

## Serra Pelada Redux: Brazilian Gold Diggers Return to Area Closed 13 Years Ago

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Friday, 30 December 2005

After being paralyzed for 13 years, mining may resume next year at Serra Pelada, in the municipality of Marabá in the Brazilian northern state of Pará.

According to Elder Pacheco, advisor to the Secretariat of Geology, Mining, and Mineral Transformation in Brazil's Ministry of Mines and Energy, the official authorization permitting this activity is expected to be delivered personally by Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva.

"Based on the progress in negotiations with the cooperative and the syndicate, I believe we can deliver the term of permission in February or March," he judged.

Since 2003 Pacheco has been participating in the process of mediation to end the dispute among leaders active in the region of the municipality of Curionópolis, where Serra Pelada is located, 800 kilometers from Belém, the capital of Pará state.

The Mixed Cooperative of Prospectors in Serra Pelada (Coomigasp) and the Syndicate of Prospectors in Serra Pelada (Singasp) are expected to meet in January to conclude the statutes of the cooperative in compliance with the existing legislation.

The presidents of the two organizations and their lawyers form the commission elected on December 22, the same date on which the Coomigasp was authorized to begin the process of regularizing the area.

"In order to receive permission to mine, they need to approve statutes based on the law of cooperatives, the Mining Code, the Federal Constitution, and the Civil Code," Pacheco explained.

According to the advisor, once the statutes have been approved by the commission, the Coomigasp will have to submit to the government studies of mining feasibility and environmental impact, as well as how they intend to carry on the activity.

One of the conditions, stipulated by the ministry and already accepted by the commission, is that the mining must be mechanized. This means that the historical scene of a hill full of men working to extract the ore, like an anthill, will not be repeated. The gold will be removed solely by machines.

The Serra Pelada pit is 500 meters in diameter, in which a 300-meter lake has been formed, occupying an area the size of three soccer fields.

"It is necessary for the mining to be mechanized as a matter of safety. It is no longer admissible that thousands of men pile on top of one another hauling rocks. Among other reasons, because the lake will have to be drained, after which a survey will be made to identify the veins of gold," Pacheco observed.

During the negotiations the president of the Coomigasp, Josimar Elizio Barbosa affirmed that there is a possibility that the American mining company, Phoenix Gems, will mine the gold in Serra Pelada.

The contract, he added, will pay the cooperative US\$ 240 million, and members of the cooperative will receive 40% of the profits. There are estimates, not confirmed scientifically, that Serra Pelada still contains 40 tons of gold.

Agência Brasil