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Uranium Seized Near Moscow not Weapons-Grade Material

The Associated Press

The Interior Ministry said Saturday that the uranium seized last week when police arrested a half-dozen men allegedly trying to sell it was low-grade material that would have been useless to a nuclear terrorist.

Police seized more than one kilogram of uranium from six suspects, who allegedly tried to sell it for \$30,000 to an organized-crime group.

The Interior Ministry moved quickly to say that it appeared to be a low-level deal between mob groups and not a bid to sell the material to a terrorist group.

Nuclear experts were called in to analyze the seized uranium, contained in a safe capsule, to determine the exact level of its enrichment and origins.

Officials said Saturday that the results of the analysis showed that the material was relatively low-grade. The suspects had "uranium tablets ... of the kind used in heat-releasing elements of power reactors at nuclear power plants," Bulat Nigmatulin, deputy nuclear power minister, told Interfax. "Those tablets have nothing to do with weapons-grade uranium even theoretically."

Viktor Zakharov, head of the Moscow region's Federal Security Service, said the material could even be handled with bare hands.

Police arrested the six suspects overnight from Tuesday to Wednesday near a roadside cafe on the Gorky highway 19 kilometers southeast of Moscow. Investigators said the suspects allegedly belonged to the Balashikha criminal gang.

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