Brazil to Spend US$ 14 Billion in 7 New Nuclear Plants

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Brazil has plans to build seven new nuclear power plants reported Sunday the São Paulo press quoting government officials.

The country currently has two nuclear power plants in operation and a major expansion is contemplated under the new Brazilian Nuclear Program (PNB), which the government is reviewing.

Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva officials told newspaper O Estado de S. Paulo that the government considers the new nuclear plants essential to expanding Brazil's role as a player on the world stage and bolstering its bid for a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council.

PNB is currently under a coordinated review by six ministries requested by President Lula on his return trip from China, May 2004. The two countries signed a nuclear cooperation agreement by which Brazil will provide enriched uranium for use in Chinese nuclear power plants.

Brazil currently operates the Angra I and Angra II plants in Angra dos Reis, in Rio de Janeiro state, and Angra III is nearing completion after some two decades of delays.

Although Brazil has significant uranium deposits, the mineral is currently sent to Canada and then Europe for further processing as a gas, before being shipped back to Brazil, where it is finally converted into solid material to fuel the nuclear plants.

According to PNB, Brazil will have to spend some US$ 14 billion to build the seven planned plants, which would increase the amount of nuclear energy to 4,100 megawatts. Brazil is also developing its own uranium enrichment technology.

Last November the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) reached an agreement with Brazil for the inspection of the experimental Resende uranium-enrichment plant. For months before, Brazil and the UN Atomic Energy Commission clashed over these inspections.

Uranium used as fuel for nuclear power plants in its highly enriched form can be employed in the manufacturing of nuclear weapons.

Brasilia had denied IAEA inspectors access to its centrifuges on the grounds that they employ proprietary technology that took the country twenty years to develop at a cost of nearly one billion dollars.

The Brazilian government claimed the right to protect what it saw as trade secrets and repeatedly denied it was trying to develop an atomic bomb.

The impasse ended when the IAEA agreed to the restrictions imposed by Brazil on inspections. Technicians who finally inspected the Resende plant were given limited access to the centrifuges but saw enough as to confirm that no diversion of the enriched mineral for other purposes was being carried out.

The Brazilian centrifuges, developed by the military, use electromagnetic levitation that supposedly consumes less fuel and is 25% less costly than enrichment methods used by developed countries such as United States, Europe and Japan.

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