

Brazil Believed to Be Bluffing About Its Nuclear Capacity

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Experts in atomic energy are skeptical that Brazil has the cutting-edge nuclear technology as it wishes to make the world believe.

Inspectors from the U.N. nuclear agency are in Brazil and will visit today the country's uranium enrichment facilities.

This visit is part of an effort to ensure that Brazil is adhering to international nuclear safeguards.

Analysts heard by BBC Brazil say that the Brazilian ultracentrifuges that will be partially inspected "may be better than the worse" or simply "a so-so machine."

The Brazilian authorities have said that their equipment has the ability to enrich uranium with very little wearing down. According to these officials, the machine spins so fast that it "floats in a magnetic field."

Nothing to call home about, says Henry Sokolski, who worked for the Pentagon between 1988 and 1993. He has not seen Resende's machine, but has talked about it with people who examined it.

Sokolski, who is today executive director of the Nonproliferation Policy Education Center in Washington, DC, comments: "All the machines float."

"Brazilians says that the machine is 30 percent more efficient and that it is unique. But it is not, probably, the most efficient or the newest. How better is it? I don't know.

"Many experts say that the Brazilian centrifuge is similar to the one called P2, that you can find in Iran and Pakistan," adds Sokolski.

The inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency arrived yesterday in Brazil. Brazilian officials have objected to full visual inspections of their nuclear facilities.

But a deal has reportedly been reached that satisfies Brazil's concerns about trade secrets and allows the inspectors sufficient access facilities at the plant in Resende to do their work.

The Brazilian government insists its nuclear program is solely to help generate electricity, and not nuclear weapons.

On a visit to Brazil earlier this month, U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell said he is convinced the country's nuclear program is entirely peaceful.