

Nuclear and solar energy to cut Saudi oil, gas use

- Published: 00:00 April 4, 2011

Dubai: Saudi Arabia, which holds one-fifth of global oil reserves, aims to pursue renewable energy and nuclear power to help reduce by half the crude and natural gas it burns now to generate electricity.

The country expects domestic power demand to triple over the next two decades and wants to develop a more sustainable mixture of energy sources, Khalid Al Sulaiman, vice president for renewable energy at King Abdullah City for Atomic and Renewable Energy, said at a conference in Riyadh on Sunday. King Abdullah City is the agency in charge of developing green energy.

"Saudi Arabia's demand for petroleum products — demand for energy — is rising at a high and very alarming rate," Al Sulaiman said in a speech at the Saudi Solar Forum. "Population growth and robust economic development and many reasons drive that demand." The country currently gets almost all of its energy from fossil fuels, he said.

Arabian Gulf oil producers are seeking new ways to generate power because they prefer exporting valuable crude to maximise income and allocating natural gas to make petrochemicals. Energy other than oil, gas and other fossil fuels may account for more than half of the kingdom's supply by 2030, Al Sulaiman said.

Future sources will include solar and wind power as well as nuclear plants, according to the plan, which needs government approval to become policy.

The expansion into renewables and nuclear power will be part of a \$100 billion (Dh367 billion) spending drive aimed at meeting the expected jump in demand and curbing dependence on crude, government officials said last week at a conference in Abu Dhabi.