

Iran considers shipping, selling enriched uranium: Diplomats

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Vienna: Nuclear negotiators for Iran, obligated to dispose tons of enriched uranium under an approaching deal, are focusing on a US-backed plan for Iran to send the material to another country for sale as reactor fuel, diplomats told The Associated Press today.

While Iran says it does not want nuclear arms, it has more than 8 tons that could be turned into the fissile core of a dozen or more atomic bombs if the material was further enriched to weapons-grade levels.

The export-and-sell option has been floated before, and the diplomats emphasized that the sides have not agreed on that solution in the search for what to do with the low-enriched uranium stockpile.

But negotiators have little time left to make a decision on the issue with a Tuesday target date looming for a deal. Senior Iranian officials publicly rejected shipping out the material in preliminary negotiations, so Tehran's renewed interest is significant.

The goal of the talks involving the US, Britain, China, France, Germany and Russia is a comprehensive deal that would crimp Tehran's capacity to make nuclear weapons in exchange for sanctions relief.

Other options discussed would mean changing the enriched uranium into a form that cannot be used for weapons or shipping it abroad for storage, probably in Russia. One of the diplomats said Russia was a key candidate in the idea being floated that Moscow would convert the low-enriched material and Iran would get a large share of the profits from any sale.

Iran says it is enriching only to make reactor fuel and for other nonmilitary purposes.

- AP