

Kuwait close to deal to import Qatar power

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Kuwait plans to sign a deal to import electricity from Qatar next week to cover possible power shortages until 2010, Kuwait's electricity and water minister was quoted as saying on Saturday by state news agency KUNA. Nabil bin Salama plans to meet his Qatari counterpart on April 19 and 20.

Kuwait has one of the world's highest per capita power consumption rates and has struggles to keep up with rising demand. When temperatures in the desert peak at around 50 degrees Celsius, Kuwait's grid struggles to deal with demand for air conditioning.

Gulf Arab countries have hooked up the first phase of a regional power grid that they hope will help them meet rapidly rising regional demand. Links between the grids of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Qatar are being tested and should be up and running in the summer. The United Arab Emirates and Qatar would be linked at a later stage.

Kuwait has said it plans to boost power capacity to around 16,000 megawatts, from 10,000MW, by 2012. Bin Salama expects 2010 to be critical for the Gulf Arab state as new projects to boost capacity would still be under construction. Maintenance that Kuwait has carried out recently should help avoid power cuts in 2009, bin Salama said.

Talks over gas imports from Qatar are continuing despite some difficulties, bin Salama said, without giving more details. Qatar's oil minister Abdullah al-Attiyah said last month it hoped to conclude talks over gas supplies to Kuwait 'at any time'. Kuwait need the gas to fire power stations.