

Brazil resists plan to allow spot inspection of nuclear site

By Larry Rohter
New York Times

BRASILIA — Brazil has announced that by mid-2004 it expects to join the select group of nations producing enriched uranium and that it intends to export the product. But it is balking at giving international inspectors unimpeded access to the plant that will produce

the nuclear fuel.

Brazilian officials describe the effort as peaceful, aimed at providing fuel far short of weapons grade for the country's nuclear power plants. But they also maintain that as a peaceful nation, Brazil should not be subject to the same regimen of unannounced spot inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) that Iran and

Libya have recently accepted.

"All we've got are a couple of itty-bitty reactors," Roberto Amaral, the minister of science and technology, said in an interview. "It is necessary to be worried about what goes on out there, not here."

The issue has come to a boil because work has been completed on a uranium-enrichment plant that officials say

will be ready to begin production as early as May.

After years of resistance, Brazil adhered to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty in 1997 and has since permitted limited, controlled visits to its nuclear facilities. But it has refused to approve an additional protocol that authorizes spot inspections.

During Brazil's military dic-

tatorship, from 1964 to 1985, the government clandestinely pursued a nuclear weapons program. In 1981, Brazil and Iraq signed a nuclear cooperation agreement that, according to an IAEA report issued last year, led the government to ship 26.7 tons of uranium dioxide to Baghdad.

With the return of democratic rule, Brazil and its historic

rival Argentina jointly renounced the manufacture of nuclear weapons and set up a mutual inspection system. But the Brazilian program continued secretly, and when a new government came to power in 1990, it found and destroyed a shaft built by the air force in the heart of the Amazon that scientists said had all the characteristics of a nuclear test site.