late, Qatar General Electricity and Water Corporation (Kahramaa) announced it would spend \$9bn for augmenting its water distribution network across the country. It floated tenders for several key projects for enhancing the country's water distribution system to meet the country's burgeoning water demand.

The BMI report said the country will need to attract more funding and technical know-how, as it will need to expand its water supply, wastewater treatment and power capacity over the next five years if output is to keep ahead of growing demand.