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Solar power key for Saudi future, says energy chief

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Executive director of Saudi Electricity Company says solar energy is a must, not a choice, at opening event of Solar Arabia Summit.



As solar power prices in Saudi Arabia fall, the potential of PV in the sun-rich Kingdom could yet be realized.
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A leading figurehead in Saudi Arabia's energy sector has called solar energy "a must" for the kingdom, stating that Saudi Arabia has little choice but to pursue the potential of solar power if it hopes to maintain the country's standard of living.

Speaking at the opening day of the fourth Solar Arabia summit in Riyadh, Hamed al-Saggaf, executive director of the Saudi Electricity Company, told attendees that the kingdom must learn to wean itself off its dependence on oil and gas for electricity production.

"If we continue to consume fuel at the same rate, then there will be a great lost opportunity," Saggaf said. "We have to start pursuing solar now."

With a peak electricity load of 57 GW and a growing, power-hungry middle class, Saudi Arabia has begun to give greater consideration to its energy future. The subject has rarely been discussed in recent decades as the oil-rich Kingdom cornered the global OPEC market.

However, Saggaf revealed at the conference plans to embellish Saudi Arabia's so-far stagnant solar industry. The Saudi Electricity Company plans to invest \$109 billion in solar energy between now and 2032 as it eyes a [solar power capacity of 41 GW](#) – a figure that would meet 30% of the Kingdom's projected 120 GW energy needs by that date.

"It is a dream right now," added Ali al-Maashi of petrochemicals company Saudi Basic Industries Corp. "But I think we have the capacity," he added, stressing that Saudi Arabia needs to develop clear policies and frameworks in order to create a conducive pro-solar environment.

Saggaf's plan is to develop solar power capacity in Saudi Arabia's remote north and northeast areas where diesel power generation is king. "The gateway for solar is these isolated areas," he said. "The cost of transporting the diesel is much higher than the subsidized cost of the diesel itself."

Saudi Arabia's 41 GW goal has already earned the support of the Chinese National Nuclear Corporation (CNNC) – a state-backed entity based in Beijing that is set to partner with the Saudi energy research center King Abdullah City for Atomic and Renewable Energy (K. A. CARE) to develop renewable and nuclear energy in the Kingdom.

Solar development in the Kingdom has threatened to take off for many years, but tangible progress so far is minimal. Nevertheless, IHS expects approximately 1.5 GW of solar PV capacity to be deployed in Saudi Arabia by 2017. The 2032 goal of 41 GW of solar energy will be driven predominately by concentrated solar power (CSP), but at least 16 GW of that capacity will be derived from PV sources, said K. A. CARE.



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