

# Israeli firm in Gaza extracts drinking water from air

Author:

Wed, 2021-01-06 01:40

GAZA CITY: The densely populated Gaza Strip has long lacked sufficient drinking water, but a new project helps ease the shortage with a solar-powered process to extract potable water straight from the air.

Unusually, the project operating in the Islamist-run Palestinian enclave, which has been blockaded by Israel since 2007, is the brainchild of a Russian-Israeli billionaire, Michael Mirilashvili.

The company he heads, Watergen, has developed the atmospheric water generators that can produce 5,000 to 6,000 liters (1,300 to more than 1,500 gallons) of drinking water per day, depending on the air's humidity.

With just a few machines operating in Gaza, Watergen is far from meeting demand for the 2 million people who live in the crowded coastal enclave wedged between Israel, Egypt and the Mediterranean Sea.

"But, it's a start," said Fathi Sheikh Khalil, an engineer with the Palestinian civil society group Damour, which operates one of the machines because Israeli firms cannot work in Gaza.

The strip, plagued by severe economic woes and regular power shortages, has also been facing a worsening water crisis for years.

Its overused aquifer has been degraded by saltwater intrusion and contaminated by pollutants, making most available water salty and dangerous to drink and forcing the import of bottled water.

Only 3 percent of Gaza's own water meets international standards, according to the United Nations, which had in 2012 predicted that ecological pressures would have made Gaza "unliveable" by now.

Multiple studies have linked rising rates of kidney stones and high incidence of diarrhea in Gaza to the consumption of substandard water.

Several players are working to solve the water shortage, including the European Union, which is supporting a massive seawater desalination plant.

Watergen's offices are located in a glass tower in Tel Aviv, some 80 kilometers (50 miles) north of Gaza.

Mirilashvili bought Watergen after moving to Israel in 2009, and the company has since exported its machines to more than 80 countries.

The company CEO and president has a colorful personal history, including time spent in a Russian prison following a kidnapping conviction in a trial the

European Court of Justice later found was flawed.

Mirilashvili told AFP that when he learned about Gaza's water crisis, he immediately wanted to help.

"Our goal was that everyone on Earth could be supplied with drinkable water ... It was immediately clear that we had to help our neighbors first."

Israel tightly controls imports to Gaza and Mirilashvili acknowledged that getting his machines approved "took some time."

Israel's army "liked the idea, but needed to check the equipment," he said.

Watergen's technology is suited to Gaza because it runs on solar panels, an asset in the enclave where the one power plant, which requires imported fuel, lacks the capacity to meet demand.

Mirilashvili lamented that he cannot see his machines at work, as Israelis are forbidden from entering the strip.

Watergen has donated two machines, which cost \$61,000 each, to Gaza.

A third machine was sent to the strip by the Arava Institute for Environmental Research, based on a kibbutz in southern Israel.

One of the machines, a metal cube that roars as it runs, is located at the town hall in Khan Younis in southern Gaza.

After capturing humidity, the machine condenses it into water and then filters it into instantly drinkable water.

When the air's humidity level is above 65 percent, Watergen's machines can produce about 5,000 liters of drinking water per day, said Khalil of the Palestinian group Damour.

An additional 1,000 liters can be produced when the humidity level exceeds 90 percent.

Some of the water is consumed by city hall employees and some transported to a local hospital for patients with kidney problems, Khalil said.

"One or two machines won't change anything," he told AFP. But "it shows there is a solution."



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## [UN chief recommends Libya cease-fire monitors be based in Sirte](#)

Wed, 2021-01-06 01:35

NEW YORK: Secretary-General Antonio Guterres is recommending that international monitors be deployed to Libya under a UN umbrella to observe the October cease-fire agreement from a base in the strategic city of Sirte, the gateway to the country's major oil fields and export terminals.

The UN chief said in an interim report to the Security Council on proposed cease-fire monitoring arrangements circulated Monday that an advance team should be sent to Libya's capital Tripoli as a first step to "provide the foundations for a scalable United Nations cease-fire monitoring mechanism based in Sirte."

Oil-rich Libya was plunged into chaos after a 2011 NATO-backed uprising toppled longtime dictator Muammar Qaddafi and split the country between a UN-supported government in Tripoli and rival authorities based in country's east, each side backed by an array of local militias as well as regional and foreign powers.

In April 2019, east-based commander Khalifa Haftar and his forces, backed by Egypt and the United Arab Emirates, launched an offensive to try and capture Tripoli. His campaign collapsed after Turkey stepped up its military support of the UN-supported government with hundreds of troops and thousands of Syrian mercenaries.

The October cease-fire agreement called for the withdrawal of all armed forces from conflict lines and the departure of all mercenaries and foreign fighters within three months.

Guterres gave few details of the monitoring mechanism but said the Joint Military Commission, with five representatives from each of the rival sides, "has requested unarmed, non-uniformed individual international monitors to be deployed under the auspices of the United Nations." They would work alongside joint monitoring teams from the rival Tripoli and eastern governments "for specific monitoring and verification tasks," he said.

"The Libyan parties have also conveyed their firm position that no deployment of foreign forces of any kind, including United Nations uniformed personnel, should occur on Libyan territory," the secretary-general said. But the commission welcomed offers of potential support to the monitoring mechanism from regional organizations including the African Union, European Union and Arab League under UN auspices.

According to the military commission's concept, "the United Nations would be expected to provide a nimble and scalable team of impartial international monitors to carry out monitoring" in the Sirte area, Guterres said.

In the commission's view, he said, they would "initially provide oversight and report compliance along the coastal road on the removal of military forces and mercenaries, the deployment of the joint police force, the clearance of explosive remnants of war, boobytraps and mines."

"As soon as conditions permit, they would expand their monitoring work to the Abu Grein-Bin Jawad-Sawknah triangle, and possibly beyond," Guterres said.

Guterres reiterated the UN's commitment to assist and support the Joint Military Commission in operationalizing the cease-fire agreement, warning that the current delays risk failure to meet the timeline.

He pointed to military activities by forces backing both sides, as well as military cargo flights, impeding the agreement's implementation.

"A lasting cease-fire in Libya needs above all else the buy-in of the parties and of ordinary Libyans," the secretary-general said., and it also requires support from regional and international parties.

He urged implementation of the widely broken UN arms embargo.

Guterres said the deployment of monitors under the umbrella of the UN political mission in Libya known as UNSMIL to the area around Sirte would require funding and personnel from UN member states.

Tunisia's UN Ambassador Tarek Ladeb, the current council president, said Monday he hopes a resolution on a cease-fire monitoring mechanism will be adopted before council members discuss UNSMIL on Jan. 28.



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## [Families rejoice as GCC Summit cements the ties that bind Gulf countries](#)

Author:

Tue, 2021-01-05 23:46



JEDDAH: Social media in the Gulf region has been flooded with celebratory joy since news broke that Saudi Arabia had reopened its airspace and land and sea borders with Qatar as part of a deal to end a three-year diplomatic crisis. For many, the story is deeply personal.

On Tuesday Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman told the GCC Summit in AlUla that the agreement to mend ties with Qatar underscored the importance of solidarity and security among Gulf, Arab and Muslim states.

A public embrace earlier in the day between the Crown Prince and Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani at AlUla airport capped the Qatari ruler's arrival on Saudi soil for the first time since 2017.



Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman held a meeting with Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani at the Maraya Hall in the historic city of Al-Ula on Tuesday. (Bandar Algaloud/Courtesy of Saudi Royal Court)

For hundreds of separated families, the significance of the reopening of borders and resumption of travel between Saudi Arabia and Qatar cannot be overstated, given the unique social fabric of the Gulf region, with its cross-border ties of marriage and blood.

Videos surfaced on social media showing men, women and children dancing and rejoicing at the easing of the crisis. Many said they were looking forward to reunions in the near future with their loved ones on the other side of the

border.

In one video, a Qatari boy could be seen jumping with excitement as he spoke with his father over the phone, exchanging promises of a reunion amid laughter, tears of joy visible on the boy's face. "Yalla (come on), let's go" the boy said and the father replied something to the effect: Get ready soon, my son.

Equally euphoric were the sentiments of Ismail Mohammed @soom3a70, a forward for Qatar's Al-Duhail FC football club. Born and raised in Makkah, the city where his mother still resides, he took to the social-media platform to express his delight with the latest developments. "Good news mom, our get-together is near," he wrote.

## Opinion

This section contains relevant reference points, placed in (Opinion field)

Similar scenes were probably playing out among members of many other families separated since 2017. Sara Abdulhakeem Abdullah, a 22-year-old Saudi who married her Qatari husband in 2018, can now freely travel to the Kingdom.

"I was awakened by my husband late last night with the news of the reopening of borders," she told Arab News. "Words fail me. It is so hard to put my feelings into words. I had been trying for a long time to find an easy way to go back to Jeddah where my parental family resides."

Despite the restrictions on air travel within the GCC countries on account of the coronavirus pandemic, last month Abdullah was able to briefly visit her loved ones in Jeddah with the support of her Qatari family. But the journey was circuitous and tiring both for her and her daughter, now a year old.

"Moving from one airport to another, waiting in transit for hours, is not the easiest thing," she said. "The journey was worth it in the end as I had not seen my father or siblings since getting married."



Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman gives Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani a tour around the historic city of ALUla on Tuesday.  
(Supplied)

As a newlywed who had to adjust to a new life abroad for the first time in her life, Sara said it was not easy being unable to meet up with her parental family. The pain of the separation was even more pronounced during her pregnancy, when she was not sure when her parents and siblings would be able to meet the first granddaughter of the family.

Shortly before her due date, she was united with her mother and youngest sister but the reunion was still short of three family members. Although she was relieved to have them by her side, her joy was short-lived as the two visitors had to return to Saudi Arabia within a month.

"It was the most difficult thing one can ever imagine, a feeling I wouldn't want anyone to experience. Those first few months of marriage were one thing, but not having my mother around when I needed her was the most difficult," she said. "But it's all old news now. The good times are soon to come."

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Saudi crown prince gives Qatar emir tour of AlUla  
Saudi crown prince holds meeting with Qatari emir at GCC summit

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## [Reading stabber fought in Libya before claiming UK asylum](#)

Tue, 2021-01-05 23:51

LONDON: A Libyan asylum seeker who carried out a terrorist attack in the British town of Reading fought for a terrorist group in his home country and lied about it during his asylum application, a court has heard.

Khairi Saadallah was a combatant during the Libyan civil war, where he fought for a group called Ansar Al-Sharia, which was later proscribed as a terrorist outfit by Britain and many other Western nations.

Saadallah, 26, had been imprisoned following numerous violent and criminal offenses in Britain, and was informed a day before his release in June 2020 that he was due to be deported from the country.

Two weeks later, he stabbed and killed three people who were socializing in Forbury Gardens, Reading, while shouting "Allahu Akbar."

Despite vast amounts of evidence provided by the prosecution claiming that he possessed an "extremist Islamist ideology," Saadallah has denied a terroristic motivation behind his murders.

On the first day of the trial, prosecutor Alison Morgan QC said: "The defendant believed that in carrying out this attack he was acting in pursuit of his extremist ideology – an ideology that he appears to have held for some time. In short, he believed that in killing as many people as possible that day he was performing an act of religious jihad."

When Saadallah arrived in the UK in 2012, he told Home Office officials that he had been helping wounded civilians during the conflict in his home country. He further claimed that he had fled from the group when he was asked to carry out torture.

However, Morgan said information taken from his personal electronic devices had disproven his claims, showing photos of Saadallah wearing military fatigues and posing with weapons.

Following his attack in Reading last year, Saadallah admitted to psychologists that he was a member of Ansar Al-Sharia, stating that he fought with the outfit for eight months and claiming that he was given training by the French military.

On June 4 – while imprisoned after one of his many convictions – he was informed that the home secretary had determined that his deportation would be for the "public good."

But due to ongoing violence in Libya, the UK could not commit to his safety in his home country, so Saadallah was released from prison on strict conditions and with mandatory mental health treatment.

In the days following his release, Saadallah carried out internet searches for violent material from the Libyan civil war, ignored his probation officer and mental health appointments, and purchased a large kitchen knife.

The court played footage of the attack, which showed Saadallah sprinting toward his victims and stabbing them from behind.

“The prosecution alleges that what took place was ruthless and lethal,” Morgan said. “In short, he executed Joseph Ritchie-Bennett, David Wails and James Furlong and it was done with such speed and precision, before they had time to even be aware of what was happening, less still to be able to react to defend themselves.”

A judge will soon decide if there was a religious, political or ideological motivation for Saadallah’s attack, and to what degree his mental state affected his actions. The sentencing hearing continues.



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UK knife attack suspect was known to security services: reports Saudi Arabia condemns terror attack in Reading, England

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[Egypt’s leader meets US treasury chief](#)



# ahead of Sudan visit

Author:

Associated Press

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Tue, 2021-01-05 19:57

CAIRO: Egypt's president met Tuesday with US Secretary of the Treasury Steven Mnuchin in Cairo, ahead of Mnuchin's first visit to Sudan since the end of Khartoum's pariah status.

The office of President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi said in a statement the president and Mnuchin discussed mutual and regional issues, including the latest developments in talks with Sudan and Ethiopia over a disputed dam that Ethiopia is building over the Blue Nile River.

The statement said El-Sisi appreciated US efforts in the dam talks last year that resulted in a US-crafted draft deal to resolve the yearslong dispute over the massive project.

The three Nile Valley countries met Sunday in the latest push by South Africa, the current chairman of the African Union, which is mediating a deal between Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia.

Experts from the three nations and the AU were to meet Monday, but Sudan boycotted the meeting and insisted on a greater role for AU experts in the negotiations.

Egypt initialed the draft deal, crafted by the United States in February, but Ethiopia did not attend the signing ceremony and accused President Donald Trump's administration of siding with Egypt. Sudan attended the meeting but did not sign.

The US has suspended some aid to Ethiopia over the "lack of progress" in the talks and US "concern about Ethiopia's unilateral decision to begin to fill the dam before an agreement and all necessary dam safety measures were in place."

Africa's largest hydroelectric dam has caused severe tensions between the three nations.

Mnuchin was scheduled to travel to Sudan's capital Khartoum on Wednesday to meet with the country's leaders, according to Sudan's state-run SUNA news agency.

It would be the first visit by a senior US official since Washington last month approved the removal of Sudan from the US list of state sponsors of terrorism.

SUNA's report said Mnuchin would discuss with Gen. Abdel-Fattah Burhan, head of the ruling sovereign council, and Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok possible US economic aid debt relief. It did not give further details.

Mnuchin said last month he would work with Congress and the transitional government in Khartoum to advance Sudan's efforts to secure debt relief in 2021.

Sudan is on a fragile path to democracy after a popular uprising led the military to overthrow longtime autocrat Omar Al-Bashir in April 2019.





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