

Jeddah water crisis nears end

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JEDDAH - The water crisis in Jeddah should be over by the middle of this year, Abdullah Al-Hussayyin, the Minister of Water and Electricity, said Tuesday.

Al-Hussayyin also said that this year's summer would be one of the best for the province of Asir in terms of water availability.

"The test run for Al-Shu'aibah III Desalination Plant has started," the minister said.

"We are still in the test run stage, but there is a discernable improvement in the supply of water."

The plant that has not been handed over yet.

The minister made the remarks at a press conference following the launch of the National Water Company's Jeddah branch.

"As for water supply to Asir, we hope to keep desalination plant working at half capacity during annual maintenance," he said, explaining that an unavoidable delay in the arrival of two water desalination barges would disrupt annual maintenance work at the plant as of Feb. 26.

The plant runs at half capacity during annual maintenance but the resultant shortage would be offset by the two barges, one of which has arrived and started production on Tuesday. The second barge would start production on March 12, he said.

By summer, Asir would have ample water supply from the desalination plant working at full capacity and the two barges producing 150,000 cubic meters of water, compared to the current supply of 100,000 cubic meters.

Drainage projects

The minister also spoke about the sanitary drainage projects under way in Jeddah, which have seen roads in several parts of the city dug up, inconveniencing residents and motorists.

He explained that the delay was because several integrated projects were under way simultaneously.

These include building tunnels and bridges, and redeveloping districts that have sprouted in an unplanned manner.

The citywide sanitary drainage project has two sections, one in the airport area and the other in Al-Khumrah. Al-Hussayyin expects all the projects to be completed within three years.

The minister did not specify the water consumption tariff envisaged when the projects are completed, saying only that it is a sovereign decision. But he confirmed that the tariff would be increased to recover part of the developmental costs, as was reported when the water company was established.

The minister has signed contracts worth SR7 billion for the sanitary drainage projects in Jeddah.

He said the construction of flyovers and tunnels has led to alterations in some of the sanitary drainage contracts, and subsequent renegotiations with the contractors.

While Saudi Arabia has over 1,000 cities, villages and rural complexes, only 20 cities alone consume 80 percent of the total quantity of water produced, the minister said.

"What we are targeting in the foreseeable future is to cover these 20 cities. One of the first steps in this regard will be to privatize water supply in Makkah, Madina, Taif, Dammam, Al-Khobar and Dhahran, followed by the remaining cities," he said.

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