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Russia Says Deadline for Talks to Curb Iran's Nuclear Program in Doubt

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World powers and Iran may not be able to secure a deal on curbing Tehran's nuclear program before their Nov. 24 deadline, Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Alexander Lukashevich said Thursday.

The six powers — Russia, China, the United States, France, Britain and Germany — want to ensure Iran's nuclear program does not enable it to build nuclear weapons, though Iran says its nuclear work is for civil needs.

"It cannot be completely ruled out that more time could be needed to reach a mutually beneficial compromise," Lukashevich was quoted by the Interfax news agency as telling reporters.

"We have emphasized that all parties are striving to meet this deadline. But what is more important: a deadline or a real agreement?"

Russia has traditionally had closer ties with Iran than other participants of the talks, after

constructing the nuclear power station in Bushehr on the coast of the Persian Gulf.

Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said this week Moscow was doing all it could to help secure an agreement and he expressed optimism a deal could be secured before Nov. 24.

The agreement is meant to assure the West that Iran's nuclear program would not be used for military ends in return for a possible easing of sanctions on Iran.

Some diplomats have said a simple extension of the negotiations is possible, and a senior Iranian official said this could be done until March. The talks have already been extended: by four months in July.

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