
Brazil Sets Half a Billion Dollars Apart for Nukes and Atomic Submarine

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Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva announced that Brazil will budget about half a billion US dollars over eight years to complete its nuclear program, including uranium enrichment technology, a third nuclear plant and finishing the building of a nuclear-powered submarine.

"I believe that this project could be the embryo for all we need from the point of view of nuclear energy and from the point of view of energy production," said Lula after visiting this week a navy research center in the southeastern state of São Paulo.

"If money was missing, there won't be any further shortage of money" to conclude the nuclear submarine on which Brazil has been working for the last two decades and which requires significant resources. "And who knows, if we could anticipate more funds the sub could be ready before since it's quite delayed."

"Brazil can give itself the luxury of being one of the few countries in the world to control all the technology of the uranium enrichment cycle," added Lula. "Why not dream big, and say we want to arrive at the possibility of having a nuclear submarine?"

The navy's nuclear program, begun in 1979, has already mastered part of the enrichment process. But it lags in developing and constructing a reactor entirely from Brazilian technology, revealed Navy Admiral Julio Soares de Moura Neto.

Lula has frequently touted nuclear power as a way to diversify Brazil's energy sources and meet growing demand in South America's largest nation and economy.

Last month, his government moved to resume work on a long-planned third nuclear power plant, Angra 3, which has been stalled since the 1980s by lack of funds.

Brazil's two operating nuclear plants, Angra 1 and Angra 2, have an installed capacity of about 2,000 megawatts. Angra 3 would raise capacity to 3,300 megawatts, at a cost of about US\$ 3.6 billion, according to the Mines and Energy Ministry.

"We're going to finish Angra 3 and if necessary build more plants, and we're doing it because it's clean energy, this has been proved and tested in Brazil. It's safe and we have the technology, so why not take advantage of it?," said Lula.

Brazil's nuclear program began during a 1964-85 military dictatorship, and the ruling generals had secret plans to test an atomic bomb underground in the Amazon jungle. The idea was scrapped in 1990.

Silva's announcement came a day after the government's environmental protection agency gave preliminary approval to a US\$ 10 billion to US\$ 14.7 billion project to build two dams in the Amazon that would generate 6,450 megawatts, or 8% of current electricity demand.

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