

## Brazil Joins Select Astronaut Club

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Brazil will be giving a significant step towards joining the select group of countries that have orbited astronauts. The Brazilian candidate is Air Force Lieutenant Colonel Marcus Pontes who expects to travel to the International Space Station April 2006.

Pontes will begin training in the City of Stars, close to Moscow next November and "we would like to see him set off next April when the hundred years of the first flight of Santos Dumont, considered the father of Brazilian aviation. Pontes would become the first Brazilian astronaut", said Sergio Gaudenzi, head of the Brazilian Space Agency.

Pontes four years ago also trained in one of NASA' centers in Houston, Texas.

"I feel I'll be participating in a scientific mission but also a patriotic one. It's Brazil going to space and this has a very strong symbolic message," said Pontes.

The first Brazilian astronaut is just one of the angles of a very ambitious space program, which hopefully will have Brazil next to the United States, Russia, China and France and other countries with which the country has cooperation agreements.

"Our objective is to have our own Brazilian space agency; geo-stationary satellites, boosters and a homologated rocket launching pad," admitted Gaudenzi.

Brazil already manufactures low flying orbit observation and experimentation satellites as well as it maintains a rocket launching base in Alcântara, state of Maranhão, next to the equator, which the country would like to exploit commercially.

Alcântara lies two degrees south of the equator line, which enables rocket launching to take advantage of the Earth's rotation and reduce fuel costs.

Last October, the Brazilian Space Agency completed the first successful launching of a USB-30 exploration rocket used for micro-gravity experimentation, which was developed by the Airspace Technical Center with support from the German Space Agency.

Unfortunately in August 2003 Alcântara experienced an accident with the explosion of a launching rocket, which killed 21 people and delayed the Brazilian space program.

"Brazil dominates the USB-30 technology and we expect to sell a lot of 15 to the European Space Agency", revealed Gaudenzi.

Last November Russia and Brazil signed a cooperation agreement to reactivate the Alcântara base and the construction of a rocket launcher for geo-stationary satellites.

"We're going to develop VLS launchers with Russian technology, and we expect to launch geo-stationary satellites of two tons by 2012," added Gaudenzi.

Brazil also has a cooperation agreement with China and they have jointly launched two Earth observation satellites.

A third observation satellite Cbers.2B is under construction to be launched in 2006. This will be followed by another two,

Cbers-3 and Cbers-4 to be fired 2008 and 2011.

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