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Bassil upbeat about oil production in Lebanon

BEIRUT: Energy and Water Minister Gebran Bassil said Wednesday he is upbeat about the future of oil production in Lebanon and the investment opportunities the sector would bring to the country, a statement by the minister's press office said.

"This promising sector paves way for major investment opportunities and cooperation with other countries," said Bassil speaking from Abu Dhabi International Renewable Energy Conference (Adirec).

Lebanon's Cabinet has recently formed a six-member Petroleum Administration that will have full powers to negotiate with international oil companies and issue licenses for the winning firms to drill for gas off the Lebanese coast.

Bassil said that Lebanon is taking its "natural place, among Arab brothers, in the energy sector."

"Lebanon cannot keep on importing energy and spending 15 percent of its [GDP] on importing fuels while we have great natural resources from which we haven't benefited until recently," said Bassil.

Bassil also said that the preparations and legislation regarding licenses to drill gas from Lebanon have been completed and promise a good investment ground.

"We have set professional laws and regulations for the relevant companies and they are all encouraging," said Bassil.

According to the energy minister, more than thirty major firms from different countries have shown interest in Lebanon and asked for information about the gas and oil recently discovered in Lebanon's territorial waters and which have yet to be surveyed.

"Many firms have shown interest in oil exploration in Lebanon and asked to be provided with the information about the topic," said Bassil.

Experts estimate the value of gas in Lebanon between \$40 billion and \$70 billion, but say gas exploration will need at least five years after the licenses have been issued to the winning firms.

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