

Despite Large Reserves Brazil Hasn't Invested in Uranium Research Since 1985

Contributed by Nielmar de Oliveira
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Adriano Maciel Tavares, the Nuclear Industries of Brazil's (INB) superintendent of Mineral Production, stated that the present moment, in which the uranium market is hot, represents a good opportunity for the country to export its surplus reserves of the mineral.

Tavares informed that global consumption currently totals 70,000 tons a year, with prices ranging from US\$ 150 to US\$ 200 per kilogram.

With estimated reserves of around 309,000 tons of uranium, "an abundant volume compared with the country's domestic demand," the INB's president believes that Brazil could export some 1,000 tons per year, even when new nuclear plants that consume the mineral, besides Angra I and II, enter into operation.

"The idea would be to export an estimated volume of 1,000 tons of processed uranium each year, but the intention does not come to fruition due to lack of specific regulation and political decision by the federal government," he said.

Tavares also stated that the country needs further investment in the sector in order to resume research work, discover new reserves and tap into the huge existing potential for large-scale uranium production.

"The last time that we saw investment in research was in 1985. The fact is our research work is standing still. Expenditure on research only totaled to US\$ 160 million in the country, even though we have huge production potential," he asserted.

The executive at the INB estimated that the country is able to cater to the domestic demand for fully enriched uranium in Brazil, even with forecasts for construction of new nuclear power plants in the coming years.

"We have total self-sufficiency, no matter how many nuclear plant units we have: four, eight units at Angra. The country is working in order to master the full cycle of uranium enriching by 2014," stated Tavares.

He said that, after entry into operation of the Santa Quitéria mine, in the state of Ceará, in 2012, the country is going to produce, in that unit alone, 1,200 tons of uranium. The volume should rise to 1,500 tons within two years.

"Our projection, and we are working to realize it, is that Caetité, in the state of Bahia (an uranium mine explored in partnership with fertilizer company Galvani), will become operational at around 800 tons by 2011. By then, we will either have large quantities of uranium in storage, or else we are going to have to export."

According to Tavares, the country should have surplus for export as of 2013. And a favorable decision - or otherwise - to the operation will be up to the federal government to make.

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