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## Brazil Officially Starts First Uranium Enrichment Facility


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**RIO DE JANEIRO, Brazil**, May 8, 2006 (ENS) - Brazil has inaugurated its first uranium enrichment facility to produce the type of fuel for nuclear power plants that Iran is running into trouble for attempting to produce. There are strong suspicions that the objective of the Iranian nuclear program is to eventually build a bomb, but Brazil has managed to assure the international community its intentions are industrial and commercial, not military.

On Friday, *Indústrias Nucleares do Brasil* officially launched the first two centrifuges needed for uranium enrichment at a facility in Resende, in the state of Rio de Janeiro. The centrifuges, which are already operating, have the capacity to produce two percent of the uranium needed to run Brazil's two nuclear power plants.

At the inauguration ceremony Brazilian Science and Technology Minister Sergio Rezende told the assembled officials and media of Brazil's commitment to the peaceful use of nuclear power.



**Sergio Rezendes is Brazil's Minister of Science and Technology.** (Photo courtesy Office of the minister)

The Brazilian Constitution bans the military use of nuclear energy, and the country has signed the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. No objections to Brazil's uranium enrichment program have been heard from the United States.

In April 2004 the Brazilian government denied access for the IAEA inspectors to the Resende facility and refused to let IAEA inspectors see equipment in the plant. Citing a need to protect proprietary information the government had built walls around parts of the facility and draped covers over equipment.

By November 2004, the IAEA was able to reach an agreement in principle with the Brazilian government on a safeguards approach

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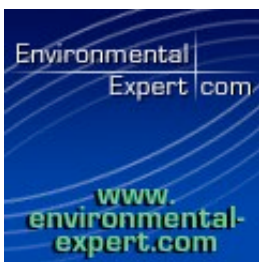
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to verify the enrichment facilities in Brazil, at the Resende facility. This approach enables the IAEA to do credible inspections but at the same time addresses Brazil's need to shield proprietary designs inside the facility.

Built at a cost of US\$172 million, the plant will be capable of enriching natural uranium to less than five percent uranium-235, an isotope needed to fuel power reactors. In order to make a bomb, natural uranium must be enriched to 95 percent uranium-235.

Carlos Freire Moreira, a director at Indústrias Nucleares do Brasil, said the Resende factory will be overseen by the Brazil-Argentina Nuclear Energy Application Agency.

The technology for INB's Resende factory was developed by the Brazilian Navy with support from the National Institute of Nuclear Research.

The new facility is intended to make Brazil independent of enriched uranium imports that now cost the country US\$16 million annually. To date, Brazilian uranium has been transported to Canada for conversion into hexafluoride gas, and then to the United Kingdom for enrichment before it returns to Brazil for fabrication into fuel elements.

**Brazil's uranium enrichment facility is built on a former coffee plantation at Resende, Rio de Janeiro state. (Photo courtesy INB)**



In the first phase of operations, running from now until 2012, the factory will supply some 60 percent of the enriched uranium needed by the country's two nuclear power plants, Angra 1 and 2.

Around 2015, the factory is expected to be supplying 100 percent of Brazil's enriched uranium.

Minister Rezende said in March that Brazil has a plan to build

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seven nuclear plants over the next 15 years, two of them in the country's poorest region, the Northeast.

Rezende made the announcement in a March 7 interview with BBC Brazil, while he was in London with President Lula da Silva on a state visit.

Luís Hiroshi Sakamoto, the director of planning, management and environment at Eletronuclear, the company that operates the Angra 1 and 2 nuclear power plants, says that Brazil will need another nuclear power plant to meet demand for electricity in the near future.

Sakamoto told the Agencia Brasil government news agency in January that it will take US\$1.8 billion and five years to complete the partly finished Angra 3, located next to the Angra 1 and 2 reactors.

Angra 3 was scheduled to be operating in 1988, but it was never completed although US\$750 million has been spent on it.

All three of Brazil's nuclear power plants are sited closely together at a beach resort, Angra dos Reis, on the coast of the state of Rio de Janeiro, 150 kilometers from the city of Rio de Janeiro. The uranium enrichment facility at Resende is located about 65 kilometers to the north.

Greenpeace calls Brazil's new uranium enrichment factory in Resende a step backwards. Guilherme Leonardi, the coordinator for nuclear energy at Greenpeace, says Brazil is investing in a technology that many countries are abandoning.

Leonardi disagrees with experts who say that nuclear energy is clean.

"Inevitably nuclear energy produces nuclear waste. And when you are dealing with nuclear energy there is always a risk of an accident at various points in the nuclear fuel cycle - in the processing of nuclear fuel, the generation of energy or in disposing of the nuclear waste," he says.

Leonardi goes on to say that many countries are rethinking the nuclear energy alternative. They are deciding against new nuclear power plants, which is what Greenpeace says Brazil should do.

But instead, the Brazilian government is planning to become an exporter of enriched uranium. Science and Technology Minister Rezende said last September that the country currently possesses

the world's sixth large uranium reserves, but a more detailed study could put Brazil in third place.

"If we know how to enrich uranium, which we do, we may eventually even become exporters of enriched uranium," Rezende observed.

The minister said that, in order to sell enriched uranium on the international market, it would be necessary to invest in technology, to raise production, and alter the Constitution, which precludes uranium exports.

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